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CALL FOR PAPERS: Issue No. 12, 2007

Each year The European Connection publishes essays in European Language Studies by students at New Zealand universities. We invite all colleagues teaching in the area to send a copy of the best essays they receive (by graduate or undergraduate students) to a member of the Editorial Committee (see below). From these the reader for the appropriate section will send a selection to the Editor, who will then make the final decision. The Editor for 2007 is Dr Walescka Pino-Ojeda.

Essays should follow the MLA style manual guidelines, and the specific instructions on footnotes and parenthetical citation will be provided by the area editor, who should receive the articles by the end of November 2006 in order to be considered for the 2007 issue. The article should be accompanied by a short bio-bibliographical note about the author, including the name of the course for which the essay was presented or, alternatively, the name of the MA or PhD Thesis from which the article comes.

The journal offers students an excellent opportunity to gain experience in preparing work for publication, while providing staff and students with model essays as reference points in teaching. The European Connection seeks to maintain a high profile for European Languages Studies in a New Zealand context.

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EDITOR’S NOTE

WALESCKA PINO-OJEDA
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The current issue of *The European Connection* is being released after a lapse of one year due to the necessary phase of transferral to the new editor. We would like to thank our readers for their patience during this period and offer our assurance that from this point forward the journal will continue with the pace it has maintained over its 11 years. I would like to take this opportunity to thank Associate Professor Bruno Ferraro for the care and dedication with which he has carried out his five year term as General Editor.

The support from the Arts Faculty and the School of European Languages and Literatures at The University of Auckland has enabled us to present a new format for the current issue. We hope that it continues to move in new directions as the journal becomes more established.

As you may notice, the field of European Language Studies in New Zealand covers the most important linguistic, political, sociological and aesthetic tendencies of the world’s major cities and research centres. Evidence of this is the variety of topics, regions, genres, eras, and research questions that appear in the articles of this issue, as well as the wide range of methodologies that inform these studies. Further evidence is the growing multicultural character of New Zealand society, which, in an academic environment, has made it essential to include inter- and trans-disciplinary perspectives, as well as the cultural production of European language societies in post-colonial regions.

The articles published here include authors of the Classical literary and philosophical tradition, as in the essay by Hilary Thomas on Dante. On the other hand, Briar Hale studies avant-garde perspectives developed in the 20th century theatre of Brecht, Artaud, Grotowski and Bal, and their legacy in current postmodern trends. Joanne Holl studies women’s literature of Senegal, New Caledonia and Guadeloupe, focusing on the ways in which these authors challenge conventions of the feminist, metropolitan canon. Foundational texts in Latin American literary tradition are addressed in this issue: Elinor Chisholm studies Argentinean gauchesque literature, while Joanne Dow reviews the contributions made in the indigenous literature of Peru. A more contemporary study of this region is Kara Morrison’s analysis of two cinematographic productions about Mexico that deal with violence in varied ways relating to models first developed in Hollywood. Kate Verkerk carries out a careful politico-historical analysis of Serfs and Free Peasants in Muscovy, which focuses on the political idiosyncrasies of this region of the
world to the present. Alexandra O’Connell confronts the challenges which German society has faced after reunification, offering a thoughtful synopsis and analysis of recent political and cultural activities. The study by Katherine Pettersson of current German narrative allows us to understand the channels through which socio-political change takes place in literary aesthetics.

Although the languages studied here vary greatly, our journal is written in English, thereby making the role of the translator almost invisible, not only as a mediator of different linguistic codes, but also with respect to the construction of ideological parameters. This is the focus of Jane Christy’s analysis of the role of translator in the creation of discourse.

We hope that this issue satisfies the intellectual curiosity of our current readers and attracts new interest. Although we are dealing with the “Old Continent,” the novelty and freshness of the analysis and the texts presented here are surely evidence of the continual cultural renovation and contributions that young researchers offer in this exciting field.
1. CONFLICTING INTENTIONS: A CRITICAL ANALYSIS OF MARTÍN FIERRO IN THE LIGHT OF HERNÁNDEZ’S PROLOGUES

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Elinor wrote this essay as part of the requirements for the course 19th and 20th Century Latin American Literature, which was part of her Honours degree in Spanish

Literary critics enjoy the process of determining authors’ intentions, as doing so can allow greater insight into the motivations behind and nuances of the work studied. In the case of one of the first examples of a work with a distinctly Latin American perspective and voice, as opposed to a transplanted European one, the modern reader is lucky enough to not have to guess these intentions: José Hernández, in his prologues to the two parts of his classic of Argentine literature, Martín Fierro, carefully did this job for us. That said, their existence offers the reader the new challenge of reading not to determine underlying intentions, but reading to see whether the stated intentions are achieved. Doing so is an effective way of gaining understanding of the rapidly changing socio-political climate of late nineteenth century Argentina, through a focus on the ‘gaucho’, the cowboy and occasional labourer marginalised by the mainstream. The time that passed between the publication of The Flight of Martín Fierro and The Return of Martín Fierro were five years in which José Hernández redefined his aims in writing, a fact that is reflected in his prologues. Where the first part of the poem laments the plight of the gauchos to an urban audience, the second part addresses the gaucho himself with advice on what to do about it. This essay will discuss Hernández’s intentions as reflected in the prologues in closer detail, and then through an analysis of the texts, conclude on his success in realizing these intentions.

The primary intention of The Flight of Martín Fierro is to give an accurate depiction of the life of the gauchos. Hernández explains in his prologue that in creating the character of Martín Fierro, he “se ha esforzado... en presentar un tipo que personificara nuestros gauchos.” ¹ Hernández adds: “mi objeto ha sido dibujar a grandes rasgos, aunque fielmente, sus costumbres, sus trabajos, sus hábitos de vida... su existencia.” ² Not only would his work describe

the gaucho’s way of life, it would describe his consciousness, including, Hernández said, “sus reflexiones… la superstición y las preocupaciones.”

This description was aimed towards educating the distant city folk in Buenos Aires, in alignment with Hernández’s own political desire to reconcile the long-opposing factions of urban and rural. Aside from his political motivations for educating the gaucho’s distant countrymen, Hernández saw an accurate depiction of their lives necessary not only because it was “tan poco conocido que es difícil estudiarlo,” but because the gaucho’s unique way of life was threatened by outside influences and the world was in danger of “[perderse] casi por completo.”

Given this clearly stated intention of putting across an accurate depiction of gaucho life, we can establish its success from Hernández’s detailed descriptions. These range from a gaucho’s average day at work, to his style of socializing and fighting. However as we have established that Hernández’s intention as revealed in his prologue were that this description be accurate, the most qualified judges on his success in doing this are men who knew both the poem and the world it claimed to represent: Hernández’s contemporary writers. Most critics believed that Hernández had faithfully reproduced the gaucho, his life and surroundings, and his mistreatment. In fact, some saw it so accurate they viewed it as much a historical document as a poem.

José Tomás Guido congratulates Hernández for preserving in writing local customs, saying to the author: “Usted embellece tradiciones que se perderían en medio de las perturbaciones de nuestra época…. Las graba profundamente en la literatura y la historia.”

The poem is considered such an accurate reproduction of the gaucho’s world, in fact, that even a century after its publication numerous scholars consider that his descriptions remain applicable today. Critics also celebrated Hernández’s attempts to accurately capture the gaucho’s manner of speaking, what he calls “ese estilo abundante en metáforas.” While some considered Hernández’s use of ‘gauchismos’ reflecting the gaucho’s accent and imaginative grammar something which did

5 Hernández (1873).
6 Ibid.
7 Walter Sava, “Literary Criticism of Martín Fierro from 1873 to 1915,” Hispanófila (University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill, N.C., 1982), 55.
8 Sava, 54.
9 José Tomás Guido, quoted in Sava, 55.
11 Hernández (1873).
not “constituye lo que propiamente puede llamarse poesía,” it was generally considered to be an accurate depiction of the gaucho’s speech.

Thus, both in its speech and its depiction of the gaucho world, Hernández fulfilled his intention of an accurate depiction of gaucho life. And if this intention was motivated by a desire to educate urbanites about the countrymen, and preserve a record of the gaucho and his world, we can judge him successful by the immediate and continued immense popularity of the poem. Achieving authenticity and accuracy in the poem Martín Fierro is an important step towards the second intention of Hernández as revealed in his prologue: drawing attention to and sympathy for the plight of the gaucho.

Hernández states firmly his belief that the gaucho is the “clase desheredada de nuestro país,” victim to “abusos y desgracias.” By educating city folk of the injustices which the “pobre gaucho” experiences, he hopes to arouse a sense of sympathy in order to challenge those injustices.

In studying Hernández’s representation of the gaucho in Martín Fierro, we can ascertain the extent to which Hernández was successful in doing this. In the beginning of the poem, Hernández describes a happy life of land, children and horses, what a critic calls “the myth of the times that are gone.” Fierro’s nostalgic memories of his former life early in the poem are an effective tool for revealing the extent of the injustices that would replace the happy times. Despite this good life, Fierro shows himself to be a good Argentine citizen when he willingly packs up his life to follow unfair orders to go fight on the frontier. On the frontier Fierro is exposed to multiple hardships and injustices, to the point that he feels he has no choice but to escape it entirely. To readers of the time, Fierro’s preference to living with ‘barbarous’ Indians would have

12 Bartolomé Mitre, quoted in Sava, 53.
13 Although Navarro Viola, a contemporary critic, compared Martín Fierro with other gauchesque work and found that Hernández’s language and versification were incorrect and used false rhymes. See Sava, 55.
15 Hernández (1873).
16 Ibid.
17 Ibid.
20 Sainz de Medrano, 22.
highlighted the man’s extreme sense of indignity. Fierro leaves for Indian territory with Cruz, whose sad story matches his own. The similarities in the injustices suffered by both Cruz and Fierro universalise their tales as the tale of the gaucho in general. It is not just Fierro’s bad luck as a man; it is the systematic mistreatment of an entire people.  

One cannot read *Martín Fierro* without feeling a sense of pity for the gaucho and sympathise with the loss of his happy life. That this sense of sympathy is strong even in the modern reader despite Fierro’s occasional ‘bad’ behaviour—his picking the fight with the black man the most obvious example—is testimony to the fact that Hernández’s intention of arousing sympathy and outrage for the life of the “pobre gaucho” was successful. This idea was quite revolutionary at the time of publication, when most literates followed Sarmiento’s ideas (in *Civilización y barbarie*) of seeing the gaucho as a personification of all that was bad in Argentina, and whose backwardness was the source of the country’s problems. In contrast, *Martín Fierro* portrayed the gaucho as a victim. Hernández was not totally opposed to Sarmiento’s ideas: his was a critique not of the system but of the corruption that pervaded it. Thus, every authority figure the characters encounter—judges, police, army sergeants—are corrupt and disrespectful. Hernández was then at once a social chronicler and a social critic, seeking not only to observe but also intending to change society through literature. Contemporary critics considered him successful in bringing attention to the injustices of Argentina’s gauchos. Mariano A. Pelliza believed that the poem acted as a bee to sting the conscience of the nation into action and defence of the marginalized. Considering that poetry had “una misión más elevada, más amplia, más social, más eficaz,” Pablo Subieta Hernández saw the author had used his poem to effectively draw attention to the social injustices inflicted on the gaucho.

These intentions of educating and criticising would be refined and developed in the years that followed the publication and immense success of *The Flight*. Hernández’s prologue to the second part of the poem reflects changing times and a change in the presidency. Hernández supported the new president Avellenada and his “política desarrollista,” which called for the integration of the gaucho into Argentine society through education and

22 Papanikolas, 187.
23 Pages Larraya, 233.
24 Papanikolas, 179.
25 Bothwell Travieso, 43.
26 Mariano A. Pelliza, quoted in Sava, 52.
27 Pablo Subieta, quoted in Sava, 54.
28 Sainz de Medrano, 26.
work. The second part of the poem differs from the first in reflecting these
developed beliefs and being aimed directly at the gauchos themselves. *The Return* becomes a sort of instruction guide, because “the advice that Fierro
gives his sons is clearly given to the latter-day gaucho for his survival and
integration into Argentina’s future.”\(^{29}\) Whereas *The Flight* had called attention
to the sad plight of the gauchos, *The Return* advises them on what to do
about it. In this shift of politics, sees one critic, he is freeing himself from
pastoral nostalgia and “reconciling himself to the modern world.”\(^{30}\) Because
of this new spirit in the air, the singing duel at the poem’s conclusion does
not degenerate into a fight, as the gauchos would have been inclined towards
previously, but ends non-violently, reflecting the new, different times.\(^{31}\)

In the prologue to the second part of the poem, Hernández’s reiterates the
intentions of his first prologue and also goes beyond them. Referring to the
language used in the poem he says “muchos defectos están allí con el objeto
de hacer más evidente y clara la imitación de los que son en realidad.”\(^{32}\) He
again wishes to accurately depict the gaucho and his world, but this is in
this case for a different purpose. Rather than authenticity being necessary in
order to properly educate city dwellers, Hernández now addresses his poem
to the gauchos themselves. Thus accuracy is necessary “a fin de que el libro
se identifique con ellos.”\(^{33}\)

The second intention repeated from the first prologue is that of drawing
attention to the plight of the gauchos. The sympathy invoked in the reading of
*The Flight* is again stoked, as if Hernández does not want the reader to forget
the points he has already made, so as to prepare the ground for their solution.
Fierro and Cruz’s stories are repeated and again universalized through the
different versions in the lives of Fierro’s two sons and Cruz’s son Picardía.
While their lives have taken different paths, their status as gauchos has meant
all of those paths have been marked by injustice and corruption.\(^{34}\) However, in
this second part of the poem, Hernández had modified his intention slightly.
Rather than decrying the treatment of the gaucho in order to call for changes
by the regime, Hernández advises the gaucho himself on the route out of his
misery. He believed the key to saving the gauchos was assimilating them into
society. This would be done through rescuing them from ignorance. *Martin
Fierro* was a tool in this, its intention was “despertar la inteligencia y el


\(^{30}\) Papanikolas, 188.

\(^{31}\) Papanikolas, 190.

\(^{32}\) José Hernández (1879).

\(^{33}\) Ibid.

\(^{34}\) Bothwell Travieso, 43.
amor a la lectura en una población casi primitiva.”  

*Martín Fierro* is aimed at “millares de personas que jamás han leído” in “esa inmensa población diseminada en nuestras vastas campañas.” This message was put across not only through the actions of the characters, several of whom lament the fact that they cannot read, and Fierro himself talking of the necessity of gauchos receiving an education, but through the gauchesque language used. The idea was to “rendir sus ideas e interpretar sus sentimientos en su mismo lenguaje… aunque sea incorrecto” so that “su lectura sea una continuación natural de su existencia.”

Hernández’s work certainly sold in huge numbers, but it is difficult to know if it encouraged reading in the people it was aimed at. It was recorded that within a few years of its publication, gaucho culture had adopted the poem as its own and gauchos recited its verses without knowing or reading their source, a fact that seems to negate the true success of Hernández’s intention. A second critique of Hernández’s success in achieving this intention of education came from his own contemporaries. Some thought that his use of gauchisms actually encouraged the gaucho’s ignorance. For example, Juan María Torres, a contemporary of Hernández, wrote to the author that *Martín Fierro* was not “una lectura provechosa para elevar socialmente al lector.” Hernández responds to these criticisms with a defence of “su lenguaje peculiar y propio, con su originalidad, su gracia y sus defectos naturales” and argues the necessity of using such language to reach the Argentina’s vast, uneducated populace. In his opinion, “Sólo así pasan sin violencia del trabajo al libro; y sólo así, esa lectura puede serles amena, interesante y útil.” Whether they agreed or not, is another question.

Along with education, Hernández saw work as necessary to the betterment of the gauchos’ situation. He intended his poem to encourage good work habits in his audience. He wished to “enseña[r] que el trabajo honrado es la fuente principal de toda mejora y bienestar.” Martín Fierro’s advice to his sons certainly reflects the importance of work, with statements like “El trabajar es la ley / Porque es preciso alquirir.” Yet Hernández’s actual portrayal of the gaucho’s world seems to contradict this, and make the question of his

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35 Hernández (1879).  
36 Ibid.  
37 Ibid.  
38 Ibid.  
39 Ibid.  
40 Borgeson, 416.  
41 Juan María Torres, quoted in Sava, 53.  
42 Hernández (1879).  
43 Ibid.  
44 Ibid.
success in achieving this intention debatable. The principal argument behind this is Hernández has already spoken of the good workers his character were prior to things going wrong for them. Then, to Fierro, “era cosa de largarse /cada cual a trabajar” (Ida ll151-156). The gauchos delighted in their work: “Aquello no era trabajo, / más bien era una junción” (Ida ll223-225). This was put to an end where Fierro was sent to the frontier. Despite doing his job there, he was not paid in return. Fierro’s sons both talk of their willingness to work, before circumstances forced them to do otherwise. Despite Hernández’s words of advice, the experiences of his characters teaches, more than anything, that no matter what you do or how well you work, you are helpless before the authorities and can be made into a victim. It is best put in Fierro’s own words: “padre y marido ha sido /empeñoso y diligente, /y sin embargo la gente /lo tiene por bandido” (Ida ll111-2). Hughes calls this one of a “número de conflictos interiores irresueltos en el ánimo de Hernández.”

By the end of the poem, Fierro is willing to adapt himself to normal working conditions, saying “debe trabajar el hombre /para ganarse el pan” (Vuelta ll4655-6). But at the same time as he almost predicts his own failure and puts blame at the feet of others, with the words “si puedo vivir /y me dejan trabajar.”

Fierro’s story may be realistic, but if it were to be judged truly successful in encouraging good work habits, Fierro would be able to work if he put his mind to it. We leave him unsure if it is really so.

It is not just work and education that Hernández’s intends to encourage in his gaucho audience. He lists other desirable qualities, which he is successful only in varying degrees in following through on in his poem. Similar to the work contradiction, Hernández wishes to encourage “el respeto que es debido a los superiores y magistrados.” Yet it was Fierro’s law-abiding nature that allowed him to be taken away to the frontier and brought about his problems: “Soy manso… y así me dejé agarrar” (Flight ll313-316).

It seems somewhat hypocritical for Hernández to recommend respecting the authorities when his poem documents a world where, as one critic puts it “son transgredidos sistemáticamente numerosos derechos humanos por parte de los que poseen alguna forma de poder,” such as judges, police, and army sergeants. The “el amor a la libertad” that Hernández claims he wishes to encourage, when manifest in his characters, only results in the expedition to Indian territory, death for Cruz, and despair for Fierro. Fierro’s final destiny will be, as we

45 John B. Hughes, Arte y sentido del Martín Fierro (Madrid: Castalia, 1970), 44.
46 Ibid.
47 Hernández (1879).
48 Swanson, 73.
49 Sainz de Medrano, 23.
50 Hernández (1879).
have seen, return and submission to official culture, as Hernández advises. However, this is something that results in the heartbreak of family division, secrecy, and the shame manifest in the changing of names.

Hernández’s intention of “inculcar en los hombres el sentimiento de veneración hacia su Creador” is repeated by Fierro’s frequent references to God, but perhaps negated by the fact that despite that faith he has been so badly treated by life. And while Hernández hopes that his book will “fomentar el amor a su esposa,” modern critics have noted that in his text fights are always provoked by women and the poem is marked by the “inability of the gaucho to maintain lasting ties with a woman.” Others interpret the poem as a homosexual love story between Cruz and Fierro, comparing Fierro’s despair at losing his friend with his emotionless rendering of his wife’s death, and note that “En los raros momentos en que Martín Fierro exalta a la mujer, es sólo la figura de la madre la que admira.”

Space does not permit a detailed examination of all the qualities Hernández states he wished to encourage in his prologues, and his success in achieving this in the poem. The ones discussed however show a distinct pattern. The qualities Hernández says he intends to encourage are admirable and capture the modernising mood of the times, and in most cases are repeated in Fierro’s advice to his sons and Picardía at the end of the poem. They are not, however, always backed up by events in the poem, and more often the lessons of experience contradict the words. Deeds speak louder than words, and Hernández’s success in achieving these intentions is in this way compromised.

Another intention voiced by Hernández in the prologue to the second part of his poem is that of celebrating gaucho culture. Although in the previous prologue Hernández had expressed a desire to preserve a record of this culture, here he expands it to an object of admiration and pride. He speaks of the “sabiduría proverbial” of the gauchos in “expresar en los versos claros y sencillos, máximas y pensamientos morales de las naciones más antiguas,” and celebrates their use of phrases which are “perfectamente medidos… llenos de armonía, de sentimiento y de profunda intención.” Yet such admiration for gaucho culture is denied by the fact that Hernández also intends his poem “afea[r] las supersticiones ridículas” and “regularizar y dulcificar las

52 Hernández (1879).
53 Ibid.
54 Geirola, 322.
55 Ibid, 323.
56 Hughes, 114.
57 Hernández (1879).
58 Ibid.
59 Ibid.
Conflicting Intentions

costumbres.” It seems Hernández contradicts himself: on the one hand he wishes to celebrate gaucho culture, yet his remedy of assimilation would obviously result in its loss.

A linked intention to that which sought to create pride in gaucho culture was Hernández’s desire to create an Argentine identity, or “levantar el grande monumento de la historia de nuestra civilización.” Certainly he was successful: critics claimed it as “nuestro poema nacional” and “un reflejo del espíritu argentino.” In 1913 the publication of a series of lectures by Leopoldo Lugones argued Martín Fierro was a national epic poem, although there was controversy on whether a character and way of life so distant from the Buenos Aires majority could be considered part of the Argentine identity. Today it is acknowledged as a “song from the heart of Argentina” which “entered and helped form the Argentine national identity.”

There Martín Fierro remains an important poem that influenced the way the gaucho’s world was perceived at the time, and continues to be popular and relevant in the Argentina of the day. For these reasons it is important to understand what Hernández intended in writing the poems, and his prologues to the two parts of the poem are very helpful in doing this. The discussion has shown that he was successful in realizing his stated intentions only in varying degrees. Certainly, as stated in the prologue to the first part of the poem, he achieved an accurate depiction of the gaucho, and in doing so, drew attention and sympathy to his plight. However, Hernández’s intentions as stated in the second part of the poem are more complex. We have seen that although his advice to the gauchos is reiterated by Fierro’s speech to his sons, the actual events of the poem appear sometimes to contradict this, and give the reader reason to believe that the solution to the gaucho’s problems will not be as simple as faith in education, work, God and the authorities. Still, Hernández’s simplest intention is that of the payadores he imitated: giving the listener a good time. He reveals in the prologue to the second poem that he intends his poem “servir de provechoso recreo” and be “ameno pasatiempo.” In the process of which, like Fierro himself advises, he sings of “cosas de jundamento” (Vuelta l4767). Hernández was successful: his poem continues delighting and provoking thought in readers today.

60 Ibid.
61 Ibid.
62 Carlos Olivera Medallas, quoted in Sava, 59.
63 Sava, 61.
64 Carlos Baires, quoted in Sava, 64.
65 Borgeson, 416.
66 Hernández (1879).
2. THE POWER OF “THE MULTILINGUAL AMONG MONOLINGUALS” (Douglas Robinson)

JANE CHRISTIE

The University of Auckland

Jane is currently completing a Master of Professional Studies in Translation. She presented this essay for Translat 703 as partial completion of her BA(Hons) in Spanish

This paper examines the notion of power and its relationship with the role of the translator. Following a critical analysis of Walter Benjamin’s marginalisation of the translator, the discussion will shift to the postcolonial context where translators play a central role in reforming the world by “reshaping texts, a role that is far from innocent” (Bassnett 23). This complicated negotiation of power will be exemplified by looking at the translation of the Treaty of Waitangi in New Zealand.

Translation as a Site of Power Struggle

Literary and cultural critic Walter Benjamin looks at literary translation through a philosophical lens. His article “The Task of the Translator,” was first published in 1923 as an introduction to his own undertaking of poetry translation. Partly as justification for this work, partly as explanation of his preferred method of translation, Benjamin’s essay also illustrates how far we have come in Translation Studies in the last 80 years. While this model may arguably be relevant to a small number of expressive texts such as poetry, I would criticise this thesis for its ambiguity, its total disregard for cultural issues and add that the religious undertones prevent this approach from being practically applicable to the reality of any translator’s task.

From the outset of Benjamin’s thesis, the translator’s role struggles to be significant. Due to so-called human inadequacies in comparison to a higher divine power, i.e. God, the translator merely serves in the humble but noble task of deriving “the pure language” (Benjamin 80). This notion of pure language can only be understood in a metaphysical context as Sarah Dudek explains, “the biblical idea of a once existing complete language in paradise disintegrated by God after the Tower of Babel grounds Benjamin’s

Thus, in contrast to what common sense tells us about the fundamental significance of the translation process, i.e. being able to communicate knowledge that can not otherwise be exchanged by means of mutually exclusive languages, Benjamin’s view reduces translation to a derivative process that at best strives to “complete languages” (Dudek).

For Benjamin, the translator serves as a liberator, freeing up the continuously changing source and target languages so that they may mingle and supplement each other. Unsurprisingly, this process allows the source language to influence the target tongue. In reference to a translation strategy known today as foreignisation, Benjamin says: “it is not the highest praise of a translation… to say that it reads as if it had originally been written in that language” (79). However, Benjamin’s idea of foreignisation is limited to the importation of foreign syntax. Reducing a great deal of the translator’s decision-making power, Benjamin endorses a literal rendering that preserves the original form and ‘relieves’ the translator of “rendering the sense” (78). Ironically, he refers to this constraint as freedom. However, in contrast to the traditional notion of ‘free translation,’ Benjamin merely frees the translator from the meaning constraints of the original: “A translation, instead of resembling the meaning of the original, must lovingly and in detail incorporate the original’s mode of signification” (78). He also makes it clear that the reader is of no significance what so ever: “Consideration of the reader never proves fruitful… even the concept of an ideal receiver is detrimental…. No poem is intended for the reader” (69). Thus, regarding the negotiation of power between author, translator and reader (and disregarding the claim of divine intervention), it can be said that Benjamin ignores the reader, marginalises the translator and stresses the centrality of the author: “Unlike a work of literature, translation does not find itself in the centre of the language forest but on the outside” (76).

Hierarchical relationships between source and target text are ambiguously defined. On one hand, Benjamin empowers the source text with an inherent underlying element, namely “its translatability” (70). He also endows the original text with “a history of its own” (71). On the other hand, translation is said to mark the original text’s transition into the “afterlife” (71), which itself is subsequently extended through translation. While the sacred original to which translations “owe their existence” (72) conceals something “between the lines” (82) that can not be embodied by the humble word, which itself considered to be an inadequate manifestation of pure language, that same original is also a mere fragment of something greater than itself. Benjamin claims that translation makes “both the original and the translation recognizable as fragments of a greater language, just as fragments are part of a vessel” (78).

In essence, we are presented with a linguistic power struggle, begging the question of whether the message is powerless in comparison to the medium or visa versa. Moreover, after reading Benjamin’s thesis, one might ask whether translation is possible at all. A literal translation of the form acts as “the arcade” (Benjamin 79) through which the message may pass but not be manifest. According to Benjamin a mingling process, which is unique to translation, allows the original language as well as the “tenor and significance” (73) of the original text to be updated and renewed, but the “inessential content” (70) is not transferred. This results in an extraordinary thesis that, as Benjamin actually admits, “prevents translation” (75).

Considering Culture and Colonisation

However extraordinary it may seem, the postcolonial theorists complement Walter Benjamin’s essay by borrowing some of his ideas. Nevertheless, they do use these ideas in a very different context and for very different purposes. In addition to recognising the indivisible relationship between culture and language, these theorists favour “the study of translation in the service of empire” (Evans 149). Thus, from this cultural-political perspective, foreignisation is seen more as a form of resistance to hegemonic lingua franca and the like and Benjamin’s original notion of untranslatability, that being an inherent quality of certain texts, better serves in this context “as a metaphor for the difficult politics of cultural transfer” (Evans 151). One of the most important phenomena that this context highlights is the power of “the multilingual among monolinguals” (Robinson 11).

Translation scholar Douglas Robinson explores the role of the translator within the ‘postcolonial’ context. In this approach, the recruitment and training of translators, when undertaken by dominant colonial powers, is said to trigger questions of loyalty. The translator may even come to be categorised as a traitor. Given that the translator’s skopos (goal) is basically dictated by an in-power group, which is unlikely to have any out-of-power group’s best interests at heart, one may question whether the information conveyed serves the receiving audience in an honest way. Asymmetrical power relations such as this are central to the work of the postcolonial theorists.

The most frequently quoted figure of the translator/traitor paradigm is the indigenous interpreter Doña Marina, popularly known as la Malinche. On one hand, she represents cultural betrayal for having helped Spanish conquistador Hernán Cortés to conquer the Aztec Empire. In Mexico, her popular name,

5 Douglas Robinson, Translation and Empire: Postcolonial Theories Explained (Manchester: St Jerome, 1997).
forming part of the adjective malinchista, is synonymous with the notion of betrayal. In contrast, as the figurative mother of the mestizo, (mixed-race) she symbolises “the fruitful mixing and mingling of cultures” (Robinson 9). This powerful and complicated position is loaded with contradictions.

In order to avoid universalising the colonial history of the entire world, Robinson introduces us to a typology of approaches to postcolonial studies. He defines the first approach as “post-independence studies” (14). Assuming that colonisation has actually ended, this study focuses on the comparatively “recent history” (14) of colonisation in nations that emerged after overcoming their respective colonial rulers. Translation in this period, often stimulated by nation-building efforts, encourages scholars to focus on the important contribution translators have made towards various movements of independence, attempts at decolonisation and language recuperation efforts. However, this approach also covers on-going struggles to retain linguistic identity, especially when it is threatened with extinction by a prevailing use of the language of the coloniser as a lingua franca.

Robinson calls the second type, “Post-European colonisation studies” (15). This approach steps further back in history to the onset of European colonisation in order to compare and contrast its on-going effects on colonised communities. Here, early examples of interpreter training, of translator as peace-maker and/or traitor, of betrayal by indigenous translators showing loyalty to the colonising powers, preferably balanced against the implications of being a captured slave in the case of la Malinche, would be considered.

On a more abstract level, the third approach works within a more broadly defined range of colonial encounters in order to focus on the power relationships between “conqueror cultures… [and] conquered cultures” (Robinson 14). By reaching beyond the traditional notion of colonisation, this approach allows the theorist to examine instances of “dominance and submission” (Robinson 16). In particular, this allows neocolonial texts from countries such as New Zealand and the United States to be compared to more obvious postcolonial texts coming from areas like Latin America. Robinson justifies the apparent absurdity of comparing a North American text to a Latin American text when he says, “the fact that Americans feel both superior and inferior to the English and Continental Europeans, and profoundly uneasy about their mixed feelings –is a postcolonial problem” (17).

A Case in Point

The translation of the Treaty of Waitangi in New Zealand is a case in point that illustrates, as Sabine Fenton and Paul Moon point out, “that the field of colonial and postcolonial studies clearly extends to New Zealand” (26).

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Starting with the translation of the New Testament and other religious texts into Maori, early missionaries developed an instrument through which they could further their so-called ‘humanitarian’ mission among the ‘savages.’ Empowered by their loyalty to God and the British Monarch, the missionaries upheld the 19th century belief in European superiority over the ‘natives’ in the South Pacific, which in turn nurtured their ideas of ‘civilization’ and ‘salvation.’ They justified their colonist activities by claiming a “paternal interest in the welfare of the Maori” (Fenton and Moon 31).

Their literacy programmes limited Maori studentship to the reading of biblical texts in Maori only. Missionary translation thus implemented a monolingual educational system that systematically denied Maori access to the languages and literatures of the Europeans. This form of disempowerment hindered Maori from gaining knowledge of 19th century European culture, together with the true nature and purpose of the European colonizer. As D. F. McKenzie argues, this restriction “enhanced their familiar pastoral role by making the Maori dependent on them morally and politically as interpretative guides to Pakeha [white settler] realities” (13).

Maori embraced the spiritual aspect of the Bible, but the legally binding power of the written and signed document remained a European concept well into the time that Maori were negotiating with European colonizers over land. As McKenzie explains, “the missionaries and their great instrument of truth had failed lamentably to equip the Maori to negotiate their rights with the Pakeha in the one area that really mattered too them – land” (31).

Ever since its rendition, the missionary Henry Williams’ translation of the Treaty of Waitangi from English into Maori has been contested on both sides of the cultural division that the treaty itself has created. Between 6 February and 9 June 1840, it is the revised Maori version (of which there were several copies made) that was in fact signed and marked in various manners “by more than five hundred Maori rangatira or ‘chiefs’” (Allen 19).\(^7\) Further English versions were drafted and one was signed by a small number of Maori rangatira who in “being pre-literate, could not have read even if they had known the language” (Mckenzie 33). However, the agreements that were forged by way of the Maori version were not only to be dismissed, but also violated, and until the establishment of the Waitangi Tribunal in 1975, these violations were also ignored.

Chadwick Allen in his discussion of contemporary indigenous activist writers that allegorize the Maori language version of the Treaty of Waitangi, claims that it serves as “a silent second text [that] speaks in two distinct, conflicting voices” (20). This conflict lies in the mistranslation of the key


term ‘sovereignty’ with a newly coined term kawanatanga a composite of kawana (Governor) and the suffix of abstraction, tanga which literally meant ‘governorship’ instead of the terms mana or rangatiratanga (chieftainship), which were already familiar both to Maori and to Williams through his translation of biblical texts and of the Declaration of Independence in 1835, to express that which was to be ceded to the crown (McKenzie 41). Mason Durie in his discussion of Maori aspirations for self-determination and self-government affirms, “Maori have never accepted that the Treaty of Waitangi required abandonment of tino rangatiratanga” (3). McKenzie argues that, “Williams muted the sense, plain in English, of the treaty as a document of political appropriation” and that had the rangatira understood the term, kawanatanga, to signify anything more than the ceding of ‘governorship’ of their land to the Crown, that they would not have signed the Treaty (41-42).

Another site of conflict lies in the underestimated use of te tino rangatiratanga… o ratou taonga katoa (in the sense of ‘full possession… of all precious possessions’) to express that which would be “guaranteed by the Crown” (Mckenzie 43). According to Allen’s analysis, “taonga specifies an inexhaustible and thus controversial range of tangible and intangible phenomena” (137). McKenzie claims that, the term is “infinitely extendable and may include any or every element of Maori culture, including the language itself” (43). Therefore, in contrast to its English counterpart, the term taonga, as it would have been interpreted by Maori rangatira before signing the treaty, has multi-faceted meaning and this has formed part of a strong argument in Maori protest and claims for its return put before the Waitangi Tribunal since 1975.

Conclusion

Despite Walter Benjamin’s allusions to a pure language and attempts to empower the author, this paper has shown the real power of the “multilingual among monolinguals” (Robinson 11). This is especially clear in the case of the diverging versions of the Treaty of Waitangi which still demand reconciliation. Maori claims for the return of tino rangatiratanga o taonga katoa and mana whenua may never be fully satisfied. The early European translators involved in the colonization of New Zealand were serving their own economic and ideological needs and those of their employers. They not only abused their position of power, but they also left a legacy of unresolved land disputes and laid the foundations for a cultural division between Maori and Pakeha that has survived to this day.

If we are to accept the suggestion of José Carlos Mariátegui that “los ‘indigenistas’ auténticos –que no deben ser confundidos con los que explotan temas indígenas por mero ‘exotismo’– colaboran, conscientemente o no, en una obra política y económica de reivindicación”, Los ríos profundos remains undoubtedly a work inspired by the literary movement of indigenismo, despite the differences between this and other contemporaneous indigenista novels. The aspects of the novel that mark it as being highly distinguishable and a step away from the prior indigenista tradition, have certainly contributed to the development of Latin American literature as a whole, and have ensured that it remains a work of significant importance within the indigenista genre. This essay aims to explore some of the ways in which Arguedas built on and exceeded already existing elements within the movement. Although there are undoubtedly numerous other details that could be included in an examination of this kind, I propose to focus here on four elements of difference that Los ríos profundos presents: the introduction of a new thematic nuance; the ‘insider’ perspective that Arguedas is able to offer thanks to his personal background; the treatment of myth and magic in Quechua culture; and the incorporation of material highlighting the process of transculturation between indigenous and Spanish cultures in Peru.

In order to understand how Arguedas departed from the limits previously set by other indigenista authors, it is necessary to understand just what this literary movement entailed, and the style that preceded Los ríos profundos. The indigenista movement emerged as a response to the socio-political situation of Indians in that era. Its main purpose was “una reivindicación de lo autóctono” and it had, according to Mariátegui “una subconsciente inspiración política y económica” and an aim of diffusion of the ideas of diversity and ethnic plurality amongst the middle classes. Above all, however, it was stimulated by the socialist ideologies that were gaining popularity at the time. Mariátegui’s

1 As cited in William Rowe’s Introduction to Los ríos profundos (Bristol: Bristol Classical Press, 1997), xii.
essays *Siete ensayos de interpretación de la realidad peruana*, highlighted the importance of indigenous participation in any socialist movement, given that Indians formed the overwhelming majority of the proletariat/working class. Although Arguedas appreciated and admired Mariátegui’s work, at the same time he was disdainful of the scholar’s obsessive attention to the economic aspects of indigenismo, to the detriment of an appreciation for Quechua culture. Indigenista literature at the time tended to focus on the repressed, exploited nature of Quechua society. Arguedas, however, according to some critics, was part of a so called *‘nuevo indigenismo literario’* or *neo-indigenista* genre that was able to overcome this tendency because it was not based on a tenet of reductionism. The new indigenismo experimented with portrayals of Quechua culture, as opposed to concentration only on their social status. Arguedas, who Escobar describes as “un hombre clave en el éxito de la literatura indigenista,” sought to incorporate in his literature “la revelación del universo cultural andino” and not only “las vejaciones en que sus iguales basaban su relación de superioridad como hacendados.”

Although Arguedas was undoubtedly in favour of the cause of defending the Indians from the exploitation they suffered and promoting the recognition of their rights, these objectives seem almost secondary to the primary goal of painting a positive and realistic picture of indigenous Peruvian culture. The denunciation of the power-wielding oligarchy comes across far more subtly in *Los ríos profundos* than in other indigenista literature. Ángel Rama is explicit in highlighting the difference between Arguedas and his contemporaries in this respect:

> Para una novela escrita en el cauce de la narrativa indigenista no deja de sorprender que no aparezcan nunca los dueños de las haciendas con colonos (salvo el paradigmático Viejo del capítulo inicial que oficia de obertura), ni que aparezcan las autoridades civiles locales, ni que tampoco aparezca el Comandante de la tropa enviada para la represión.

In other indigenista works, reprehensible statements and dialogue of the elitist landowners or authorities are heavily relied upon to portray the exploitation and cruelty of which Indians are victims. In one of the most well known indigenista stories, *Huasipungo*, by Jorge Icaza for example, one reads statements such as “Que se les mate sin piedad a semejantes bandidos,”

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4 Ibid.

5 Ibid.

Los ríos profundos in indigenista Literature

“hay que defender a las desinteresadas y civilizadoras empresas extranjeras” – spoken by local authorities that appear in the tale; and further recriminatory declarations like: “Nadie. Nadie como yo… para conocer y dominar a látigo, a garrote, a bala, a la sinvergüencería y la vagancia de los indios” – spoken by a landowner. 7 In fact, the bluntness with which traditional realist indigenista authors depict the unjust treatment the Indians suffer at the hands of landowners and authorities could even be seen as unsophisticated and less effective compared to the undercurrent of accusation that Arguedas achieves.

Despite the above explanations of their seemingly noble intentions in defence of the Indians and their efforts towards a revindication of Indian rights, many indigenista authors in fact betrayed their ambiguous discourse about the Quechua with messages in their novels that showed a lack of appreciation for both Quechua culture and for the Indians themselves. Jorge Icaza, in Huasipungo, suggests that the Indians are incapable of thinking about any issues other than how to meet their basic needs: “En la mente de los indios… sólo hilvanaban y deshilvanaban ansias de necesidades inmediatas: que no acabe el maíz tostado… que pase pronto la neblina… que sean breves las horas para volver a la choza.” 8 Similarly, the critic José Miguel Oviedo points out the negative, somewhat stereotypical ways in which two other well-known indigenista authors perceive Indians. According to Oviedo, Enrique López Albújar sees the Indian as “un ser monstruoso, sádico, que busca venganza violenta… un ser dominado fatalmente por sus pasiones;” and Ventura García Calderón sees the Indian as a “turista en su tierra… como un objeto curioso.” 9 These demonstrations of the authors’ lack of understanding and respect for Quechua, culture are a direct reflection of the fact that the writers themselves had little experience in personal relationships with Indians and, therefore, scant knowledge of Quechua culture, beliefs and worldviews. Their perspective on the indigenous world is necessarily the external view of those living on the outside and looking in as an observer on the world that they are representing. The two authors mentioned above for example, López Albújar and García Calderón, had indirect relations and contact with Indians – López Albújar only professionally as a judge, and García Calderón even less so, given that he was a diplomat and in fact spent most of his life living outside Peru. 10 Arguedas, on the other hand, because of his personal life history, had

8 Ibid.
9 José Miguel Oviedo, quoted in María Gladys Vallières, “El lugar de José María Arguedas en la evolución del indigenismo literario.” In: José Antonio Mazzotti and U. Juan Zeballos Aguilar (eds.), Acedios a la heterogeneidad cultural: Libro de homenaje a Antonio Cornejo Polar (Philadelphia: Asociación Internacional de Peruanistas1996.), 375.
10 Vallières, 375.
a unique inside view of the Quechua world, and was inherently predisposed towards not only an appreciation of indigenous culture, but also towards an understanding and even something of an identification with the Indians themselves. His mother’s death when he was still very young, his father’s frequent absence because of work, and his problematic relationship with his stepmother, meant that much of Arguedas’ childhood was spent in the company of the Indians who worked in his father’s house. Arguedas grew up feeling that he belonged more to the Indian community than to the Spanish one, and often felt torn between these two worlds.\(^{11}\)

One of the reasons that Arguedas began writing literature within the vein of \textit{indigenismo} was to rectify the false image of the Indian that many authors before him had portrayed. Speaking of his reaction to other \textit{indigenista} short stories, Arguedas declared: “En estos relatos estaba tan desfigurado el indio y tan meloso y tonto el paisaje que dije: ‘No, yo lo tengo que escribir tal cual es, porque yo lo he gozado, yo lo he sufrido.’”\(^{12}\) Having been privileged to live within the Indian community, he was significantly more qualified to present an ‘authentic’ representation of the Quechua than any other \textit{indigenista} author. It is interesting to note then, that although Arguedas was almost undoubtedly more able to present an accurate, objective view of the reality of the life of the Quechua, in \textit{Los ríos profundos} he chose to use primarily first person narration, a technique which intrinsically expresses the subjectivity of the narrator. Even the commentaries of the second ‘ethnologist’ narrator, which are introduced in chapter six, have a more subjective, poetic tone, and while certainly descriptive of ethnological observations, they lack the judgmental quality that third person narration often conveys. In one of the passages narrated by the second narrator, cited by Ángel Rama, for example, this narrator’s commentary appears subjective simply through his choice of words, which seem to imply an opinion held by him: “El sol infunde silencio quando cae, al mediodía, al fondo de estos abismos de piedra y de arbustos.”\(^{13}\) The second narrator also makes references to personal information: “El K’arwarasu es el Apu, el Dios regional de mi aldea native;”\(^{14}\) thus also indicating that the ethnological narration is not entirely third person. Traditional \textit{indigenista} authors, in contrast, employed exclusively third person narration, (Ciro Alegria and Jorge Icaza for example) suggesting an omniscient, all-knowing narrator, and giving the impression of any commentary being based on objective, factual background. López Albújar even goes so far as to give psychological

\(^{11}\) Rowe, viii-ix.  
\(^{12}\) José María Arguedas, quoted in Vallières, 376.  
\(^{13}\) Rama, 274.  
\(^{14}\) Ibid, 277.
explanations for the behaviour of Indians which, in the words of William Rowe, “make the reader believe that he is being given an inward view of the Indian mind, when in fact it is simply a rationalization of racial prejudice.”15

Through his use of first person narrative, Arguedas positioned himself more within the genre of modernist literature, while other indigenista literature was firmly grounded in the realist tradition.

Aside from the thematic and perspective differences between Los ríos profundos and other indigenista works, Arguedas’ style was also distinguishable for the esthetics of his narrative, particularly the fact that the novel was “emparentada con el realismo mágico,”16 in contrast to the purely realist narrative of previous literary indigenismo. Milagros Aleza has even stated that Los ríos profundos was the work that in fact began the era of Realismo mágico.17 The inclusion of elements of myth or magic in the novel situated Los ríos profundos a step ahead of its contemporaries in the evolution of indigenista literature.18 The source of magic in the novel is invariably from the natural world, which also supplies all metaphors and similes in the narration. To quote Rowe however:

[This] constant reference to the natural world goes beyond comparison or analogy: it entails the notion of a single order which includes both man and nature. This is the view of the Indian, who, ‘por naturaleza de su cultura, se siente como formando parte del ser de plantas, animales y de los objetos notables. (La literatura quechua en el Perú)19

Furthermore, as Rama points out, in the treatment of mythical/magical themes in other Latin American literature, both before and after Arguedas, one can reasonably make the assumption that these beliefs belong to the characters alone. In Los ríos profundos, however, and indeed in other of Arguedas’ works, the introduction of these elements seems so natural that it would not be inconceivable to propose that Arguedas in fact shared the world vision of the culture he was representing.20

In terms of portrayals of the Indian and of Quechua culture, other indigenista literature tended to focus on the pitiable state of servitude of

15 Rowe, xii.
16 Escobar Ulloa, op cit. in note 3.
17 Ibid.
19 Rowe, xxv.
20 Rama, 297-99.
the Indians, how their everyday reality had changed for the worse since colonization and how the culture itself had failed to adapt. Mariátegui himself, whose work represented the beginning of the so-called ‘primer’ *Indigenismo*, in his essay ‘El proceso de la literatura’, claims that: “Lo único que sobrevive del Tawantinsuyo es el indio. La civilización ha perecido.”21 Rather than concentrating like his contemporaries on the downtrodden present-day social realities of the Quechua, Arguedas includes in his depiction of the Quechua culture observations on the changes and adaptations that the culture has gone through. His interest was, according to María Gladys Vallières, in: “cómo esta gran cultura había demostrado capacidad y flexibilidad necesarias para incorporar los elementos ajenos provenientes de la cultura hispánica y sobrevivir de esta manera en la población actual del Perú.”22

González Vigil cites three particular ways in which Arguedas showcases examples of transculturation of Peruvian society in *Los ríos profundos*: the melding of “la mentalidad mítico mágica [indígena] con sincretismo cristiano; quechuaización del español; y la tradición oral ligada a la música y la danza.”23 The arrival of the colonos in Abancay, to receive mass as their deliverance from the plague, is a perfect example of the way in which Indian culture adapted itself to some of the belief norms of the dominant culture. The reverse is also true in the way that the dominant culture adopted the language of the marginalized Indians. The narrator himself, Ernesto, even declares in the book that in the whole school, only one pupil did not speak Quechua (Valle), a fact which in itself is explicit in highlighting the importance of the Quechua language within society. These examples of transculturation are testimony to Arguedas’ belief in the inevitability of the development of a *mestizo* identity in Peru. Vallières even goes so far as to suggest that in highlighting the extent to which the indigenous culture influenced the dominant European-based culture, Arguedas proved himself to be rather more a ‘mesticista’ than an ‘indigenista’.24 His own position as an individual situated in between “two absolutely different worlds, without belonging completely to either”25, gave him a particular understanding of the development of Peruvian identity, which informed his literary perspective. The critic Anne Lambright states that:

Arguedas rejects romantic attempts to incorporate the indigenous element into national discourse, efforts which tend to draw upon an idealized, glorified Incan past and ignore the present situation of the Indian, nor does he seek

21 Cited in Vallières, 373.
22 Vallières, 365.17 Ibid.
23 Cited in Escobar Ulloa, op cit.
24 Vallières, 365.
25 Rowe, xi.
a uniquely indigenous literary expression, which would marginalize the
hegemonic discourse. Rather, Arguedas seeks a language that mediates among
and incorporates the different cultures, and in this manner best expresses the
nation.26

The other area where Arguedas is recognizably unique from his
contemporaries is in his treatment of spoken language. Whereas most
indigenista literature overlooked the fact of bilingualism, Arguedas made
efforts to integrate Quechua language into his novels in many forms. After
having experimented for years with the transposition of Quechua syntax
into Spanish, Arguedas realized that a more subtle method was needed to
represent the importance of the Quechua language within Creole society in the
communities of the sierra. Los ríos profundos is therefore more traditional in
its linguistic style than Arguedas’ previous works, but still retains elements of
Quechua language which strongly distinguish it from other works within the
genre of indigenismo. Certain words are maintained constantly in Quechua
throughout the whole novel; entire phrases are occasionally inserted in
Quechua and followed with translations; and in other cases the narrator states
that what has been said in dialogue was spoken in Quechua. Rama insists
particularly on the significance of the fact that insults and words that inspire
fear remain almost wholly in Quechua.27 Through these techniques, Arguedas
is able to illustrate the prevalence of a kind of linguistic hybrid of Quechua-
Spanish. His incorporation of Quechua in Los ríos profundos to represent
the spoken word is an infinitely superior technique to other authors’ efforts
to reproduce the use of indigenous speech by simply deforming the spelling
of Spanish words. In Huasipungo for example, the dialogue of indigenous
speakers is written in Spanish but marked by the replacement of ‘o’ by ‘u,’
and by prolonged vowel sounds – thus no becomes nuuu, cielo becomes
cielooo, and bandido, bandidu or bandidoo – this technique would perhaps
be forgivable it were merely a representation of the Indian accent. Given that
the language used would in fact have been Quechua, these can only be seen
as futile attempts which lead to a misperception of the real spoken language.
In many respects then, we have seen how Los ríos profundos differs from
the norm of indigenismo literature. But to what extent can we praise his
achievement? In 1980 Antonio Cornejo Polar wrote that:

El mejor indigenismo no sólo asume los intereses del campesinado indígena:
asimila también, en grado diverso, tímida o audazmente, ciertas formas

26 Anne Lambright, “Time, Space and Gender: Creating the Hybrid Intellectual in Los ríos
profundos,” Latin American Literature Review, 55.28 (Jan-June 2000), 7.
27 Rama, 243.
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literarias que pertenecen orgánicamente al referente. Se comprende que esta doble asimilación, de intereses sociales y de formas estéticas, constituye el correlato dialéctico de la imposición que sufre el universo indígena del sistema productor del indigenismo.28

Arguedas’ success in *Los ríos profundos* can be measured directly against the attributes described here, and his inclusion as one of the best indigenista authors can be aptly justified. Not only did the novel depart from the traditional indigenista socio-political theme, to encompass a broader cultural vision of Quechua society, but the aesthetics of his narrative, notably the incorporation of nature and myth, also signified a radical new style of writing which was much more in tune with the cultural forms of the subjects that he was representing. It is for these reasons that one must surely agree with Ángel Rama when he claims that *Los ríos profundos* is a literary work of major importance in Latin America – evidently within the genre of indigenismo, and also as a significant contribution to the development of Latin American literature in general.

Theatre places us right at the heart of what is religious-political: in the heart of absence, in negativity, in nihilism as Nietzsche would say, therefore in the question of power.

Jean-Francois Lyotard

One’s own body – that most forgotten land.
Walter Benjamin (Birringer 205)

Theatre, especially much modern theatre, is fundamentally concerned with the body. Its physicality locates it in a unique place to give a bodily home to theories left otherwise two-dimensional on the page. As an art form, theatre has a heightened pragmatism that allows it to demonstrate theoretical ideas in physical and striking ways. Just as performance is the act of embodiment, performance has the power to dismantle certain conditions such as textual authority and illusionism. The actor/spectator relationship allows the actor to translate ideas through physical embodiment to the spectator. Theatre can demonstrate both performative and theoretical possibilities (Goodman 7), and as a result of this occupation of physical and theoretical space, it is imbued with an effectiveness that allows ideas like existentialism, absurdism, surrealism, issues of exile and deconstruction to be embodied and shown on the stage. This ‘power,’ as Lyotard notes, places the theatre in the position of effectively reflecting the current “ideological climate” of an age.

Many significant theorists and practitioners have returned to the power of the physical body in theatre. The theoretical contributions of Antonin Artaud, and Jerzy Grotowski (and to a lesser extent Bertolt Brecht, Samuel Beckett and Augusto Boal) are examined and assessed on how their ideas have impacted on the theatre and beyond. Of course, contemporary critical theory does not always relate to contemporary theatre, nor does theatre to theory,

but approaches in theatre that have linked to wider fields of study are looked at, especially where the ideas from theorists of the theatre are particularly innovative, or where they have borrowed methods and ideas from elsewhere. Lastly, the effect of postmodernism is also explored, particularly how it has affected, and is affected by the theatre. The actor/spectator relationship is also considered in light of reception theory and the postmodern condition.

Beginning in the first half of the twentieth century, and continuing to the present day, many playwrights and audiences were seeking significant spiritual expression in theatre in place of mere entertainment. The objectives of those wishing for a more meaningful theatre have been expressed in the Ritual Theatre of Antonin Artaud, Epic Theatre of Bertolt Brecht, Absurdist Theatre of Samuel Beckett, the Poor Theatre of Jerzy Grotowski, and to some extent the Postmodern Theatre of ‘happenings’ and performance art. Together these new modes redefined the various functions of theatre and theatre inquiry.

Artaud’s ideas on theatre came from his admiration for Eastern forms and his frustration with traditional Western theatre. He advocated what he called a ‘theatre of cruelty.’ Rather than a sadistic form of pain, he meant a violent and physical theatre that would shatter the false reality that clouded the audience’s perception of truth. He believed that text had been a tyrant over meaning and sought a theatre that used a mixture of thought and gesture rather than verbal language. Artaud argued: “it is essential to put an end to the subjugation of the theatre to the text, and to recover the notion of a kind of unique language halfway between gesture and thought” (89). He wanted to attack the audience’s senses via an array of technical methods and acting, so the audience would be brought out of their desensitised state and have to confront themselves. Through a metaphysical ‘cruelty,’ i.e. using grotesque, ugly and violent images, the audience would see a spectacle so excruciatingly powerful it would wake them from their ‘slumber’ and complacent spectatorship. The audience would come away with a deeper connection to the work and a new understanding of what it is to be alive.

The theories of Artaud as well as Brecht, propose ways in which the relationship between audience and drama should not be one of complacency, but one where the spectator is freed up from his conventional role as passive recipient and becomes an active part of the production of meaning. The theatre of cruelty insists that the boundaries of the stage are removed and that there is no boundary of any kind – the spectator joins the actor in direct communication and plays a central part in the meaning of the drama (Brockett 451).

Artaud’s defining tenet was that when anything is quantified, rationalised or represented through language, the true article seeking to be expressed

is destroyed. He created his theatre out of this idea and sought to focus on non-lingual verbalisation as the vehicle for true communication, and body language as the vehicle for thought and emotion. Like the postmodernists after him, Artaud saw the world as being a mirror of the theatre he advocated: chaotic, non-rational and incomprehensible (Artaud 7). He believed that imagination was reality. Thoughts and delusions were no less real than the ‘outside’ world.

Whereas Brecht advocated a theatre of enlightened rationality, Artaud looked for a nonverbal, physical theatre or what he called “unperverted pantomime” (Birringer 148). He saw demonstration of this in Cambodian and Balinese dance performances, and observed that through the labyrinth of their gestures, attitudes, and sudden cries, through the gyrations and turns which leave no portion of the stage unutilised, the sense of a new physical language, based upon signs and no longer words, is liberated. These actors… seem to be animated hieroglyphs…. Their sense of the plastic requirements of the stage is equalled only by their knowledge of physical fear and their means of unleashing it…. In [the] Balinese theatre there is something that has nothing to do with entertainment, the notion of useless, artificial amusement. The Balinese productions take shape at the very heart of matter, life reality. (Artaud 54-60)

It is likely that Artaud’s wonderment at Balinese theatre, as with Brecht’s admiration of Chinese acting, had a eurocentric bent, a perception of ‘otherness’ and the ‘exotic’ that coloured their interpretation. Later practitioners, such as Ariane Mnouchkine, France’s best-known living director, have also drawn closely on Asian forms, particularly Kathakali. Working with Hélène Cixous, her actors borrowed conventions from Vietnamese water puppets and the puppetry of Japanese Bunraku. The actors were given travel grants to observe theatre in Vietnam, Taiwan, Japan and Indonesia and incorporate the methods on their own merits, rather than out of a concept of ‘otherness’ (Brockett 561).

Although very different in their approaches, Artaud and Brecht shared a common frustration with the illusions that dominated the bourgeois aesthetic of naturalism and realism (Birringer 148). Brecht’s Verfremdungseffekt was a technique to expose illusions and break the practice of audience identification with the central character in conventional realist theatre, while Artaud conceived a theatre that used the body of the actor and their physical language as the source of performance and confrontation. Artaud’s aim in the theatre was to establish unity:
We abolish the stage and the auditorium and replace them with a single site, without partition or barrier of any kind... a direct communication will be re-established between the spectator and the spectacle.... The spectator is placed in the middle of the action, is engulfed and physically affected by it.... Without an element of cruelty at the root of every spectacle, the theatre is not possible. In our present state of degeneration it is through the skin that metaphysics must be made to re-enter our minds. (Artaud 90)

His prescription for unity in the theatre strongly influenced the Absurdist movement that, although outwardly chaotic, was also seeking unity in assumptions and forms expressed.

After Artaud, theatre in the 1960s sought an even greater unity and ‘truth’ through its aim to eliminate ‘synthetic’ requirements that got in the way of pure theatre; things such as costumes, scenography, a separate performance area, lighting, and sound effects. In particular, Polish practitioner Jerzy Grotowski’s ‘Poor Theatre’ was very concerned with eliminating superfluous elements in the theatre and with borrowing and adapting ideas from other cultures (Brockett 527). The only fundamental requirement in the theatre was the actor/spectator relationship. Grotowski advocated cross-cultural methods to be adopted in his theatre, not in reaction to dominance of canonical texts used in theatre, but rather because of a tiring of traditional performance codes.

Carl Weber writes of this transculturalism where “experimentation with ideas and forms lifted from other cultures was conducted. Emerging new modes of performance were frequently evolved from a transculturation of foreign structures and ideas” (Brockett 528). The dominant motivation within such branches of theatre for engaging in non-western methods was not to balance discrepancies between the practice of western and non-western theatres, but through foreign new ideas to inject life into the western performance codes that had become obsolete. Grotowski himself was influenced by the Peking Opera (he studied in China), Indian Kathakali and Japanese Noh theatre (Grotowski 16). Often theorists of the theatre have looked to other cultures, not because of external pressure to redress the dominance of certain narratives and modes, but because of a tiring of western theatrical forms and the ‘Aristotelian’ norm. The search resulted in an influx of forms that focused on the body and spectator collaboration in the production of meaning.

In *Towards a Poor Theatre*, Grotowski argues that theatre should focus on its own roots: actors in front of spectators, rather than try and compete with the spectacle and technology of film. Grotowski goes on to say that “the Rich Theatre depends on artistic kleptomania, drawing from other disciplines... by
multiplying assimilated elements, the Rich Theatre tries to escape the impasse presented by movies and television” (19). The ‘trappings’ may enhance the experience of theatre, but are unnecessary to the central core of meaning that theatre should generate. By paring down and offering “poverty in theatre,” the actor was actually being much more ‘theatrical’: transforming himself from type to type using only his body and craft. ‘Poor’ means a stripping away of all that is unnecessary and leaving just the actor. The audience is not confused or distracted by the other elements, and instead gets to focus and engage with the actor on a much deeper level. Grotowski explains further by illustrating that a song in an untranslated language is enough to stimulate a response, just as much as a strong physical gesture would, because one does not need to know the script of the play in order to see that the structure of the acting is the script (Birringer 159).

By gradually eliminating whatever proved superfluous, we found that theatre can exist without make-up, without autonomic costume and scenography, without a separate performance area (stage), without lighting and sound effects, etc. It cannot exist without the spectator relationship of perceptual, direct, communion. This is an ancient theoretical truth, of course, but when rigorously tested in practice it undermines most of our usual ideas about theatre. It challenges the notion of theatre as a synthesis of disparate creative discipline; literature, sculpture, painting, architecture, lighting, acting. (Grotowski 19)

As Brecht had suggested several decades earlier, the audience is not merely to be entertained. Grotowski acknowledged the audience as pivotal to theatrical performance: they are the pathway to understanding. His theatre was confronting, challenging and experimental. It was based not so much on image and simulacrum, but on the presence of the actor. He refused realist conventions in favour of methods that engage the audience rather than mere entertainment. As in Absurdist theatre, many modern dramatists remove barriers between the audience and the stage in order to make the audience participate in an experience. Ideally, the spectator ceases to be a complacent observer and adopts a critical attitude.

Brazilian dramatist Augusto Boal elaborates on the criticism of ‘Aristotelian’ theatre (as the hegemonic form of western theatre) and its tendency to political indoctrination, intimidation and coercion. In Theater of the Oppressed he describes dominant western theatre as instilling ideological acceptance of the status quo into a passive and oppressed audience. Boal saw theatre as an intrinsically active process: “Theatre is action. Maybe theatre in itself is not
revolutionary; but rehearses the revolution” (Birringer 147). Boal proposed many theatre exercises to break the pattern of the audience not thinking or acting for themselves due to their passive position as spectators. One such exercise Boal created was to perform in public places such as restaurants, and to create a scene that invited the spectators to take part in the discussion. Those that participate are allowed to think and speak for themselves. In such an ‘invisible theatre,’ “theatrical rituals are abolished; only the theatre exists, without its old, worn-out patterns. The theatrical energy is completely liberated, and the impact produced by this free theatre is much more powerful and long lasting.”

Postmodernism in theatre developed out of the ideas of Artaud and Brecht and as a response to the rampant commodification of late capitalist society. For Jean Baudrillard and Fredric Jameson, postmodernism itself is a social and cultural idea. Baudrillard’s view is particularly related to the idea of simulacra and copies of images that create a ‘hyperreality.’ Postmodernism creates a new cultural order as well as a “political economy of the sign” (Baudrillard 119). Jameson’s view focuses on the way in which postmodernism has arisen out of the cultural predicament of late capitalism where everything has been commodified. Cultural production has become a mish-mash of borrowing without a commitment to anything. Postmodernism can be understood in terms of re-enacting “the invention and reinvention of nature” (Fortier 119). The postmodern condition is constructed on the basis that life, along with everything else, is a mere exchangeable commodity in an inescapable market (Fortier 126). Heiner Müller’s work is a particularly compelling example of theatre in the postmodern world. His idea of an ideal postmodern performance was a proposed staging of “Macbeth on top of the World Trade Center for an audience of helicopters,” mixing technology, ideas of capital, subversion of conventions and recontextualization of the past (Fortier 127).

Often postmodernism resembles classical Marxism because of the limits it draws around culture and social order – the postmodern surrounds these conditions and all one can do is work within its limitations (Fortier 120). Hélène Cixous argues that theatre is a particularly attractive form within an inescapably postmodern society because it has the power and ability to go against the grain of our technological and simulated culture (Fortier 121). While perhaps not technically avoiding the postmodern paradox, pushing boundaries and subverting the status quo is the next best thing. Johannes Birringer calls for the theatre to have “a critical connection to postmodern

culture” (Birringer xiii). Theatre’s power to resist the limits of postmodernism is not found in its ‘liveness’ but in its exploration of representation and its limits, as well as its ability to contradict and challenge the indifference in contemporary culture (Fortier 122).

As postmodern theory means different things to different theorists, it is hard to locate a specific meaning that applies to all postmodern conditions. For Jean-François Lyotard, postmodernism is a way of thinking. He argues in The Postmodern Condition (Fortier 118) that with postmodernism, master narratives are destined to fail, so a unified understanding of the world is impossible. Instead of master narratives, Lyotard proposes micro-narratives, performability over truth, and plurality over unity (118). For Linda Hutcheon, postmodernism is an artistic style, noted for it self-reflexivity, irony and ambivalent imitation. A fitting theatrical example is Grace Nichol’s play I Is a Long Memoried Woman, first performed in 1990. Nichols addresses the issues of race and gender by creating her own version of verbal language. Actors are not assigned particular lines but are free to choose what part of the text they wish to use. Nichol’s also combines oral traditions of poetry with an eclectic mix of narration, dance, movement and music.

Most strands of postmodernist thinking are unperturbed by inconsistency or discontinuity. They allow disparities to exist without seeking to mask them and mix styles that are usually considered incompatible. Boundaries are blurred between dramatic forms and performance styles. Intertextual elements and subversion of traditional cultural values are frequent. As such, the distinction between high and low cultures is also subverted. Postmodern culture in capitalist society is said to consist of many fragmentary experiences and images. These images are often devoid of depth, coherence and originality. Like poststructuralist art, postmodern theatre uses these fragmented images, as well as mixing techniques, genres and medias. Hamletmachine (1977), by the internationally famous East German playwright Heiner Müller (1929-1995), is marked by its postmodern stylistic features: fragmented, complex irony, overlaying of cultural quotations and mixing of traditional and current cultural images. Often using no designated characters or dialogue, Marx, Lenin and Mao are represented by three naked women – a rebellion of the oppressed body against patriarchal, and mostly western, powers. He depicts how change will be brought about through revolutionary third world and feminist forces (Fortier 127-8).

Theatre has been useful for exploring the poststructuralist proposition that it is impossible to think about any subject without language because language makes consciousness and thought possible. Also, meaning can never

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9 Elaine Aston, An Introduction to Feminism and Theatre (London: Routledge, 1995), 133.
be present because during the process of communication, it is always being modified by what has gone before. Therefore, by engaging in reception theory, and placing the emphasis of meaning on the ‘receiver,’ meaning is taken out of the domain of the creator. An example of the spectator controlling the production of meaning in theatre is seen in the work of Robert Wilson (1942). Much of his work combined postmodern and poststructuralist elements, using an eclectic mix of media, cultures, historical periods and images. His play *CIVIL warS* (1983-4) used twelve languages and was not meant for an audience of a single culture. According to Wilson, there is nothing in his pieces to understand, only to experience. Spectators are left to construct their own interpretation from the indeterminate, time-warped images and sounds (Brockett 550). A point of deconstruction is reached as there is no closure of meaning.

This sort of deconstruction means additional possible meanings are always being uncovered, including ones the creator may not have been aware of. The author has no more right to the text or work than anyone else since no one can dictate how a work can be interpreted. As such, the audience become authors of the text they perceive. This idea gives licence for directors to move away from the usual instructions within a text. Especially with classic works, ‘interpretations’ had become so enshrined in expectations that directors and actors altered them radically so that audiences could see them afresh (546-7). Hans Robert Jauss identified a “horizon of expectations” that a reader (as well as a spectator) has when viewing a text or piece of theatre. This horizon consists of knowledge and assumptions about a ‘text’ the reader/spectator already has. The interpretation of the ‘text’ is like a dialogue between the ‘text’ and reader/spectator.10

Theatre has often led the way in providing a platform for the revision of texts. Heiner Müller used Shakespeare’s *Hamlet* as a basis to challenge such audience expectations in his radical *Hamletmachine* (Brockett 516). Radical British playwright Sarah Kane’s play *Phaedra’s Love* (1996) took the ancient Senecan tragedy of Phaedra and rewrote it in a very controversial and unconventional manner to maximise the shift in the audience’s “horizon of expectations.” 11 Revisions of well-known texts are useful to deliberately undermine an audience’s preconceived notions of what they will see, based on their knowledge of the text and past productions. Peter Brook, director of a later production of *Hamletmachine*, delighted in this break of expectations:

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I would say it is good news if it’s a shock. That’s part of the aim. The reason for doing *Hamlet* is for people to receive it as a new experience. The first thing was to break with the disastrous habit that exist with a play like *Hamlet* – the fact that people come to the play humming the tune, as they say on Broadway, before they enter the theatre…. The first thing I had to do was cut through the enormous super-structure of prejudices and do away with the various conceptions of *Hamlet*. If this production broke through expectations, that is already good news.\(^{12}\)

Ignoring the playwright’s intent though has had serious consequences in theatre. Samuel Beckett threatened legal action when The Wooster Group set his *Endgame* in an abandoned subway station. Arthur Miller also refused to allow fragments of his play *The Crucible* in Wooster’s *L.S.D* (1983). The focus of the conflict was the question of the right of the author to have their worked performed as they were written versus the right of directors and actors to interpret the script however they think most effective (Brockett 548).

Revision of texts has been an important element of feminist critique. Gynocriticism takes texts and revises them according to a women’s framework. The influence of gynocriticism in the books *Sexual Politics* by Kate Millet (1970) and *Toward a Feminist Politic* by Elaine Showalter (1979), made its way into the current theatrical practices. Gynocritical theatre includes works such as Lois Weaver and Peggy Shaw’s *Belle Reprieve* (1992)\(^ {13}\) and Elaine Feinstein’s *Lear’s Daughters* (1991).\(^ {14}\) Weaver and Shaw incorporated gay and gender issues in the reworking of Tennessee William’s *A Streetcar Named Desire*. Stella and Stanley were played by two lesbians, and Mitch and Blanche played by two gay men. Additionally, original works such as *Top Girls*, *Cloud Nine* and *Fen* by Caryl Churchill, gave current feminist, social and political issues featuring in modern critical theory physical place within the drama. Issues of representation were particularly well figured on the stage. Jaqueline Rudet’s play *Money to Live* (1986), powerfully addressed the issue of the ‘gaze’ – the condition of ‘looking-at-being-looked-at-ness’ (Aston 95), and how the female body is often constructed as an image for male consumption.

Challenging audience expectations supports the postmodern notion of an indeterminate view of the world. The postmodern age is often thought of as the post-atomic age. Absurdist thought emerged out of the possibility that because humans could annihilate themselves, the only sane response

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to a world of such madness was real madness. In Samuel Beckett’s *Waiting for Godot* (1953), the action is maddeningly circular; and as was famously quipped by critic Vivian Mercier – nothing happens, twice.\(^1\) When questioned over the meaning of the play, Beckett replied “I take no sides in that” (Croall 44). Another critic, Timothy Bateson, told Beckett what he thought the play was about. Beckett listened courteously and when Bateson finished he said: “Well, Timothy, if you think that’s what my play’s about, I expect that’s what it’s about” (Croall 87). As he did with actors, Beckett blocked all attempts by directors to get him to shed light on the play and its characters. When asked what that play meant, he would say “It means what it says” (91). Rather than having nothing to declare, the play simply allowed the audience to engage with the work to the extent that whatever sort of declaration they thought the play may be making, they had the power to assign that meaning to the play.

Postmodernism is the continuation of such counter-traditional approaches in art and literature. Postmodernist theatre continues to break with conventions and plays with the expectations of the reader/spectator. The alienation and absurdist theatrical techniques are extended to a point where an even more incoherent worldview is accepted. This sort of fragmentation of the mise-en-scène and a discontinuous narrative are two techniques found in postmodern theatre that find their origins in the ideas of Artaud. Fragmentation is a clear move away from realism because realism seeks to offer a ‘slice of life.’ Such a goal is impossible in postmodern thought because no singular reality exists. Of course, not all sectors of society can be depicted at one time on stage, and traditionally the sector represented is a middle class norm. Fragmentation is an important facet of postmodern theatre as it does not attempt to be representative. Such fragmentary work is seen in Lee Breuer’s *Prelude to Death in Venice* (1979). He incorporated snippets of puppet theatre, recorded voices, quotations from Thomas Mann, images from Dracula films and tied them together though associations with the Oedipal impulse, youth, ageing and death (Brockett 549). The use of intertextuality, fragmented images and mixing of art forms link together to give a postmodern version of unity.

Interpretation of such theatre is brought under scrutiny by postmodern theatrical approaches. Interpretation is thought to be a western trait: a focus on the search for meaning. Some theatre practitioners have developed ‘happenings’ that focus on experience rather than meaning. Interpretation is left open, to avoid rigid frames of meaning. The intermingling elements of postmodernism and poststructuralism resulted in ‘happenings’ – a branch of theatre that developed in the 1970s and 1980s. Allan Kaprow, a key figure in this movement, believed that the whole setting of the happening – the audience and the environment, are part of the total experience, and

the audience were often given things to do (Brockett 547). Improvisation and chance played a significant role. The shift was made from product to process (a shift seen in fine art too). Often the boundary between participant and spectator was indistinguishable, again challenging the traditional actor/audience relationship. The emphasis went from artist intention to participant awareness. Multimedia was also frequently used to mix different art forms together. The multi-focus meant that the audience was not under the illusion that they were experiencing the same thing in the same time or order.

In 1968 The Performance Group was founded by Richard Schechner. They used ‘happenings’ to explore a kind of theatre that advocated the sharing of performance and audience space. Spectators are both scene-makers and scene-watchers. The event could take place in any space that they would convert into an ‘environment.’ Again, the focus was flexible and variable. The text was considered “neither the starting point nor the goal of the production. There may be no text at all” (Brockett 548). The site of the performance was seen to interact with the participants and spectators to form a single entity. All production elements ‘spoke’ their own language rather than existing to merely support the written and spoken text.

Similarly, performance artists believed that their work should avoid impersonation and be almost improvisational (551). Carolee Schneeman’s *Interior Scroll* (1975) contained strong ideas of ‘speaking the body,’ a dominant element of female performance art (Aston 68). Following on from Luce Irigaray’s notion that the production of female form begins with the body (Aston 68), Schneeman stood on stage before a female-only audience and proceeded to read from a scroll that she was pulling bit by bit out of her vagina. Her performance physicalized the idea that a female performance artist still scripts herself from a deep dark place. The scroll is writing from/by the female body, which, as Hélène Cixous suggested, moves beyond the binary constraints of patriarchy (46). The women-only audience also challenged the public display of the female body for male consumption. Like Brecht, Artaud and Grotowski, Schneeman’s sought to provoke and shock the audience out of complacent attitudes in order to challenge their perceptions of the representation of the female self.

The exploration in theatre of the postmodern condition using ‘postmodern’ methods, has also contributed to the theoretical question of what it means to be postmodern. By engaging with a range of methods and practices, the theatre has been able to embody matters within critical theory in illuminating, confronting and useful ways. Additionally, those practices have become the platform for the development of postmodern theatre, both in the recent past and yet to come.
5. SOCIO-CULTURAL SPECIFICITY AND FEMINIST READINGS OF THE WORKS OF THREE FRANCOPHONE WRITERS

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This article was written for the paper Gender and Culture in the French Speaking World as part of the BA Honours degree in French

‘Toutes les vies sont très difficile… comment s’affirmer dans un monde qui ne fait pas toujours une place pour les femmes, pour les noirs?’
Maryse Condé

The works of Mariama Bâ, Déwé Gorodé and Maryse Condé are notable for their open engagement with social problems, in particular issues concerning the subordinate position of women in their home countries. Their critical and lucid, but often ambivalent portraits of the status of women in non-European countries have been greatly scrutinised by both feminists and literary critics, who, for many different reasons, have asked, “To what extent is this really a feminist work?” In his article ‘La question du féminisme chez Mariama Bâ et Aminata Sow Fall’, Médoune Guèye criticises attempts to situate such works in relation to a Western ideological concept based on the binary of opposites, which fails to take into account the importance of the specificity of the socio-cultural elements in the work analysed. For this critic, it is wrong to analyse an African work, for example, according to the values and preoccupations of a Western feminist ideology. In this paper, Gueye’s article will function firstly as a departure point for a study of the extent to which socio-cultural specificity complicates a feminist reading of Une Si Longue Lettre (So Long

1 “All lives are very difficult, how can one affirm oneself in a world which doesn’t always make a place for women, for blacks?” (My translation) Maryse Condé Speaks from the Heart [videorecording]. Dir. Susan Wilcox. Prod. Ann Armstrong Scarboro. (New York: Cinema Guild, 2003).

Here I must note that I am aware of the problem posed by the term ‘Western feminism,’ as there is not and has never been, one unique Western feminism, but rather a great number of different feminisms. However, in this paper I group these together under this admittedly problematic term, justifying my move by the thesis that all Western feminisms share a number of common elements, and many of these pose a problem for a ‘feminist’ reading of the works studied.

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*a Letter*, *Uté Mûrûnû, petite fleur de cocotier* (*Uté Mûrûnû, Little Coconut Flower*), *L’Epave* (*The Wreck*) and *Traversée de la Mangrove* (*Crossing the Mangrove*). Secondly, the argument will be further developed by insisting on the role played by the subjectivity of each author herself, and her personal implication in the society she critiques.

Mariama Bâ, Déwé Gorodé and Maryse Condé come from very different parts of the French-speaking world; Senegal, New Caledonia and Guadeloupe, respectively. Each of these countries was colonised by France and is now marked by serious political interrogations arising from the challenge of the period of post-independence of Senegal, of the debate on the post-colonisation of the French Antilles and on independence in New Caledonia, which is currently under the Noumea Accord. These works provide a critical, rather than idealistic portrait of the author’s country of origin, emphasising the importance of certain traditional cultural aspects of the society, while at the same time opening other aspects, such as unequal power relationships between the sexes, up to question. Nevertheless, the female condition - and the reasons for the subordination of women - make up only one part of their social critiques which examine a number of ideological questions arising from post-colonisation and post-independence, the materialism of a globalized world, and racism within multiculturalism. This multiple focus may distinguish works created in the Black world from those from the White feminist canon. According to Leah Hewitt, for example, “for most White women writers, the question of race is a nonissue or the problem of others. For many Black women writers, it just as frequently imposes itself as a major issue.” Therefore, when one attempts to situate these works in relation to the Western feminist canon, it is important to take account of the multiple socio-cultural factors involved and to consider their effect on the particular feminism constructed.

Despite their engagement with the subordinate situation of women, the attitudes of these authors towards the concept of feminism itself are explicitly ambiguous. In her interviews and writings, Condé suggests that the term ‘feminist’ poses a problem when it comes to describing her work, “Je ne sais pas ce que ça (être féministe) veut dire exactement, alors je ne pense pas l’être. Si tu poses la question aux Etats Unis, on te dira surement non.” For her, the

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4 The Noumea Accord of 1998 anticipates a referendum on the independence of New Caledonia before 2018 as well as a transfer of power, and recognition of the Kanak culture; “A moral and political act without precedent in all colonial history” (my translation), according to Alban Bensa in *Nouvelle-Calédonie vers l’émancipation* (Paris: Gallimard, 1990), 166.


“woman question” is one question among many that she addresses in works which have markedly different preoccupations to those written by Western feminists. For example, in *Traversée*, the portrait of Rivière au Sel depicts a society far removed from a concern with sharing the values of equality between the sexes. Condé seems preoccupied by questions of equality and power relations on a much more general level, rather than on focusing on the problem of the domination of women.

Bâ did not consider herself to be a feminist either, despite the fact that she is now considered by many to be a great African feminist. Aminata Maïga, for example, knew Bâ personally and states, “Le féminisme de l’auteur ne fait aucun doute”. This paradox opens questions concerning readings of texts; can a work be feminist even if the author herself states the contrary? It also points to changing attitudes towards feminism in Senegal, Bâ’s country of origin.

Gorodé is an active militant of the Palika (Kanak Liberation Party) and is better known for her political engagement than for her literary work. Her priority is “la politique, la lutte du peuple Kanak,” and she considers her literary work to be secondary. The themes of her works seem to reflect this hierarchy; she appears to be more preoccupied with the destructive heritage of colonisation, a desire for greater general understanding and recognition of Kanak culture, and the fight for independence, than with the feminine condition.

This paper will attempt to explain the ambivalent attitudes of these writers towards Western feminism, and the implications of this for ‘feminist’ readings of their works. A study of the characterization of both sexes in *Une Si Longue Lettre*, *Traversée*, and *Uté Mûrûnû*, can offer important clues as to the nature of the feminism of these works; is the writer more sympathetic towards the female characters, and to what extent does the socio-cultural specificity affect these characterizations?

In *Une Si Longue Lettre*, a novel which focuses on the ‘betrayal’ of two friends by husbands who choose to take second wives in accordance with the traditional Muslim custom of polygamy, it is clear that Bâ feels an affinity towards her two heroines, Ramatoulaye and Aïssatou. The form of the book, a letter written by Ramatoulaye to her close friend, creates a kind of feminine complicity between the author and the reader, who takes the place of the fictional addressee, Aïssatou. This creation of feminine solidarity, as well as Bâ’s attack on the patriarchal order in her portrait of women as its victims, is not incompatible with Western feminist works.

However, the focus on feminine solidarity and values can incite a reading which neglects those elements which are more difficult to reconcile with a

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simplistic conception of feminism. A number of critics have fallen into this trap; “(Rama et Aïssatou) symbolisent le courage, la dignité et l’abnégation de la femme noire… Les femmes dans les romans de Mariama Bâ se remarquent par leur grandeur d’âme… les hommes par contre, sont dépeints comme des individus dont l’égoïsme, la fourberie… sont sans bornes.”9 This incomplete reading of the characters which finishes with the afore-mentioned phrase, “Le féminisme de l’auteur ne fait aucun doute,”10 is at pains to prove that Une Si Longue Lettre could fit into the Western feminist canon, designating all (Black) women as inherently ‘good’, and all men as ‘bad’. In my view, this critic is wrong, first of all in her implicit definition of feminism (that women are inherently morally superior to men) and also in her understanding of Bâ’s characterisation of men and women. There are, in fact, a number of female characters who act in very negative ways, such as Tante Nabou and the Belle-mère, who both use polygamy for strictly selfish reasons. The analysis of their ‘sexism’, and more problematically, the origin of their prejudices in their respective social settings (inferior castes, and ancient royalty) must not be neglected. At first, these characters may seem incompatible with a feminist reading as their inclusion denies feminine solidarity in showing rivalry amongst women, as well as male responsibility for discrimination. However, it can be argued that these characters show the extent to which patriarchal values have been interiorised by this society, and in this way their presence is not incompatible with a feminist reading. The inclusion of characters like Tante Nabou and the Belle-mère, insists on the responsibility of both men and women in regards to the problem of polygamy. Thus, for Bâ, a positive change will take place only if both men and women recognise and accept responsibility for the familial and social problems brought about by polygamy.

This notion of female responsibility is also present in Traversée, where negative female characters are equally present. For example, Rosa is so emotionally affected by the death of her first daughter that she is incapable of loving Vilma, her second daughter, and so neglects her. Condé is very aware of female responsibility in the perpetuation of women’s subordinate position to men, and states openly in an interview: “Les femmes antillaises… perpétuent des schémas dont elles sont victimes.”11 It is equally important to note that, unlike the heroines in Une Si Longue Lettre, there are no completely positive female characters in Traversée. However, in general, a more intimate relationship is established between the reader and the female characters mainly due to the fact that the monologues of the women’s chapters are narrated in the first person, while the chapters dedicated to the men are in the third

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9 Maïga, 130.
10 Ibid, 134.
11 Pfaff, 35.
person. This creates a greater emotional distance between the reader and the male characters; even Condé admits that despite the fact that she did not intend this, it came naturally and that; “pour les autres personnages, comme Loulou ou Désinor, cela devrait être plus extérieur.” This point is important, particularly in relation to the fact that as a Haitian illegal immigrant Désinor represents the most disadvantaged sector.

Nevertheless, this sympathy towards the female characters is far from complete, as each of these have a number of negative qualities, such as a lack of love for their children, cruelty, and emotional weakness. In addition, there are a number of very moving moments which focus on male characters; Carmélien’s despair when Mira insults and rejects him at the Petit Bourg festival is particularly touching. Here Condé shows the indirect sexual power that women themselves hold over men.

The female character that I consider the closest to being the ‘heroine’ of Traversée, is the character Mira. Whilst only one chapter is dedicated to the other characters, she is allowed two in which to express herself. This continuation of Mira’s thread of the story makes her stand out from the other characters and encourages a stronger empathetic link between her and the reader. Mira’s portrait shows a woman marginalised by her illegitimate and mixed race birth, but also independent and headstrong, with a great interior strength. Despite the death of her mother in childbirth, Mira succeeds in finding a sort of surrogate mother in nature, deep in the Ravine. Nevertheless, she has a number of significant weaknesses which prevent her from being considered a ‘feminist’ model, in particular her dependence on a lover, Francis Sancher, on whom she projects all her hopes for the future; “Moi, il y a vingt-cinq ans que je t’attends sans rien voir venir. Je désespérais”. When she stops to consider her behaviour, it is clear that she is aware that this is a mistake, “Mira, Mira Lameaulnes, qu’est-ce que tu es devenue à présent? Une poupée de chiffon qui pleure pour un homme.” However this understanding does not have any effect on her attachment or behaviour. In this self critique, the author reveals her own observations on women’s desire to meet the man of their dreams, and their weakness in waiting for the ‘love’ of a man they believe will bring them fulfilment. It is also important to note Mira’s cruelty, such as in the case of her attitude towards Carmélien. Her portrait shows Condé’s attitude towards strictly positive images, which according to her, are all too

15 Condé, 179.
16 Ibid, 63.
often victim to oversimplification. Instead of providing positive models of women which could be compatible with feminist ones, Condé shows the complex and often negative truth of modern Guadeloupean society in her very mixed and human characters.

In Uté Mûrûnû, however, there are no negative female characters. Gorodé is clearly empathetic towards her five different generations of women, all named Uté Mûrûnû, rebelling against the patriarchal Kanak system identified with colonialism, and retelling history from a different point of view. In talking about history through the daily and personal lives of women, Gorodé insists on the importance of the voice of Kanak women and an alternative version of history. In this way, Uté Mûrûnû aligns apparently naturally with the feminist movement.

However, Uté Mûrûnû is different from Western feminist works in that the critique of men is largely implicit and there are no particularly negative male main characters. Rather, women are opposed to the patriarchal system in general. Uté Mûrûnû explicitly compares the earth, colonised by the popwaalé, with the female body, colonised and abused by men, implicitly evoking the idea of the double colonisation of women. During an outburst by one grandmother, a raft of traditional injustices against Kanak women are denounced: arranged marriages and the exchange of women to create alliances between tribes, sexual violence and particularly the rape of young girls, as well as the evangelisation which marked them with even more taboos to make them “des Eva mordues par le serpent inventé par les prêtres de la nouvelle religion.” This prise de parole (rhetorical stand) is undeniably feminist and appears to represent the irruption into the text of the voice of the author. This highly didactic speech is not representative of the story as a whole, where the feminism is, for the most part, addressed much more indirectly.

Even in L’Épave, a courageous novel (published in 2005) which denounces the sexual domination of women in Kanak culture and opens up the unspoken or unspeakable question of incest, the representation of the feminine condition has ambiguous aspects. The reappearing figure of ‘le vieux Tom,’ the fisherman/tramp/sorcerer who bewitches young girls and women and uses them as sexual objects, is obviously denounced, but female complicity with his sexual domination is equally present in the character of the Ogresse, for example. In addition, the author’s presence-absence of judgement complicates any reading (including a feminist one) of a Kanak work that explicitly

17 Hewitt, 168.
18 French colonizers.179.
discusses female sexuality and female pleasure, as well as the question of sorcery as psychological violence, which can partly explain the shock and surprise the novel caused to readers in New Caledonia.\textsuperscript{21}

The target readership also has an important effect on the representation of the female condition in these works. It has been noted that \textit{Une Si Longue Lettre}, rather than being addressed to only one readership, is addressed to two very different ones; readers in Senegal and European readers.\textsuperscript{22} The forgiving family and community orientated Ramatoulaye who stays with her polygamous husband functions as a model for Senegalese readers, whilst Aïssatou, who leaves her husband to start a new life in the United States is much more pertinent and acceptable to Western readers.

Due to this double target readership and double response to the problem of polygamy, Bâ, who was educated at a French \textquote{Ecole Normale} (Teachers' College) has been criticised of acculturation of the colonizer’s values in a number of articles which appeared in Africa.\textsuperscript{23} \textbf{Despite the fact that} traditional and Islamic values are for the most part respected (mainly though Ramatoulaye’s character), Bâ’s public critique of Senegalese society was considered by many to be unacceptable, and that as a woman, she had no right to make such criticisms. It is also important to add that if \textit{Une Si Longue Lettre} had been explicitly feminist, and had not emphasised the complementarity of men and women through the figure of Ramatoulaye, it could have had negative repercussions on the social cohesion of a country facing numerous social and political problems.

\textit{Traversée}, which explores the theses of oppression, racism, and isolation within a community, acts as a mirror for the Guadeloupean community to incite social change. At the end of the novel, the death of Francis Sancher pushes the other characters to re-evaluate their lives and even prompts a number of positive changes; ‘Nous autres, nous vivons… Je dirai à ma fille… Donne-moi ton pardon.’\textsuperscript{24} \textbf{In fact, the reestablishment of communication is} one of the principal solutions proposed by Condé,\textsuperscript{25} and it is most of all the women who recognise this fact,\textsuperscript{26} the men being much more preoccupied

\begin{footnotesize}
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\item Raylene Ramsay, \textquote{Under the Influence? The Work of Mariama Bâ, Tradition, Islam and the Universal.” In: Carlotta Von Maltzan (ed.), \textit{Africa and Europe: Encountering Myths} (Frankfurt: Peter Lang, 2003), 162 and 166.
\item Ibid, 159.
\item Rosa. Ibid, 171.
\item Rosemary Erlam, \textit{Tentative de la Communication dans \textquote{Traversée de la Mangrove} (PhD Thesis The University Auckland, 2002), 5 and 8.
\item Hewitt, 80.
\end{enumerate}
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with personal projects, such as Aristide who decides to leave Guadeloupe. Jean-Pierre Piriou has remarked that Condé’s portrait of her native island is “un portrait sans indulgence… (Elle) n’est pas tendre avec les hommes… Elle ne l’est pas non plus avec les femmes.” Condé’s critique is addressed to all Guadeloupans, men and women, but her solidarity with women reveals itself in that it is through them that positive social transformations are articulated.

For Gorodé, recognition for Kanak language and culture is imperative due to its decline following the colonization of New Caledonia. I believe this preoccupation has, up until the very recent publication of *L’Épave* in 2005, immensely complicated the feminist possibilities of her works. In traditional Kanak society the relations between men and women are based on the separation of masculine and feminine roles, and on the superiority of men. Gorodé’s position on this subject is very delicate as on one hand she calls for a greater appreciation of Kanak culture, and on the other she criticises a fundamental part of this culture. This is the dilemma of equating a feminist critique and a discourse of rights with (Western) modernism and patriarchal oppression with tradition. In *Uté Mūrinū* the secondary place of women in the public domain is not explicitly dealt with, however in *L’Épave* there is a clear denunciation of the way in which tradition is perverted and used to hide the many violences done to women.

The positions of Bâ, Condé, and Gorodé in regard to ‘Western feminism’ are complicated for a number of both socio-cultural and personal factors due to the multiplicity of problems addressed by the writers in these contexts of post-colonisation and due to questions of reception. Rather than limiting themselves to discussing the feminine condition, they address a number of questions, some of which they consider to be more important or pressing. Their search for original solutions pertinent to their local situation affects the focus of their critiques. The resolution of urgent social problems in their respective countries depends on the solidarity of the community in general, rather than simply solidarity amongst women. This is why these writers call for greater recognition of the responsibility of all members of society, and emphasise the importance of social cohesion, avoiding inciting hostility between the sexes.

Feminism is above all a change of perspective; the recognition of centrality of women’s lives and the importance of feminine subjectivity, including the

27 Condé, 79.
29 Hewitt, 80.
writer’s own subjectivity. Despite the fact that Bâ, Condé, and Gorodé do not publicly consider themselves to be feminists, I would suggest that this attitude is above all due to the fact that they have no desire to be ‘recuperated’ or contained by Western feminism. Their denunciation of the contemporary subordination of women, the use of women as objects, and call for social change are unquestionably feminist.

To conclude, a study of works by Bâ, Gorodé, and Condé that takes into account the socio-cultural and personal elements which have so great an effect on each portrait of the feminine condition, insists on the plurality of feminisms, and reinforces a malleable rather than rigid concept of feminism.
INSTITUTIONAL FAILURE AND THE CREATION OF ALTERNATIVE ECONOMIES: VIOLENCE AS A STRATEGY OF AUTHENTICITY IN RECENT FILMS ABOUT MEXICO

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In their own specific contexts and through different devices, several recent films about Mexico offer a view of both urban and rural Mexico at the turn of the millennium as a violent location. In the films Men with Guns, Amores perros, El crimen del padre Amaro and Once upon a Time in Mexico, violence functions as a device which both buries and uncovers collective memory with regard to twentieth-century Mexico, for both Mexican and US viewers.

Amores perros (2000) by Mexican director Alejandro González Iñárritu graphically depicts urban violence in Mexico City, focusing on the ways in which violence fragments the family. The film begins with a car crash and then splits into three chapters to tell the stories of the characters whose lives are changed dramatically by the crash. The first section, Octavio y Susana tells the story of working class characters, Octavio and his dangerous attraction to his sister-in-law, his rivalry with his brother and his participation in the violent underworld of dog fighting. The second story, Valeria and Daniel shows the lives of the elite members of society but portrays how their superficially perfect world is so easily destroyed by cruel fate. The crash leaves beautiful model Valeria incapacitated with severe damage to her leg. Like her leg, Valeria’s new life with lover Daniel is shattered before it has even had a chance to begin. The final chapter, El Chivo y Maru tells the story of a disillusioned ex-militant and the family life he sacrificed in the hope of securing his daughter a better future.

In contrast to the urban violence that alienates family members in the first film, El crimen del padre Amaro (2002), directed by Mexican Carlos Carrera is set in a rural town in Mexico and deals with the issue of corruption in the Catholic church. The film tells the story of ambitious new young priest Padre Amaro and his rapid moral descent after arriving at the parish of aging Padre Benito. His willing seduction by a beautiful young religious fanatic locates violence in places where it is least expected.

Men with Guns (1997) by independent US filmmaker John Sayles attempts to offer the non-Latino viewer a comprehensive idea of the causes of violence (guns) through the main character, an idealistic doctor who is not aware of
the violent realities of his own country. As a naïve tourist in his own country, both the doctor and the viewer become aware of the violent realities that exist outside of the comforts of urban existence. The film tells the story of the highly educated and wealthy physician Dr Fuentes who leaves the cocoon of his comfortable city life in search of medical students he had trained as “barefoot doctors” to go out into the countryside to help the indigenous population. Coming upon an ex-student in the marketplace, Dr Fuentes is told that all of the other students have been killed. Unaware of the political and military unrest outside of the urban metropolis, Dr Fuentes embarks as a naïve tourist through his own country. He encounters the grim truth of the outcome of his students, all of whom have been killed either by military or guerrilla forces. The details remain hazy but what is made clear is that the violence is a result of the evil caused by men with guns.

The most stereotypical images of violence in Mexico are those of the third and final of Robert Rodriguez’s Mariachi trilogy Once upon a Time in Mexico (2003). The series began with the low budget El Mariachi (1993) and was followed by the blockbuster star-studded Desperado (1995). Once upon a Time in Mexico is a hyperviolent movie featuring a large cast of major Hollywood stars such as Johnny Depp and Antonio Banderas, and is about corruption, redemption and the bad guys getting what they deserve. The main character, El Mariachi has been forced by a crooked CIA agent with psychosocial issues to help in a plot which involves the betrayal of the president, a drug cartel head and revenge against the corrupt general who murdered El Mariachi’s wife and daughter. The film employs typical Hollywood stereotypes of Mexicans as violent individuals and Mexican institutions as corrupted and unstable. Through the deliberate use of cinematic violence, various social issues are questioned in these films, and previously censored subjects such as religion, abortion, domestic violence, narcotrafficking and political corruption are presented for contemplation.

The US film industry has historically had a huge international influence, and it is for this reason that it is necessary to briefly consider the origins of violent film in the United States. In Screening Violence, Steven Prince discusses the origins and evolution of ultraviolent movies, classified as those which rely on the excessive graphic depiction of violence onscreen, dating the escalation of Hollywood ultraviolence back to the social and media violence of the 1960s. In pinpointing the historical social origins of the ultraviolent movie, Prince explains that:

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The savage bloodshed of the Vietnam War established a context whereby filmmakers felt justified in reaching for new levels of screen violence. Moreover, the war and the political assassinations of the 1960s fed a general cultural fascination with violence to which the movies responded. (8)

As a result of the real violence that the viewing audience was exposed to on a daily basis with instant television coverage of the Vietnam War, the 1960s was marked by a cultural fascination with violence that was mirrored by the film industry. Controversial film makers of the period, Arthur Penn and Sam Peckinpah, were radical social critics of the corruption of the US in the Vietnam era who proved that graphic violence could be used in film for serious purposes in order to gain social awareness (Prince 12). Subsequent violent films did not purport to carry such social messages and can be understood as exploitation of the type of onscreen violence which seeks merely to entertain.

According to Devin McKinney, cinematic violence can be classified as either “strong” or “weak”, depending on the ability at a narrative level to accord “the consequences of violence a determining role” (101). In a film which delivers “strong” violence, asserts McKinney, “the bloodshed has subtext, carries the weight of fear and mystery, and is piercing enough to shoot past the crap violence we all drink like beer” (100). Strong onscreen violence is effective in provoking a questioning of controversial social issues when it is utilised in a way which shows cause, effect and suffering. By contrast, “weak” violence tends to lack plurality and refuses insight into the human psyche, inviting the viewer merely to consume the cinematic violence without further contemplation. Weak violence, argues David Tetzlaff, “only contributes to an apolitical passivity that, among other things, keeps us from facing up to the encroaching real violence around us” (272). Conventional movie violence (identified by McKinney as weak) shows death as merely a momentary lull before smoothly and easily progressing to the next scene.

In agreement with McKinney’s argument, it can be said that onscreen violence in serious films is valid when it is structured tragically with complex struggling heroes and painful consequences, and serves as a device by which the viewer is forced to reconsider her moral positioning. In these films, cinematic violence has the potential to function as a device that invites viewers to critically question both the present and the recent history that is understood to have contributed to the negative elements presented in the

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narratives. The use of strong violence in the films *Amores perros*, *El crimen del padre Amaro* (*El crimen*), and *Men with Guns* (*MWG*) functions as a disruptive element which serves to shock viewers out of the stupor induced by the overload of weak violence abundant in contemporary media. Conversely, the weak violence employed in the Hollywood blockbuster *Once upon a Time in Mexico* (*Once*) is violence portrayed with the specific intent of it being consumed without further contemplation. This last film has been included in this analysis primarily because it provides an excellent example of weak violence to contrast with the strong violence of the other films.

I will read those aspects of strong violence in each of these films which uncover a collective memory to suggest that when national institutions fail to provide for the members of society for whom they are set up to serve and protect, the resulting violence against individuals and family causes a shift away from traditional hegemonic systems and results in the subsequent creation of alternate means of survival.

The cinematic critique of national institutions can be interpreted as a dismantling of the cinematographic consensus achieved during the Golden Age of Mexican Cinema, which had corresponded to the institutionalisation of the Mexican Revolution and the consolidation of many forms of societal structuring. At that time, the institutions of the Catholic Church and the state were represented as offering an increasingly progressive support for happy middle class families.

A common theme of the films under study is the representation of the breakdown of social and political institutions originally created after the Mexican Revolution with the goal of social reform, but which have since disintegrated. All of these films acknowledge the need to look elsewhere than national institutions for survival in an era of globalisation and continuing unequal distribution of wealth and resources, and present the existence of alternative and parallel economies which function to allow the economic survival of its participants.

In these films, the decay of institutions such as the Catholic Church, government, the education system, the health and the judicial systems are shown to have led to the necessity for people to create their own economies of survival. These alternative economies have their own set of ethics and rules which the participants abide by in order for this underground economy to continue functioning. There is also an implicit recognition that these alternative systems in some cases may be more just and humane than the remnants of institutions set up by the state.

In order to locate the ways in which these recent films relate violence to the institutional changes that have taken place over the last two decades, it is essential to consider the institutions which have contributed to the formation of modes of social control in Mexico over several centuries: these can be
identified as the Catholic Church, the State and the Military. Each of the films analysed focuses on one dominant form of institutional failure and links the other major institutions to it in different ways: the Church is central to an understanding of *El crimen*, military repression is the dominant topic in *MWG*, whereas governmental failure is the major institution represented in *Amores perros* and *Once*.

In *Amores perros*, the strong violence experienced by the protagonists, and to some degree vicariously by the viewer, compels the viewer to question the portrayed lack of governmental services and the absence of any kind of social safety net for the characters of the film. *MWG* employs strong violence through a portrayal of the aftermath of violent military actions, leaving no doubt as to the failure of the government to protect its rural indigenous citizens. The earliest of these films, *MWG* (1997) by director John Sayles, places the blame solely on military and political corruption. *MWG* shows what happened to rural society once external military forces withdrew. The violent repression has continued in the name of maintaining so-called peace. Sayles does not offer an alternative way out through resistance, nor does he develop the idea that resistance may have been at all a feasible option for those facing repression. Sayles has chosen a different strategy for representing violence to that of Oliver Stone’s *Salvador* (1986). Instead of presenting graphic violence to show the terrible destruction inflicted by military and guerrilla forces, Sayles depicts the after-effects of the violence by showing the devastated community groups of the rural areas visited by Dr. Fuentes. Although the physical violence in *MWG* consists of a violence not experienced first-hand either by Dr. Fuentes or the audience, this violence is disturbing as the story is pieced together by the characters’ revelations about

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4 *Men with Guns* was filmed in Mexico and there are many visual, musical, linguistic, and geographic references to the part of Mexico that shares borders with Guatemala. However, director John Sayles intentionally left the location ambiguous as an attempt to represent all third-world countries where there is repression by men with guns. For the purpose of this study it will be assumed that *MWG* is set in Mexico.

5 Although it would be easy to dismiss *Once upon a Time in Mexico* as purely gratuitous violence, study of this film does bring to light some valid issues with regard to the portrayal of Mexico for the consumption of an international – mostly US – audience.
their repression by military forces. Sayles concentrates on the military as the main corrupted force responsible for the violence, but in representing the guerrillas as being just as bad as the military, he ultimately places the blame on the tools of violence rather than the implementers of, or causative factors behind the violence. Although the military is portrayed as corrupt, the film argues that individuals also become quickly corrupted with the temptation of the power afforded by a gun.

*El crimen* portrays the complex rifts within the Church with regard to liberation theology, ultimately presenting a very different view to that of *MWG*: that liberation theology has not in fact failed, but has been forced into clandestine operation by the Church, the very institution that gave birth to the movement.6 *El crimen* delves further into the question of a split Church and portrays a corrupt system based on narcopolitics that interweaves Church, State, and the criminal world of the drug trade. Unlike *MWG, El crimen* does not portray liberation theology as a failure, but rather shows the difficulties, as Gustavo Gutiérrez had warned about in 1971, faced by those priests who choose to support a social movement which functions in direct opposition to dominant power structures.

The use of the actor Damián Alcázar to play the character of the priest in both *MWG* and, five years later, the Mexican-produced film *El crimen* can be interpreted as a rejection by director Carlos Carrera of the idea proposed by Sayles, that is, that liberation theology failed because of individual weakness. In the later film of *El crimen*, Damián Alcázar reappears as Padre Natalio, the priest of the people who defies the Catholic Church and chooses to continue practising liberation theology, resulting in his ex-communication. From the failure of liberation theology as an individual struggle in *MWG*, to the strength of the individual in *El crimen*, lies redemption of the idea of liberation theology. Carrera rescues the failed character of the liberation theologian from *MWG* and allows him to choose a different path for his future in *El crimen*.

In *Amores perros*, the lack of regulation by any kind of legal justice system constructs out-of-control urban spaces occupied by the youth of Mexico City. The absence of any kind of authority figure, be it fathers, police, governmental agencies, or teachers, results in the lack of positive role models to guide this aimless youth into a productive, hopeful adulthood.

The misogynistic violence depicted in hyperviolent films often shows women confined within a domestic space occupied by broken families. In three of these films, women are shown as bearing the physical and emotional

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violent consequences of becoming a mother in a dysfunctional family, the symbol of the private realm of violence carried out by individual male figures as a result of a greater institutional failure in the public realm. In *Amores perros* and *El crimen*, the major contributing factor to this violence can be traced back to institutional failure.

This breakdown creates dysfunctional, fractured families in both urban and rural settings. When violence is contextualised in this way, it becomes strong and encourages the viewer to understand how individuals relate to larger social systems. Because the family is often taken to be an allegory for the nation, happy, harmonious families that are coded as Mexican may dispose the viewer to interpret that the nation is at peace, moving together toward the future, while dysfunctional families may suggest the opposite.

In *Amores perros*, the portrayal of violence experienced by individuals and families at all levels of society on a day-to-day basis offers a criticism of the Mexican social institutions which do not provide the support needed by its citizens. Locating the violence in the domestic realm serves to demonstrate the far reaching effects of institutional failure. The domestic violence experienced by the young mother Susana is symbolic of a young generation of Mexicans who have been failed by social institutions and left to fend for themselves. In the film the unemployment, inadequate health services and negation of legitimised space for women in a male dominated economy, all have resulted in the violence experienced by the women in the film.

Institutional failure takes another form in *El crimen*, which has been harshly criticised for its condemning portrayal of corruption in the Mexican Catholic Church. With such focus on the Church, there is little mention in the film of any form of governmental authority. The absence of state intervention in *El crimen* serves to highlight the desired representation of the overbearing power of the Catholic Church in rural Mexico. Rather than focusing on the portrayal of violent urban spaces, Mexican director Carrera shows a seemingly tranquil rural Mexico which is being effectively and violently manipulated by the joint efforts of Church, local politics, and drug money. Demonstrative of the failure of the health system to ensure adequate medical access for rural populations, it is drug cartel head Chato Aguilar who has the material resources (in the form of air transport to a city hospital) that save that life of Padre Benito after his stroke.

The films *El crimen* and *Amores perros* suggest that the drug economy is not perceived within Mexico itself as a genuine social problem. *El crimen* addresses the issue of narcotraffickers in a rural setting and the effects on *campesino* communities with regard to the repression exercised by the drug cartels. *El crimen’s* portrayal of long-standing financial relationships between individual Church members and drug cartels reflects contemporary criticism.
of the Mexican Catholic Church and its links with the narcotics industry. It should also be noted that the film does not show any social problem with drugs, nor does it imply that drugs are supplied at a domestic level, rather implying that they are taken to the United States. Neither is there any portrayal of US intervention in the drug trade, nor of the external demand that makes this alternative economy so financially rewarding for suppliers.

The majority of the US-Mexico problems with regard to the drug trade have generally been attributed to a historically asymmetrical perception of the degree of the problem by the two nations. Mexico has continuously stressed that the United States should place more emphasis on controlling the demand side of the issue, arguing that the US has a huge domestic drug problem, while US policy makers have traditionally identified the supply side as the source of the problem. In other words, the problem of drug smuggling into the US has become a problem for the US government because it cannot control the extensive abuse of drugs within its own borders. Gabriela Lemus notes that the Mexican government has traditionally not perceived Mexico as having a major drug problem, but rather that “Mexican assistance to US law enforcement efforts is more of a response to US domestic pressures than an acknowledgment that drugs pose a security problem for Mexico” (425).

The representation of the drug trade and its participants differs greatly in the Mexican-produced films in contrast to the US-produced film of Once, supporting this idea of a difference in the perception of the drug trade between the two countries.

Notably absent in Amores perros is the problem of drug addiction, for although the characters of Octavio and Ramiro are seen to be smoking a joint in a couple of scenes, there is no portrayal in the film of narcotics abuse or consumption of heavy drugs. Given the obsession that US-produced films seem to hold with drugs and Mexico, it is telling that a domestically produced film such as Amores perros omits drugs almost entirely from the issues it considers as important to Mexico’s contemporary urban population. It would appear that although Mexico is the largest supplier of drugs for United States consumption, the demand-driven external market does not play a significant role in the day-to-day lives of the films’ protagonists. The issues that concern the majority of the characters in Amores perros have more to do with obtaining food and health services (Susana’s baby is always sick) than participation in the drug trade.

In contrast to *Amores perros*, one of the main themes of the US-produced *Once* is the business of narcotrafficking. The cinematic portrayal in *Once* of Mexico as the amoral pusher of drugs into the United States perpetuates the negative US media attention of the late 1980s and early 1990s which presented Mexico as a corrupt nation full of drug smugglers and dangerous characters, where the law means little and is just as likely to be implicated in committing human rights atrocities as to serve justice. The representation of Mexico by Rodriguez in *Once* as lawless, and Mexicans as violent and corrupt, takes advantage of media-constructed stereotypes in its use of real-life incidents converted to spectacular film entertainment to uncover the collective memory of a predominantly US audience which remembers the recent past of US-Mexico relations.

In the other US-produced film *MWG*, Sayles overlooks the very real and powerful influence of the drug trade and as such he misses one of the significant factors of cause for unrest and inequality in those countries which he claims to be representing in this film. Although the film depicts failed healthcare on an internal level, *MWG* fails to address the issue of narcotrafficking at a global level. In *MWG*, Sayles offers the alternatives of: an isolated community in the mountain jungle, urban black market medical supply, guerrilla forces, and a black market for ammunition and arms. What Sayles does not offer in this film is a representation of other subaltern groups such as unions, cooperatives, women’s or student groups.

Although *El crimen* explicitly shows the corrupt ties between government and narcotrafflicants, the film also suggests that for some sectors of Mexican society this is not considered dishonest, but merely a part of local economics. As an institution, the Catholic Church is most heavily criticised for the hypocrisy that exists at all levels of its structure. Rural towns are shown financially benefiting directly by the drug trade in the form of donations to the Church for public facilities. Although the drug cartel is represented as the “bad guy” for the *campesinos*, at the same time it is shown to provide an important service in the funding of municipal activities, such as construction of the hospital, which would not otherwise be possible.

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8 Reaction to the 1985 torture-murder of DEA agent Enrique Camarena in Mexico resulted in the manipulation of public perception by US media sources in the late 1980s-early 1990s, including the issuing of a travel advisory for tourists in Mexico. Media coverage of this incident played a huge part in the overall US perception of Mexico as being a dangerous place full of drug smugglers and corruption. See Gabriel Lemus, “U.S.-Mexican Border Drug Control: Operation Alliance as a Case Study.” In: Bruce Bagley and William Walker III. (eds.) *Drug Trafficking in the Americas* (Miami: University of Miami, 1994), 427.
In the DVD commentary of *El crimen*, director Carrera and lead actor Gael García Bernal joke that the real life *narcofiestas* (drug cartel parties) are usually bigger than the one in the film. Carrera says that the tastes of narcos are changing, describing the narcos of the film as narcos from the early nineties and that these days they are more mixed with businessmen and are less ostentatious. These comments suggest that the alternative economy of narcotrafficking has become mainstreamed and largely accepted in some sectors as almost a legitimate export business in the age of globalisation.

It can be said that within the context of a focus on alternative economies, *El crimen* offers narcotrafficking as a real and widely tolerated, if not totally socially accepted, alternative to the legitimate and legal economies of contemporary Mexico. Unlike *MWG*, *El crimen* does not show military repression as a reality for rural populations, and the existence of guerrilla groups as an option for alternative survival is shown as a response to violence exerted on mountain communities by narcotraffickers.

In *Amores perros*, the rural narcotrafficants of *El crimen* are replaced by urban gangs such as that of El Jarocho. More contemporary in dress and language than the characters of *El Crimen*, these urban gangsters are the confident players in an underground economy which utilises illegal dogfights as an important means of redistribution of wealth. As an alternative to the drug lords of *El crimen* and *Once*, *Amores perros* offers the amiable character of Mauricio who is *el jefe* (the boss), organiser, and financial backer of the dogfights. Mauricio is an adept businessman who has created his own niche market in the underground world. He tells Octavio, “Ésta es mi empresa, no pago impuestos, no hay huelgas, ni sindicatos, puro billete limpio” (This is my business, I don’t pay taxes, there are no strikes or unions, pure hard cash). In this film, society’s failure to provide a viable alternative to the economy of crime and easy money through illegal activities has enabled the parallel economy of dog fighting to operate as legitimate option for a large male section of Octavio’s socioeconomic group. Rather than portraying the activity of dog fighting as corrupt, the film shows a well organised economic system governed by an established set of informal rules, and demonstrates the violent consequences of non-conformity.

The corruption of state institutions is powerfully represented in *Amores perros* by the crooked police commander, Leonardo, who acts as a middleman for El Chivo, presenting him with prospective clients and skimming his own percentage off the top. Leonardo’s character is indicative of a wider corruption in the legal system, which was created to protect its citizens but has failed. Like the dogfighters, El Chivo also operates in an alternative economy and exists on the periphery of respectable society inhabited by the likes of his daughter Maru, Valeria and Daniel, and the well mannered white collar
Institutional Failure and the Creation of Alternative Economies

clients who pay him to kill. Once again, the informal economy appears just as ethical as the legal economy, or perhaps more so.

Discussion up to this point highlights the main theme of this article: that because the institutions designed to respond to public need had been weakened and dismantled throughout the 1980s and 1990s, alternative economies have arisen which, although illegal and inherently unstable, appear to be more responsible, moral and humane than the legal institutions designed to repress these illegal groups. If the state is only engaged in repression and provides no other services, then the state becomes the major enemy for marginalised peoples, whereas the alternative economies arise to offer services that enable marginalised people to survive.

From this discussion, it can be concluded that the two Mexican-produced films offer a portrayal of alternative economies that run parallel to a legitimate economy and which have arisen as an answer to the failure of state institutions to provide basic necessities for some sectors of the population. This institutional failure results in violence against families and a breakdown in what are considered traditional family values. When marginalised members of society are denied support by legitimate systems, these individuals are shown in the films to come together to create and maintain alternative forms of economic survival.

The films *El crimen* and *Amores perros* show different alternative economies, which function both in urban and rural spaces and allow their participants survival despite the oppression exerted by these failed legitimate institutions. By contrast, the US-produced films show either a very limited potential for the existence of alternative functional economies or ignore the possibility altogether. In all of the films, women are presented as victims rather than agents, and their own networks of survival are not represented.

The viewer of these recent films comes away with the impression that when faced with a failure of institutions and the resulting violence on both an economic and personal level, it is inevitable that individuals and groups marginalised by the dominant system will resort to other means in order to survive. When legitimate jobs are either unavailable or unrealistic in terms of pay, people will resort to other forms of economic survival. If medical supplies or other basic necessities are unavailable through legitimate channels, it is highly likely that black-market supplies will provide an alternative. Resistance to violent military repression may develop into organised social movements, and in extreme cases the formation of guerrilla groups.

In all of the films being studied here, violence is a central theme which functions to offer a portrayal of turn-of-the-millennium Mexico as both a location and a culture of violence. The films *MWG, Amores perros* and *El crimen* all employ strong violence which “acts on the mind by refusing it glib
comfort and immediate resolutions” (McKinney 100) as a strategy to engage the viewer and provoke a critical response. Through portraying the suffering and consequences that accompany violence, these filmmakers achieve a feeling of authenticity (a globalised neo-realism). The weak violence of *Once*, on the other hand, does not overtly seek to question the status quo, but rather allows for a passive consumption of violence. The use of parodic elements in this film suggests an acknowledgement of the image typically presented by US media of the violent Mexican.

Collectively these four films draw on onscreen violence as a way of engaging the viewer in consideration of the causes for and consequences of this violence. Three of the films depict cinematic violence in a way that compels a moral repositioning and questioning of the social conditions that lead to the violence shown on screen. The broad social issues that are common to these films have been identified as concerns for all sectors of contemporary Mexico, and these include religion, dysfunctional families, institutional failure, and political corruption.

The strong cinematic violence in these films functions as a strategy which invites the viewer to confront and question the underlying causes for this violence, causes which are not always immediately apparent in the films. Through valid complex violence, the films permit and encourage an uncovering of collective memory by offering clues or explanations of the past. Although the individual characters of the films are not always aware of the greater social structure in which they exist, when seen as a group, the films permit the viewer a more comprehensive understanding of how the characters and situations presented in all four films fit together to provide an understanding of Mexico’s violent past and an explanation for the violent present offered by these films.
7. EAST GERMAN IDENTITY AND THE PROBLEMS OF UNIFICATION: NEW DISCUSSIONS

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After the fall of the Wall, a number of books appeared dealing with the effects of unification and lives under the ancien regime. These works expressed a shock brought on by the sudden encounter with an entirely new political and economic structure, and anger directed at the system from which they came, focused primarily on its repressiveness and heavy-handedness. More recently, literature on this topic has been of two kinds: reminiscent literature, which seeks to evoke the everyday nature of most lives and eschews politics; and a reaction against what is seen to be an overwhelming nostalgia for the German Democratic Republic, the so-called “Ostalgie,” in the previous category of writings. Prominent examples of these two newer trends are Jana Hensel’s Zonenkinder and Wolfgang Herles’ Wir sind kein Volk, respectively.

The backdrop of the newer writings has been less about the fact of reunification than about its ramifications, economic ones especially. From late 1989 to early 1990, a feeling of euphoria pervaded most of the former East. The ordinary people who had taken to the streets during the autumn demonstrations felt that even in their ordinariness they had achieved something, and a new wind of change would better their lives. The union with West Germany, financial and political, was seen to be the cure for all the East’s ills, a fix-it that would occur overnight. Of course, promises and words had to be turned into practicalities, and it was a matter of time before the high expectations were brought down to earth – some with a distinct thud. People lost their jobs; political considerations, like a file as a collaborator with the secret police, played a role in some of these decisions. But many were determined by the market: factories which had been subsidised by the East German state were closed because they were unprofitable, for example. The western market, which many in the East had thought of longingly for years

2 Wolfgang Herles, Wir sind kein Volk (München: Piper, 2004).
–and which some critics have remarked acerbically was the prime reason for voting for unification and the Kohl government– may have been a miracle of goods but it did not have a “human face.”

Unfortunately, ordinary people in many ways reaped the least of the new economic benefits. “The factory workers who bravely defied and brought down the old regime are the group who’ve fared worst,” Eric Schlosser states in his bestseller, *Fast Food Nation*. They are “the group with the wrong skills and the least hope. Others have done quite well.” The others were those with well-placed contacts in the German Democratic Republic. In his book he uses the couple who were chosen to own the first McDonald’s franchise in East Germany, when the Wall came down as an example of the way the rules of the revolution were turned on their heads: before they made their fortune as franchisees, “they headed the local branch of Konsum, the state-controlled foodservice monopoly.” Much of the power structure seems to have remained the way it was.

While the former East expected a change in politics, changes in the economy went in an unexpected direction. The socio-political stage in Germany in recent years has been primarily concerned with market reform: not just of the former East but of the basic system, with nation-wide implications. Western Germany’s vaunted social network is crumbling under its own weight. The fallout from the so-called Hartz Reforms, envisioned as a way to address the structural problems, has included a re-opening of older debates, such as the question of German identity, with respect to the differences between East and West, as well as the fundamental concept of national identity as a whole. As demonstrations in the former East in the summer of 2004 highlight, these discussions have been thrown into particular relief in the “new” states.

All of these debates have had political aftershocks with ramifications for the government. The ruling party since 1998, the Social Democrats (SPD), which has built itself a platform focused on marketplace reform, has seen its support base dwindle over the course of state and local elections in the past several years. Its main opponent, the Christian Democrats (CDU/CSU),

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3 The term “socialism with a human face” was first used by Alexander Dubcek of Czechoslovakia in 1968, when short-lived reforms were introduced to the Communist system there. It has many echoes in the East German ideal of a “third way for socialism” that was vaunted by many intellectuals in the brief interregnum between the end of the GDR and unification with West Germany.


5 Ibid.


who generally reaped the benefits in those elections and therefore were seen to be on the ascendant, have not made the national gains they would have hoped either, as indicated in the split results in this year’s federal elections. Above all else, these revealed a nation of disaffected voters. Pundits and public alike agree that something is not working, but differ quite drastically in their assessment of how to go about fixing it.

*The Reform Agenda Enters the Unification Debate*

Even as the former East was going through post-unification pains, a need for basic structural reform loomed for the country as a whole. The tight German labour market, epitomised by the institutionalised relationship between labour unions and the government, which worked together to set wages, holiday hours and other facets of employer-employee relations, was widely seen as too inflexible. “Es geht, da sind sich die meisten Fachleute einig, um mehr Flexibilität, weniger Bürokratie und bessere Qualifikationen.” In 2002, the Hartz Commission, whose task had been to examine how to make the labour market in Germany more efficient and suggest reforms to the Federal Office of Employment, presented its report to the government. Chancellor Gerhard Schröder of the Social Democrats personally promised to make each of its suggestions a reality—the vaunted “eins-zu-eins” implementation—and enshrined this aim in his platform Agenda 2010.

Since then, the Hartz Reforms have become some of the most fought-over and controversial pieces of policy in Germany in the last decade. An informational outline of the reforms by Wikipedia, an online encyclopedia, even has a disclaimer at the top of the page indicating that its presentation of the facts has not been considered objective. The possibility of “eins-zu-eins” vanished quickly amid arguing among the parties in the Bundestag and was replaced by the fuzzy concept of the “spirit” of the reforms. Despite this, the reforms were introduced in four groups: Hartz I and II were valid from January 2003, Hartz III the following January and the final Hartz IV in 2005. By the summer of 2004, protests against the last package, which include regulations on unemployment benefits, were especially pronounced in the former East.

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8 See www.elections.de for further analysis.
10 Bundesanstalt für Arbeit.
12 See www.tagesschau.de, www.spiegel.de, or another German news site and run a search for “Hartz– reform,” and it is clear that there were arguments about the reforms from Day One.
14 Berg, “Fegefeuer.”
“Helmut Kohls Versprechen, dass es niemandem schlechter gehen werde, ist mit Hartz IV zurückgenommen. Nun droht Arbeitslosen spätestens nach vier Jahren ein Leben auf Sozialhilfeniveau,” reads an article in the Spiegel magazine of 20 September 2004.15 Ironically, the same article later alleges that under the present (pre-reform) system, the unemployed in the former East have it better than they did as employees in the GDR.16 Their protests are thereby portrayed as whining – the article suggests that people do not know how good they have it – and the picture of the “Jammerossi” stereotype emerges. In the same issue, the former GDR head of state de Maizière says of his erstwhile constituents, “Unter Gerechtigkeit verstehen bis heute viele Gleichheit.” 17 After all, this is what their government emphasised for forty years. Having just been welcomed into the pan-German social welfare net recently, Germans in the East are especially resentful that it is being withdrawn.

In his book Wir sind kein Volk Wolfgang Herles sees an indisputable connection between the after-effects of unification and the problems of reform. “Die Einheit hat die Menschen so überfordert, dass sie weitere Veränderungen ablehnen.”18 Herles takes aim at the economic reasons East Germans decided to join with the Federal Republic, as well as lasting attitudes that still occasion a politically correct feeling of sympathy toward the East by westerners even today. The “Verständniswessi” is the target of his criticism, mirroring and facilitating the image of the “Jammerossi” who regrets what he has lost with the GDR. According to Herles, all Germans helped to make the bed that no one wants to sleep in now, and the “Verständniswessis,” by treating their eastern compatriots with kid gloves, propagate an unfortunate parent–child relationship.

The unemployment rate is a big part of the problem. The GDR had a “make-work” policy in place to ensure that as close to 100% of the population as possible would be employed, a figure which allowed them international boasting. Under discussion as part of the Hartz Reforms now are regulations for “mini-jobs,” whose aim is much the same: though they are not full-time positions, they serve to mop up some percentage points on the calculation of the unemployed. Certain people have pointed out, with reason, that breaking up one full-time position into several mini-jobs has questionable benefits for all involved, both in the short and long-term. What most Germans are keen on is a stable, full-time position, but the stability most wish for has a systemic cost.

16 Ibid, 46.
17 Ibid, 52, feature “Denken Sie an Mose.”
18 Herles, 11.
Today it is generally accepted that the former East Germans were promised too much from unification, painted themselves a too rosy picture; perhaps, the theory goes, the population would be less disillusioned if their expectations had not been so high to begin with. Others argue that the special tax imposed after unification and still in force today, euphemistically labelled “solidarity tax,” also helped create a perception problem. Generally seen by western Germans as a funnel of money eastwards, these payments were intended to bring the East’s infrastructure – roads, rails, phones, etc. – up to a common, that is West German, standard. The new states were promised money from the federal government, and they got it. As a result, “Statt sich selbstkritisch zu reflektieren und Eigenverantwortung zu entwickeln, sind die Ostdeutschen in das Obrigkeitsdenken zurückgefallen,” suggests Hans-Joachim Maaz, a psychotherapist.19 His assessment has much in common with Herles’ critique of the “Jammerossi” and “Verständniswessi.” Striking a dark tone, Herles concludes: “Keine Angst, liebe Brüder und Schwestern, wir sorgen schon für euch! Es war die Urlüge. Die Ostdeutschen waren es nicht gewohnt, von demokratischen Politikern – ihren neuen Helden – getäuscht zu werden. Von nun an misstraute sie der Demokratie und der Marktwirtschaft.”20

It is true that East Germans expected much from the new system, that it failed to deliver immediately (or in some cases, it could be argued, at all), which certainly led to a great sense of disillusionment. Along with the realisation that the capitalistic, democratic system was as fallible as the state-controlled one, came musings about what the old system did deliver: day care, jobs, a sense of community ties and being in it together. The fact that the underlying structural impossibility of it was invisible to the ordinary man on the street facilitated the conclusion that perhaps the old system was better: “Ostalgie” was born. “Unruhe, Getriebensein, Erschöpfung, die sich wie ein roter Faden durch das Leben vieler Ostdeutscher nach dem Umbruch zogen, ließen die oftmals beklemmende Ruhe unter dem alten Regime in günstigeren Licht erscheinen,”21 Wolfgang Engler commented in 2002.

Those who talk about the resultant political cynicism of the former East usually support their argument by quoting voting figures from the new states, both in terms of overall turnout and by breaking down the support for various parties. Such analysis can be tricky, as the figures have been used to reach very different conclusions. Believing in the theory of disinterest, some observers are sympathetic: “Wer sich von Nelson Mandelas Gesundheit bis zu den Senioren der Volkssolidarität für alles verantwortlich fühlen musste, was ihn

20 Herles, 84.
eigentlich nichts anging, dem wird man nicht verdenken, dass ihm Politik und Engagement verdächtig geworden sind,” Ingo Arendt has presciently commented.\textsuperscript{22} The consensus in public discussion is, however, that voter turnout is generally higher in the West, although actual figures are harder to come by.\textsuperscript{23} What is true is that former Communist parties have been doing well – they received three percentage points more votes in the recent federal elections than in the previous election, and two more seats in Parliament.\textsuperscript{24}

However, suggestions that the attitudes are reversed, namely, that young eastern Germans are more politically engaged, lead to their own set of stereotypes. A survey in 2004 found that people under 30 in the new states are “aktiver, selbständiger und freiheitsorientierter” than their western counterparts.\textsuperscript{25} From results such as this, it is easy to draw the conclusion that the younger generation from the former GDR appreciates their ability to have a political impact more than do their coddled friends who grew up in an open system. The two (apparently contradictory) conclusions – disinterest in politics on the one hand and political engagement on the other – come from the same data, but generally reflect an age difference: the older generation tends to be more cynical and the younger is more involved. This is the view to which Jana Hensel’s book \textit{Zonenkinder} ascribes. Resistance to the Hartz reforms, on the other hand, cuts across the board. By this year, popular opinion saw it as a failure: a focus article in \textit{Der Spiegel} comments: “[D]ie neuen Instrumente zur Jobförderung haben vieles anders, aber wenig besser gemacht. Es hat fast nichts geklappt.”\textsuperscript{26}

\textit{Memory versus “Ostalgie”}

While the first years after reunification saw some of the most critical literature about the GDR published, more recent works have focused on “Erinnerungsarbeit.” The GDR is generally described as being pervasively political, a system that reached into every aspect of life; this “Allgegenwärtigkeit” led people to make an intense demarcation between the public sphere and their own small, private existences. The criticism that

\textsuperscript{22} In Tom Kraushaar, \textit{Die Zonenkinder und Wir: Die Geschichte eines Phaenomens} (Stuttgart: Rowohlt), 40.
\textsuperscript{23} Berg, “Trübsal.” The article notes, “‘Desillusionierung’ beobachten Meinungs– und Sozialforscher… bereits seit den frühen neunziger Jahren im Osten. Deshalb seien die Wahlbeteiligungen geringer als im Westen,” but no figures are mentioned nor is the source of the generalisation.
\textsuperscript{24} For a breakdown of the 2005 results see en.wikipedia.org/wiki/German_federal_election. 2005. Accessed 19 Oct 2005. In 2005 the PDS, successor to the communist Socialist Unity Party (SED) of the GDR, combined with a further splinter fraction from the SPD to form a new left group called “DIE LINKE.”
\textsuperscript{25} Berg, “Trübsal,” 56.
\textsuperscript{26} Jung, 32.
discussion of the GDR only in political terms leaves out any consideration of the everyday has primed the public for works that do deal with it in personal, idiosyncratic terms: movies such as Goodbye, Lenin and Sonnenallee are fueled by reminiscences. They were also wildly successful. Their counterpart in print is Jana Hensel’s book Zonenkinder, published in 2002.

Zonenkinder seeks to appeal on several levels: on the one hand, it is a memoir of the author’s own childhood in the GDR, a childhood which she claims ended when the Wall fell; on the other, it is a kind of sociological look at the GDR as a whole, from the perspective of a child whose youthful ignorance does not take politics into account. In an interview with Tom Kraushaar, the author describes her book thus: “Ich wollte von der DDR nicht wie von einem politischen System erzählen. Ich wollte sie als einen Herkunftsraum beschreiben.” With only minimal advertising but a generous dose of publicity due to critical reviews, sales of the book took off throughout the country.

Hensel herself was fairly young when the Wall fell (thirteen years old); she has a memory of attending one of the Monday demonstrations in Leipzig with her mother, but confesses to have had no idea of the significance of it at the time. A great deal of the book deals with what sets her generation apart from those before and after it. Hensel proposes that their need to adjust to the new order and (generally) success in doing so created a basic difference between them and their parents, while their memories of growing up in a different system left them stranded, as still younger children were not, in a frame of reference which no longer exists. Throughout the book she endeavours to recreate that frame of reference, cluttering pages with brand names, products, agencies and clubs that have disappeared. Throughout the book, she uses the inclusive pronoun “we,” in so doing emphasising the common generational experience.

This inoffensive-looking little word soon became the centre of the firestorm surrounding Zonenkinder. Hensel was criticized for the generalising effect of the pronoun: her own personal story was extrapolated out onto the rest of the population, many argued, without justification. In literary terms, the word is also a weakness, as it blurs the distinctions between Hensel’s own story and the overarching theme of youth in the sundown days of the GDR. Her personal experiences remain sketches that blend into the big picture. Jens Bisky –who does see positive achievements by the author– notes with some regret: “doch vermisst der Leser, was Hensel verspricht: das Besondere, die Individualität des Erwachsenwerdens. Sie entwirft ein kunstgewerblich angehübschtes Allgemeines, typische Charaktere unter untypischen Umständen.”

28 Kraushaar, 95.
29 Ibid, 30.
Another criticism is the loaded term “Ostalgie.” Generally what is understood under this term is a reminiscence of the GDR-past that goes beyond memory into longing for the good old days, involving a cosmetic adjustment of the grey and harsh reality that life often was. “Fernsehshows machen sich die Ostalgie zunutze. Sie tun so, als sei die DDR eine harmlose, wenn nicht sogar liebenswerte Dauerwerbesendung für Spreewaldgurken, Rotkäppchensekt und schnittige Trabis gewesen. Die angebliche Nestwärme der DDR wird gepriesen,” fumes Herles. What most irks him is the “Verharmlosung des ‘Unrechtstaates’” that occurs under such a nostalgic viewpoint. Similarly, Hensel’s cute reminiscences about children’s programs and cartoon characters distract the politically critically-inclined reader, the argument goes. Hensel uses her age as a defence against such accusations, insisting that as a child her worldview was limited to her family and friends and the absence of political criticism in her book is the result of her lack of exposure to the system. However, she has also compared her book to the movie *Sonnenallee*, which was a popular success. “So etwas [DDR als Herkunftsraum] hat es abgesehen von ‘Sonnenallee’ nicht gegeben,” she said in an interview, going on to add the disclaimer: “und der funktionierte nicht als identifikatorischer Film.” Considering the amazing popularity of that film, it is perhaps only Hensel’s opinion that it failed to make an “Identifikationsangebot,” yet her clear association with that type of storytelling is precisely the sort of rose-tinted perspective that Herles deplores.

While Hensel’s argument that the very fact of her youth excluded politics from her view at the time is valid, it is true that the overview that the book creates (and strives for, by the author’s own admission) does leave the reader with the sense that something is missing. “Alles wird hintereinanderweg kurz angerissen. Diese andere Kindheit bleibt seltsam geruchlos, ohne Intensität,” states Alexander Cammann. Indeed, much is touched on lightly, creating an impressionistic work overall. Although this causes some weaknesses in the text, including a lack of depth to both the sociological and more personal aspects of the work, Hensel is successful in evoking the place by the use of certain labels. What details there are, are fairly general; with them, it is possible to recognise a sort of outline that a reader may fill in with his or her own more specific experiences. It is this function as a sort of template that probably most helped in the success of the “Identitätsangebot” that Hensel wanted to make, a success evident in the enthusiastic letters she received affirming that her book aligned with the memories of many others.

30 Herles, 39.
31 Kraushaar, 95.
32 Ibid.
33 Ibid, 65.
34 Ibid, 95.
Among those who were personally engaged by the book was the politician Angela Merkel, currently Chancellor of Germany and head of the CDU/CSU. In September 2002, she sent a very positive “reader’s letter” about Zonenkinder to the Frankfurter Allgemeinen Sonntagszeitung. It is clear that she was very taken by the book, although her letter also talks about the East German experience as a whole. She backs up Hensel’s justification of ignorance of politics by virtue of age: “Die Tatsache, dass die Zonenkinder im besten Alter im Westen angekommen sind, ermöglicht es dieser Generation, unbefangen über den Osten zu schreiben, ohne gleich in den Generalverdacht der Glorifizierung zu verfallen.” 35 In other words, the political unconsciousness of the author absolves her from any striving toward “Ostalgie,” and legitimises her intention to write an “Erinnerungsbuch,” at least in Merkel’s eyes.

Although Merkel herself is from the former East Germany, this fact is not touted in her political campaigning or that of her party. Hensel considers this distance Merkel has preserved from that particular aspect of her identity to be the expression of a fundamental difference that still exists in the outlook of eastern and western Germans on politics. “[E]ine ostdeutsche Politikerin wie etwa Angela Merkel steht nie nur für ihr Amt, ihre Partei oder deren politische Inhalte, sondern immer für alle 16 Millionen, sie repräsentiert die ganze unsichtbare Schicksalsgemeinschaft der ehemaligen DDR-Bürger. Wie aber soll es gelingen?” 36 According to Hensel, playing the western political game so well makes Merkel appear too western (for eastern audiences), while playing up her origins would indicate (to western ones) that she suffers from “Ostalgie”; the west has greater numbers, so she understates that facet of her identity completely.

Throughout the 2005 elections, Merkel’s popularity flagged behind that of the Party she was representing and which nominated her for Chancellor. The CDU/CSU has primarily been associated with conservative, bourgeois western attitudes; yet the party did equally well in east and west, 37 so it cannot be purely an association with these values that led to her being so low in opinion polls. “Was Wessis so sehr lieben, macht im Osten schnell misstrauisch,” says Herles concisely. 38 “Angela Merkel gilt als aus der Art geschlagen, als Wendelacke.” She was a physicist in the GDR, but quickly (and successfully) took up politics when it crumbled. The whiff of opportunism has attended her success, perhaps particularly because of the lack of an antagonistic relationship between her and the Communist regime.

36 Ibid, 96.
37 See www.election.de/sitzverteilung_West_Ost.pdf [Accessed 21 October 2005, for figures].
38 Herles, 61.
Merkel was “too friendly” with the regime for many observers who called for a more rebellious East German population, and now is too friendly with the very prototypical “western” political apparatus in the form of the CDU for her former colleagues in the East. Indeed, this question of too much tolerance now plagues the discussion of recent GDR history. Anyone who “stayed,” as it were, in the GDR implicitly is being asked: how could you have lived there for so long and just let the “Unrechtstaat” continue? How was it that no one seemed ever to fight it? In her book, Westwärts und nicht vergessen, East German author Daniela Dahn, calls the behavior of her compatriots over the decades in the GDR “Duldungstarre.” 39 In her view, according to the logic of the accusation, “müssten alle Intellektuellen der Welt, die in einem verfehlten System leben, jede soziale und politische Mitverantwortung für die weitere Entwicklung von sich weisen und auswandern.” 40 The question then becomes: where to? After all, everyone has to call someplace home. Making everyone in the former East bear personal responsibility for all the acts and failures to act by the state is an untenable position, and serves only to divide the now politically unified country down old boundary lines. “Der Prozess der Annäherung wurde durch die Einheit abrupt abgebrochen,” Dahn believes. 41

East versus West aside, there is considerable debate about German national identity generally, and the related question of patriotism, always a tricky one in light of its most flagrant example, the Nazi party and World War II. “During the upheaval of 1989-90 an older set of identities resurfaced with elemental strength and eventually superseded many of the newer post-war identifications,” Konrad Jarausch asserts. 42 It is almost impossible to find anyone ready to discuss the term “patriotism” as simple pride in one’s country and its achievements; the aftertaste left by the NSDAP is much too strong. With the demise of the GDR, debate about reunification and the question of eastern and western identities has included discussion of another historical burden: the legacy of communism as well as national socialism. The “stark reminders of the excesses of Nazi definitions of racial identity” are now paired with “historical questions about legal accountability for the shootings at the Wall and moral responsibility for collaboration with the hated Stasi.” 43 Neither of these are flashpoints for national pride. Others argue for a historically splintered German consciousness by pointing to the relatively recent creation

40 Ibid, 25.
41 Ibid, 23.
43 Ibid, 11, emphasis in original.
East German Identity and the Problems of Unification

of a federal German state in the late 19th century. One cannot be proud as a group without first being a group. The debate about unification, the integration of East Germany and whether it is possible or desirable is, in a way, simply another wrinkle in this larger question of what it means to be German.

Conclusion

Herles asserts that the new emphasis on national identity and national pride is a political cover for what the country is not providing at present: good economic prospects and growth. “Weil die materielle Basis der Identifikation mit dem Staat bröckelt, sollen emotionale Werte Ersatz bieten.” 44 But as a diversion from the differences between east and west, he thinks that it fails: “Ein Volk kann sich schließlich nicht zwei verschiedene Geschichtsbilder leisten, ein Volk kann nicht sein ohne eine gemeinsame Geschichte.” 45 One does not need to burrow very deep to recognise Herles’ belief in the failure of unification, a failure inherent in the two predecessor states themselves. Yet if one accepts his assessment, only time as a unified nation can rectify this lack, providing the common basis he insists does not now exist. The more time Germany spends unified, the more history its denizens will share. Indeed, they currently appear to share political disgruntlement: with the exception of Bavaria, where the CSU undoubtedly succeeded, no parties received unequivocal support anywhere in the country in the federal elections this year. The SPD and CDU/CSU separately have made reform pledges of one kind or another, though given the uproar over Hartz, there will be a difficult road ahead of them in trying to fulfil those promises. And while voting patterns everywhere show a deep split, the two leading parties enjoyed a considerable lead over their smaller opponents in the western, or “old” German states. This trend is distinct from the eastern part of the country, where votes were diffused across the available political spectrum, and the new left-wing party, DIE LINKE, did quite well.

Voting patterns may well speak for a distinction that is not a difference, but it would appear the newer states still think of themselves differently, and have different political requirements, from their compatriots. Herles makes a valid point when he says that treating the eastern Germans differently will only lead to them being thought of as different, both by themselves and by western Germans. However, some consideration of the different historical and economic conditions which they experienced as the norm is necessary for any equitable political treatment; acknowledging their distinct recent past might suffice. Enough time has elapsed now, and the former GDR citizens

44 Herles, 112.
have learned through their own (sometimes painful) experience that simply “having” capitalism and political freedoms is not everything in itself. In fact their experience with an alternative system gives them a different vantage point from which to critique the current situation. Based on the numbers, the perception of a difference between east and west remains in all parts of the country; the gentle “Erinnerungsarbeit” that Hensel has presented, almost entirely free of statistics, therefore remains as valid as Herles’ own interpretation. According to her and many others, politics are not everything. While the economy may not be everything either, as Herles seems to suggest, the storm about Hartz indicates that it seems to be the basis needed to build further stories in the German national house.
8. THE ROLE OF THE NARRATOR IN GRILLPARZER’S

DER ARME SPIELMANN

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In Der arme Spielmann the narrator is essential in providing an alternative point of view from that of Jakob, Grillparzer’s protagonist. The narrator’s comments and observations prevent Jakob’s story from becoming overly sentimental, and ensure that the novella contains an external response to Jakob’s first person narrative. Through the narrator’s opinions and behaviour, Jakob’s own personality is both reflected and contrasted. Grillparzer uses this comparison to examine the place of the artist in society, to demonstrate the subjective nature of artistic interpretation, and also to identify two conflicting perspectives on the function of artistic creativity. The fact that these perspectives are the creation of the author, and that Der arme Spielmann itself is a form of art, suggests that Grillparzer uses the narrator’s viewpoint to lead to a certain interpretation of the novella. However, the way in which the author identifies approaches to artistic function within his portrayal of both Jakob and the narrator, indicates that Grillparzer intended that a combination of these approaches be made. The narrator’s presence ensures that the novella itself must be considered as a work of art.

W. E. Yates perceptively comments that the narrator’s interruptions ward off “too great an empathy on the part of the reader.” While the narrative frame certainly distances the reader from indulging in sentimentality, it also places the Jakob’s story into a wider context. Through the seemingly impartial reaction of the narrator, Grillparzer not only depicts Jakob’s general failure to make a place for himself in society, but also shows why he does fail, and how others respond to this failure. The narrator never considers that his point of view could be anything less than objective, and refrains from making an obvious personal response to Jakob’s story. However, he is present to see the reaction of others after Jakob’s death. Through the additional eyes and ears of the narrator too great a level of intimacy is not encouraged, and the reader is not restricted to Jakob’s perspective alone. This suggests that Grillparzer’s aim is not for the reader to identify solely with his protagonist.

While it is possible to accept the narrator’s commentary as the absolute truth, and to assume that Jakob is deluded in his perceptions, it would seem that this is not what Grillparzer intended, as the narrator is not always strictly reliable. The narrator claims to be a lover of people and says that he would not lightly miss the “Volksfest.” However, he is quickly distracted from the festival when Jakob awakens his curiosity and he consequently spends the rest of the day in a quiet pub. He also claims that it is possible for “die Julien, die Didos und die Medeen” to reside in embryo form in common girls at the festival, but fails to have any respect for the passion of a poor musician. While this is certainly partly due to the quality of Jakob’s performance, the self-proclaimed humanitarian narrator is nevertheless all too readily disdainful of the impoverished man’s appearance, and his painstakingly copied sheet music. The narrator is very aware of class distinctions in his special love of the ‘common’ people and the way that he delights in the “geputzten Damen in den scheinbar stille stehenden Kutschen” being overtaken by the people on foot. However, he also seems to consider himself to be above the less wealthy as he almost pushes Jakob into making a time to see him, and then promptly forgets his house number. By making the narrator unreliable Grillparzer suggests that his perception must also be interpreted.

The narrator’s presence therefore makes it possible for a second interpretation of events. The introductory scene in which the narrator presents Jakob busking with his violin is almost comical, and completely contrasts with Jakob’s own view of himself. Papst accurately comments that as soon as Jakob “is given the reins of the narration, the perspective is changed and with it our whole evaluation of his character.” Jakob believes that his waltzes are hard to distinguish only because the listening children have no ear for music, not because of the quality of his playing. In his comments the narrator is also careless with the opinions of others, automatically contradicting Jakob’s point of view with his own. When he sees Barbara he finds that it “schien fast, als ob sie nie schön gewesen sein könnte” and the tune Barbara sings which has so moves Jakob is said by the narrator to be “gar nicht ausgezeichnet.” Due to the fact that an unreliable narrator is in position to qualify the hero’s opinions, the reader is never presented with a definite truth. By providing alternative perspectives Grillparzer reveals the subjectivity of such interpretation.

2 Franz Grillparzer, Der arme Spielmann (Stuttgart: Reclam, 2002), 5. Other quotations are from this edition.
3 Ibid.
5 Grillparzer, 47.
6 Ibid, 20.
The manner in which the narrator behaves towards Jakob demonstrates Jakob’s subservience, but also reveals the limits of the narrator’s anthropological interests. At the beginning of the novella the narrator considers that “das ganze Wesen des alten Mannes war eignetlich wie gemacht, um meinen anthropologischen Heißhunger aufs Außerste zu reizen,” and Roe bleakly observes that the narrator “never approaches Jakob with kindness, but only as an interesting specimen.” More than once he offends Jakob by offering him money, and Jakob’s humble responses to the narrator’s attentions directly contrast with the narrator’s almost inconsiderate attitude towards him. Jakob asks only to be informed of the narrator’s visit in advance, out of regard for the possible inconvenience of his guest, and is consequently startled when the narrator unexpectedly arrives, some days after the visit was proposed. When the narrator walks past the dead bodies after the flood he reflect on the effort required to certify them and the lack of officials. This contrasts tellingly with a man who dived into the flooded waters to retrieve some accounts. At first glance the narrator’s passion for people seems to be bare of true empathy. However, although Jakob’s selflessness and simplicity are scorned and abused by most of the people he encounters, it must be noted that the narrator never directly judges him. Perhaps by the end of the novella some compassion has been awakened within the narrator, suggesting that Jakob was someone well worth investigating.

The narrator is essential in providing comment upon situations external to Jakob’s story. He does this in great detail, approving of the cleanliness of Jakob’s side of the room he shares with the workmen, describing the line between his side and that of the workmen, as being like the “Äquator einer Welt im Kleinen.” This concisely suggests Jakob’s separateness from the rest of the world. The narrator is also careful to observe details which convey the the genuine grief Jakob’s unattainable true love Barbara displays at his funeral. Although she has to keep an eye on the children, she always looks back to her prayer book, and it is only she who actually kneels down beside the grave. The narrator does not openly express any emotion at Jakob’s death, and claims that he is prompted by “psychologische Neugierde” to visit Barbara’s house. He notes that Jakob’s violin is hanging opposite a crucifix, that the dust on it has not been disturbed, and then is present to witness Barbara’s weeping: “Tränen liefen… stromweise über die Backen.” While the narrator may not feel anything at all at Barbara’s tears, it seems possible

7 Ibid, 8.
9 Grillparzer, 15.
10 Ibid, 48.
11 Ibid, 49.
that his meeting with Jakob has made some impression on him. The way the novella ends with Barbara’s tears, indicates that this is to be the lasting image in the narrator’s mind. He bears witness to Barbara’s grief, but can make no comment upon this scene. In this way Grillparzer suggests that the narrator cannot detach himself from the scene entirely. If Jakob has evoked compassion in the narrator, then it would seem that by the end of the novella, the narrator has learned something of empathy from “der arme Spielmann.” Through the narrator’s changing attitude towards Jakob, Grillparzer proves that even the most hopeless are worthy of understanding and compassion.

At the beginning of the novella the narrator sets the scene of an impenetrable mass of human conformity. His poetic description of the people slowly jamming themselves together on their way to the festival, places the narrator outside of the group as he stands back to watch the scene. He notes that both the flow of the river and the “Strom des Volkes” are caught within the river bank and the railing of the bridge.12 After the narrator’s introductory description, Grillparzer later demonstrates that it is difficult to swim against the tide, not only that of society, but also in the flood which leads to Jakob’s death. Roe perceptively writes that it is the “contradictions in Jakob that attract the narrator, who is, however, reluctant to admit his equally contradictory character and general similarity to Jakob.”13 The narrator attributes his lack of participation to his anthropological interests, but it seems that like Jakob, who fails to fit in with his family, his workplace and society in general, the narrator is simply unable to fit in with the masses. It is thus of interest that both of these outsiders are artists. The narrator is a “dramatischer Dichter” and Jakob is a musician.14 Both rely on public appreciation for their income. By placing both the protagonist and the narrator as outsiders, Grillparzer demonstrates that those attempting to survive through artistic means cannot merely be part of the crowd. In this way the narrator is also linked to Jakob.

Ellis comments that in Der arme Spielmann “a genuine but incompetent person is introduced by one who is capable but insincere.”15 Although Ellis is referring to the novella as whole, this comment can also be applied to the narrator’s, and Jakob’s, approach to their art. The narrator finds it unusual that Jakob can have “Kunsteifer bei so viel Unbeholfenheit.”16 It bothers him that Jakob leaves the festival, just when he could have made the most money. He

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12 Ibid, 3.
13 Roe, 121.
14 Grillparzer, 5.
16 Grillparzer, 8.
does not consider the possibility that Jakob’s aim may not be making money, but rather taking pleasure in his music. The narrator finds the response of the audience in a packed crowd “immer zehnmal interessanter’ than the judgement of a critic who is ‘an Leib und Seele verkrüppelt.”’ It therefore appears odd to the narrator that Jakob’s performance is “für den Spieler nämlich, nur nicht auch für den Hörer” as it seems that the narrator’s entire focus is on pleasing the audience. He describes Jakob’s playing as ‘höllisch,’ although Jakob has called his playing his ‘Gebet.’ Jakob was inspired to play the violin by Barbara’s voice, whereas the narrator spends his mornings in his room trying to find inspiration. He is even loath to visit Jakob because he thinks that this would waste time which should be devoted to thinking of his writing. Jakob has passion but no skill, and it could perhaps be said that the narrator has skill in his descriptions, but no passion. When Jakob does attempt to put his passion for his music into words, the narrator can only see that Jakob has become so worked up that he is unrecognisable, as such a feeling is incomprehensible to the narrator. Through this comparison there is the suggestion that Jakob may have lived more deeply than the narrator ever will. However, Grillparzer makes it clear that the narrator is more successful in terms of survival within the demands of society.

In examining these different approaches to artistic function, Grillparzer presents the interesting paradox of the novella itself. The interpreter is free to consider whether Der arme Spielmann is meaningless due to the fit of passion in which it may have been created, or whether it has been carefully constructed in order to please the audience. However, the self-conscious narration of the novella suggests that this paradox was hardly unintentional. Thompson makes the valid point that Der arme Spielmann “underlines the fact that the power of the artist’s vision is without value for others if it is not translated into intelligible art.” Artists like the narrator are necessary to make situations, sights and ideas comprehensible to the audience. Through the narrator Jakob’s passion, and the story which details it, are made into art, just as Grillparzer, behind both of these characters, has created the whole story. The self-conscious narrative carefully intertwines relevant aspects of the narrator, and of Jakob, to ensure that the reader is presented with a balance. Grillparzer juxtaposes the passionate and the dispassionate, the aware and the naïve, and more importantly, the concept of art for one’s own pleasure and the concept of art as a means of giving pleasure to others.

17 Ibid, 5.
18 Ibid, 13.
19 Ibid, 15.
20 Bruce Thompson, Franz Grillparzer (Boston: Twayne, 1981), 93.
In *Der arme Spielmann* Grillparzer uses the narrator to place Jakob’s story into a wider context. The narrative frame inhibits the reading of the story in too sentimental a light, and the narrator’s presence, and at times unreliable narrative, ensures a second interpretation of events. His observations enable the reader to see responses which Jakob cannot see, and the personality of the narrator is important in revealing Jakob’s character. Through the contrast between Jakob and the narrator, Jakob’s naïve approach to his work is shown to be inadequate in terms of material survival in society. However, in the narrator, Grillparzer also examines the limitations of an impartial approach to life. The narrator does eventually develop some feeling for Jakob, implying perhaps authorial criticism of a reader who feels no emotion at Jakob’s death. In a world “wo wir nach unsere Absichten gerichtet werden und nicht unsern Werken,” Jakob would be in a superior position to the narrator. However, despite the fact that both artists stand apart from the masses, it is the narrator who remains afloat in society. His artistically inquisitive mind recognises Jakob’s confused, but inspired existence as a subject worth appreciating. The narrator is drawn to Jakob because his way of life is so incomprehensible to him, just as the narrator’s would be to Jakob. Thus, in his examination of subjective interpretation, Grillparzer demonstrates that both Jakob and the narrator could learn something from each other, not only in their way of life, but in their approach to art. Although Jakob could not be happier than when playing his violin badly, the narrator emphasises the necessity of art as being comprehensible to others. The author’s awareness of these different approaches suggests that in *Der arme Spielmann*, Grillparzer has united both his skill, and his inspiration.

21 Grillparzer, 32.
9. DANTE THE PILGRIM AND THE CONCEPT OF PIETÀ IN THE INFERNO

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This essay was submitted in the Stage III course on Dante’s “Inferno” offered by the Italian Department

The main theme of Dante’s Commedia is Dante the Pilgrim’s journey: from the selva oscura of Canto I, through physically witnessing damnation in hell, punishment in purgatory and beatification in heaven to salvation. Allegorically, Dante the Pilgrim’s progress through hell is representative of man’s spiritual journey from ignorance of spiritual values to enlightenment and acceptance. As such, Dante the Pilgrim is initially ignorant of the values and order of the world, and progressively learns to recognise them. This progress is evident by his interaction with personages in hell and the emotions they evoke in him.

Dante gave a definition of the word pietà in his Convivio,

E non è pietade quella che crede la vulgar gente, cioè dolersi de l’altrui male, anzi questo uno suo speziale effetto, che si chiama misericordia ed è passione: ma pietade non è passione, anzi è una nobile disposizione d’animo, apparecchiata di ricevere amore, misericordia e altre caritative passioni. (Con II x 6)

However he redefines pietà to mean anything ranging from empathy to anguish to filial devotion, depending on who feels it and how far along the path to enlightenment he/she is. The meaning of pietà becomes a traveller along the path, developing and growing, just as the protagonists are.

The earliest and one of the most extreme reactions Dante the Pilgrim exhibits in Inferno is with Francesca with the Lustful in the second circle of the Sins of Incontinence. Dante is easily seduced into feeling pity by Francesca’s courtesan-style speech in which she twists morals, beliefs and themes of Dante the Poet’s. He is so taken in and emotional over the encounter that he faints.

Francesca’s speech is courteous and courtly on the surface, but it is easy to see her vanity beneath her words. She politely offers to answer any questions Dante the Pilgrim has, or listen to anything he has to say, whichever he prefers:

3 As in Inf. XXVI 94.
Di quel che udire e che parlar vi piace, 
noi udiremo e parleremo a voi. (V 94-95)

However, she then launches straight into her story without waiting for his response. She made the offer only to appear to be courteous. Her speech is remarkably similar to Beatrice’s, both as she speaks to Virgil in Canto II and as Dante the Poet speaks of her in his Vita Nuova. Francesca corrupts language one associates with Beatrice in line 100, where she says words almost exactly similar to one of the most beautiful poems in Vita Nuova. They both speak of amore and of il cor gentil.

Amor, ch’al cor gentil ratto s’apprende. (V 100)
Amore e ’l cor gentil sono una cosa. (VN XX)

The love Francesca refers to, which kindles in the heart, is a sensual love, a physical desiring, as can be seen by her use of language:

- prese costui de la bella persona (V 101)
- mi prese del costui piacer si forte (V 104)
- ‘disio’ (V 113)
- il disiato riso / esser baciato da cotanto amante (V 134-135)
- la bocca mi baciò (V 136)

Francesca’s love is emphasised by her marked repetition of the word amore, starting three tercets in a row from lines 100 to 108. While Francesca’s amore is sensual and active (in ‘seizing’–prese– her and Paolo), for Beatrice amore is not at all physical. She is Dante’s philosophical salvation, and love for her means moral purity and guidance, and ultimately God. The linguistic similarities between Francesca and Beatrice emphasize their moral dissimilarities.

Dante the Pilgrim’s reaction to Francesca’s vanity and sinfulness so lightly cloaked in language of Beatrice’s style clearly illustrates his initial naivety. He who thought everything about Beatrice unearthly and incomparable, to feel pity for a sinner in hell who uses words and figures of speech that can only recall Beatrice still more strongly to mind than she always is anyway, is certainly not reflective of Dante the Poet. While Dante the Pilgrim’s reaction to Francesca is indicative of his ignorance and moral confusion, Dante the Poet has served a second purpose by creating a character like Francesca, which is to exalt Beatrice even higher by comparison.

Another word Francesca corrupts, and which is a major recurring theme throughout the Commedia, is pietà. In Canto II Virgil recounts how Beatrice convinced him to guide Dante the Pilgrim. Santa Lucia had come to Beatrice and pleaded with her to take pity on Dante’s tears:

Non odi tu la pieta del suo pianto? (II 106)

Having related to Virgil all she has to say, he sees tears in her eyes.

Poscia che m’ebbe ragionato questo,
li occhi lucenti lagrimando volse; (II 115-116)

These tears are clearly felt entirely piously, out of love and sympathy for the plight of Dante the Pilgrim. Similarly, Francesca agrees to answer Dante the Pilgrim’s question about how she and Paolo came to sin, saying that she will answer although she will cry. But each was compelled to tears by completely different reasons. Beatrice is brought to tears by relating a noble story about how Santa Lucia came to her in heaven to ask her to help Dante the Pilgrim, and Francesca is brought to tears of regret that her past happiness is over, in relating to Dante the story of how she came to sin, while accepting none of the blame or acceptance of her sin. In fact, she cannot acknowledge that she has sinned, and still refers to her sinful days as tempo felice:

dirò come colui che piange e dice. (V 126)

Francesca lauds Dante the Pilgrim for the pity he feels for her and Paolo, even though at that stage he has neither exhibited any pity towards them in particular nor mentioned his feelings: all he has done is asked them to speak with him:

poi c’hai pietà del nostro mal perverso. (V 93)

Although she pre-empts Dante’s pity, Francesca is correct in assuming he feels it; pietà is a recurring theme throughout the Commedia, but nowhere is it mentioned as frequently as in Canto V.

Firstly, Dante’s senses are confused by pity at the sight of all the lovers flying in the wind:

pietà mi giunse (V 72)
This pieta comes from Dante’s heart and is reflective of empathy and pain at the sight of humans being punished in hell. Dante progressively learns to redirect his pieta towards the flaws in humankind; but at this stage he is too close to the selva oscura in which he found himself in at the beginning of his journey to differentiate pieta for sinners (empathy for physical suffering) from pieta at the unfortunate flaws of humankind (sadness, love and acknowledgement of humankind’s faults). The pieta that Francesca solicits is not the pieta that Beatrice feels for Dante, or the pieta Virgil gave Aeneas as a cardinal virtue: \textit{insignem pietate uirum, tot adire labores}.\footnote{Virgil, \textit{Aeneid}, trans. C. Day Lewis (London: Hogarth Press, 1954), I 10.} She has corrupted its meaning by applying it herself. The fact that Dante still feels compassion for her indicates his unenlightened state.

Secondly, Francesca charms Dante by thanking him for his pieta (as seen above, V 93). If Dante’s pieta is far from ideal, that which Francesca expects is even farther from ideal. It is based on vanity and the belief that one as lovely and ‘innocent’ (\textit{senza alcun sospetto}, V 129) as herself has been wrongfully placed in hell.

The third mention of pieta is a derivative: pio.

\begin{quote}
\ldots \text{Francesca, i tuoi martiri}
\text{a lagrimar mi fanno tristo e pio. (V 116-117)}
\end{quote}

Dante eventually collapses at feeling such an immense amount of pietade:

\begin{quote}
\ldots \text{si che di pietade}
\text{io venni men cosi com’io morisse;}
\text{e caddi come corpo morto cade. (V 140-142)}
\end{quote}

Here pietade can be translated as a feeling of sadness in witnessing the eternal unhappiness of Francesca and Paolo.

Dante the Pilgrim next feels compassion for Ciacco in Canto VI who is found among the Gluttons in the third circle of the Sins of Incontinence. As with Francesca, Dante the Pilgrim is brought to tears through compassion:

\begin{quote}
\text{Io li rispuosi: <Ciacco, il tuo affanno}
\text{mi pesa si, ch’a lagrimar mi ’nvita; (VI 58-59)}
\end{quote}

While Francesca’s position in hell can be seen as controversial, because she was a historical character whose story is not necessarily honestly told by Dante (Boccaccio gave credence to the story of Francesca being tricked into marrying Gianciotto de Rimini when she believed she was marrying his
brother Paolo), Ciaccio’s placement in hell has never been debated. He is a glutton and is punished with unceasing rain:

   Per la dannosa colpa de la gola,  
   come tu vedi, a la pioggia mi faisco. (VI 53-54)

Like Francesca, he is vain and unable to accept the blame of his sin. Ciaccio calls Dante’s attention to himself, and asks him to remember him to the world when he returns. As a Florentine character, Dante introduces the new theme of politics. But as a character who elicits a reaction as strong as tears from Dante the Pilgrim, he is merely illustrative of Dante’s continued state of ignorance.

Dante’s first step towards recognising sin is in Canto VIII, among the Angry and the Sullen in the fifth circle of the Sins of Incontinence. Filippo Argenti introduces himself as one who weeps, recalling to mind the act of crying from both Francesca and Ciaccio, in both cases succeeding to elicit compassion from Dante the Pilgrim.

   Rispuose: <Vedi che son un che piango>. (VIII 36)

However, Dante the Pilgrim’s reaction is angry and violent to the extreme. He firstly abuses Filippo with words, then tells Virgil he would like to see Filippo physically abused.

   E io a lui: <Con piangere e con lutto,  
   spirito maladetto, ti rimani;  
   ch’i’ti conosco, ancor sie lordo tutto>. (VIII 37-39)

   E io: <Maestro, molto sarei vago  
   Di vederlo attuffare in questa broda  
   Prima che noi uscissimo dal lago>. (VIII 52-54)

Virgil praises Dante’s wrath, which he considers to be righteous. He has certainly learnt not to pity the sinner, as was the case so demonstrably with Francesca; however he is still far way from enlightenment. He has yet to learn to recognise the sin and feel pietà for humankind’s state rather than identify it with individuals.

In the Forest of Suicides, Dante encounters those who sinned against themselves, the second category of the Violent Sins of Malice. Pier della Vigne’s position within the Forest of Suicides and Dante the Pilgrim’s reaction to him is as complicated as Francesca’s. A historical figure well known for his
rhetoric, diplomacy and unshakable support for Frederick II, Pier della Vigne was unfairly jailed in 1248, having lost the Emperor’s favour, and consequently killed himself. As a poet and a supporter of an Emperor, in his case Henry VII, Dante felt respect and empathy for Pier della Vigne. As a Christian, he could not condone Pier’s suicide. He recognises the sin, as does Pier himself by acknowledging that his suicide was an unjust act against himself:

\[
\text{ingiusto fece me contra me giusto. (XIII 72)}
\]

Pier cared about his good name so dearly on earth that it seemed more important to him to die in defence of his innocence than to live in social disgrace on earth. He did not care that it would condemn him in the after life, only temporal happiness mattered to him. His eagerness to be remembered on earth upon Dante’s return shows that he has not re-evaluated his priorities.

\[
\text{E se di voi alcun nel mondo riede,}
\text{conforti la memoria mia, che giace}
\text{ancor del colpo che `nvidia le diede>. (XIII 76-78)}
\]

This preoccupation with his good name on earth makes his admission, that he was unjust to himself, seem self-effacing and fake. It is fitting that Pier who cares so much for his name on earth, loses it in hell and does not name himself to Dante.

The complexity of Dante and Pier’s relationship/similarities is intensified by Dante’s *De Monarchia*, in which he deduces that temporal happiness on earth is attainable independently of the Church.

\[
\text{Duos igitur fines providential illa inenarrabilis homini proposuit intendendos:}
\text{beatitudinem scilicet huius vite, que in operatione proprie virtutis consistit et}
\text{per terrestrem paradisiunm figuratur; et beatitudinem vite ecterne, qui consistit}
\text{in fruitione divini aspectur ad quam propria virtus ascendere non potest, nisi}
\text{lumine divino adiuta, que paradisiunm celestem intelligi datur. Ad has quidem}
\text{beautidines, velut ad diversas conclusions, per diversa media venire oportet.}
\text{(III xvi 7)}
\]

However, Dante never wavers from believing that happiness after death is the ultimate goal of a human being’s life, to which earthly happiness can only come second. Pier’s despair can be criticised in comparison with Dante’s own behaviour in the face of exile, and with Boethius’. Boethius was accused of treason and sentenced to death; however, while imprisoned, rather than taking

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his own life like Pier did, Boethius wrote the *Consolatio Philosophiae*, in which he finds solace in philosophy. Although entirely pagan, Boethius’ ideas are so in line with Christian beliefs that his remains were moved to Pavia’s Church of St. Peter where he is known locally as St Severinus; furthermore Dante placed him in Canto X of *Paradiso*. Another example similar to Pier is to be found in Canto VI of *Paradiso*: Romeo. Romeo (born c. 1170) became the Prime Minister of the Count of Provence and took his job as seriously as either Frederick-loving Pier or Florence-loving Dante. Through his skills in diplomacy he managed to marry all four of the Count’s daughters to kings. Yet surrounding nobles grew jealous and accused him of mismanagement of treasury funds. Romeo merely showed that the treasury had increased under his administration and left his post to become a pilgrim. His name on earth did not mean so much to him that he would sacrifice his place after death.

While Dante the Pilgrim recognises that Pier has sinned, and feels that his punishment is just, he feels so much compassion for Pier that he cannot speak.

Ond’io a lui: <Domandal tu ancora
Di quel che credi ch’a me satisfaccia;
ch’i’ non potrei, tanta pietà m’accora!> (XIII 82-84)

Dante the Pilgrim, who has wavered between feeling pity for sinners and hatred towards sinners, is here able to hate the sin. Yet he still feels *pietà* for the sinner, which can be translated in this instance as anguish and pity at the state in which he finds the sinner. Another factor in Dante’s *pietà* is his empathy towards a personage who is unjustly called a traitor by the person (in Pier’s case Frederick II) or place (in Dante Poet’s case the city of Florence) in whom or in which he has dedicated his life and allegiance.

From Dante the Pilgrim’s reactions to Francesca, Ciacco, Filippo Argenti and Pier della Vigne it is clear to see that *pietà* is a recurring theme. In Canto XX this is brought to a climax when Virgil criticizes Dante the Pilgrim for yet again being moved to tears out of pity for sinners being punished. At the sight of the Soothsayers walking around in the fourth Bolgia with their heads twisted to look permanently backwards, Dante the Pilgrim is so overcome he leans against a rock and weeps. Virgil sharply rebukes Dante for his continued pity at the sight of righteous punishment of sinners.

mi disse: <Ancor se’ tu de li altri sciocchi?
Qui vive la pietà quand’è ben morta:
chi è più scellerato che colui
che al giudizio divin passion comporta? (XX 27-30)
Here *pietà* has two meanings. The *pietà* that lives (*vive*) is piety, approval of the justice of God. The *pietà* that is *ben morta* is closer to the English ‘pity’: compassion for the pain of the damned.

In sharp contrast to Virgil disapproving of Dante’s *pietà* in Canto XX, he had acknowledged he felt pity in Canto IV. However, it can be deduced that he pitied only the shades of Limbo, where he himself resides, who were not actively sinful. As a guide, Virgil is enlightened with enough reason not feel pity for the just punishment of sin. His pity for good pagans is not a contradiction of his (beliefs) which lead to annoyance at Dante’s pity for sinners.

Ed elli a me: <L’angoscia de le genti che son qua giù, nel viso mi dipigne quella pietà che tu per tema senti. (IV 19-21)

For Virgil the Guide, *pietà* is strongly linked to the Latin pietas. Virgil the Poet used the words pietas and *pietate* in his *Aeneid* as a cardinal virtue of Aeneas’. It has connotations of loyalty, forgiveness, willingness to shoulder burdensome responsibilities and to submit to the gods. It has been translated to mean ‘duteous of heart,’ ‘goodness of heart’ or ‘renowned for piety’. For Dante, however, *pietà* can be translated as meaning more ‘empathy’ or ‘anguish’ for aesthetical or ethical reasons. The first time *pietà* is mentioned in relation to Dante the Pilgrim is in describing his fear and anguish at the height of his confusion in the *selva oscura*:

Allor fu la paura un poco queta
che nel lago del cor m’era durata
la notte ch’i’ passai con tanta pièta. (I 19-21)

Here *pietà* is associated with fear (*paura*), and translated as ‘desperation.’

The meaning of *pietà*, initially anguish or compassion or piety towards sinners, reflects Dante’s reaction to their physical punishment. Furthermore, he becomes convinced that unrepentant sinners deserve their punishment. It is this conviction which will fortify him in his journey through Hell, thus enabling him to reach Heaven.

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Serfdom is remembered as a key factor in the development of peasant-state relations in Muscovy, symbolising the chief obstacle to peasant freedom in Russia. This essay will explore its establishment in the period 1497-1682, with particular reference to the Russian North. It will assess notions of freedom and autonomy as they existed alongside an exploitative feudal system, with the aim of demonstrating that “each village has ways of its own.”¹ The reasons underpinning regional variations in culture and socio-economic structure will also be noted.

Russia’s peasantry has been the subject of heated debate since the mid-nineteenth century. Both idealised and denigrated, the common people have intrigued commentators throughout history, generating a wealth of literature and a range of views on the peasantry.² However, there are fundamental difficulties in forming a truly representative account of the pre-Petrine countryside. Historians have noted the need for objectivity, especially when exploring pre-capitalist class structures from a post-industrial standpoint.³ The enormous diversity of the peasantry creates conceptual limitations in examining the social structures of rural Muscovy, and primary sources detailing the economic and demographic trends of the period are fragmentary. They focus largely on the central provinces, with only forty percent of official documentation surviving today.⁴ While foreign accounts are useful, the scarcity of sources that reflect mentalities outside officialdom undermines attempts to understand provincial Muscovite attitudes.

In the sixteenth century, nine tenths of Muscovites were classed as ‘peasants,’ a politically and economically subordinate group whose primary occupation was agriculture.⁵ In theory, the Tsar owned all the land of Muscovy.

⁴ Richard Hellie, The Economy and Material Culture of Russia 1600-1725 (Chicago: Univ. of Chicago Press, 1999), 1-12.
⁵ Moon, Peasantry, 11-36, 66-117.
The socio-political status of peasants was determined by the intermediary between the rural household and the Tsar. Peasants without a landlord were categorised as ‘free peasants,’ with no legal limitations to their autonomy. However, ‘freedom’ is still more complicated, implying independence, ranging from economic to political and cultural, at both a collective and individual level. By contrast, serfs (‘seigniorial peasants’) were legally bound to the land they cultivated and subject to the authority of their landlord, a reciprocal system which exchanged legal bondage for protection, land allotments and agricultural tools.

Expansionism, both territorial and bureaucratic, characterised this era, with Muscovy spreading beyond the Volga-Oka Basin and increasing its territory sevenfold between 1462 and 1533, opening the Southern frontier for colonisation. Running parallel with these acquisitions were near-constant military threats, from both external and internal forces, which stifled trade and agriculture throughout the state. Territorial gains heightened hostilities with neighbouring states and nomadic groups, leading to continuous raids on frontier settlements, and the Livonian War, the Thirteen Years War and the Polish occupation of Moscow in 1611. Internal conflict took the form of the oprichnina, a jurisdictional restructuring under Ivan IV which led to a violent anti-boyar campaign that devastated and depopulated the central provinces and of the dynastic crises of the Time of Troubles. War, political destabilisation, social chaos and the economic recession that followed, bred lawlessness among the rural population, setting a highly volatile backdrop for debates surrounding agrarian autonomy.

These developments placed enormous stress on Muscovy’s political and economic infrastructure, fundamentally altering peasant society. A key issue was the tension between traditional feudal self-government and efforts towards political unification, evidenced in the reigns of Ivan IV (r. 1533-84) and Aleksei Mikhailovich (r. 1645-76). Both Tsars sought to consolidate autocratic rule: Ivan IV in a sprawling, decentralised state through the violent elimination of political rivals, causing widespread social unrest and stifling rural economies, while Aleksei rebuilt autocracy through bureaucratic expansion, most notably in the establishment of advisory bodies such as the

9 Hellie, 1-12.
zemsky sobor and Chancellery system which allowed the tsarist authorities to fulfil administrative functions such as tax collection systematically and effectively. Both approaches served to escalate the exploitation of the countryside.\textsuperscript{12}

The Legal Status of the Peasantry

Debates surrounding notions of freedom often turn on the legal status of the peasantry. While agrarian freedom of movement was affirmed by the 1497 Sudebnik,\textsuperscript{13} these rights were abolished by the 1580’s, when a system of ‘forbidden years’ increased the legal authority of landlords by banning peasant movement, and culminated in the 1649 Ulozhenie, the founding document of serfdom.\textsuperscript{14} Eliminating legal distinctions between different categories of rural workers, the Ulozhenie formally bound peasants to the land.\textsuperscript{15} As well as securing a labour force, these measures marked an ideological shift in Muscovite conceptions of authority and social hierarchy. As the political loyalties of the Tsar shifted from the boyars to the militarised gentry, attitudes towards the legal role of the peasantry also changed. Rural subservience was emphasised by contemporary legislation, as Ivan IV called on the peasantry to “obey their lords in everything.”\textsuperscript{16}

There are other useful methods for assessing agrarian autonomy, particularly notions of property rights, which offer a clearer reflection of rural power outside officialdom.\textsuperscript{17} The two dominant forms of land ownership, pomest’e and household tenure, illustrate disparate levels of independence among peasants. Pomest’e tenure was a conditional, non-hereditary form of landholding, prominent in the colonial South, the “heartland of serfom,”\textsuperscript{18} where notions of private property were alien due to persistent pressure to fund military campaigns.\textsuperscript{19} Although Northern peasants did not own land at law, customary rights, including family inheritance and the sale of houses and land among peasants, survived throughout the period.\textsuperscript{20} These prevailing conceptions of property rights, and the absence of military pressure,
emphasised individual Northern households rather than landlord authority. It is important to recognise that, unlike slaves, all rural workers were recognised as an important thread in the fabric of Muscovite society, with rights and corresponding obligations. These rights included access to justice and protection from extreme cruelty and, although not widely applied, affirmed agrarian membership to the Muscovite citizenry. They must, however, be weighed against the demands placed on the countryside. A universal ‘land tax’ affirmed the Tsar’s position as overarching landlord, severely disadvantaging poorer peasants, particularly following the 1679 introduction of a broad flat rate. Further, eligibility for conscription was a condition of citizenship, producing labour shortages and stifling agriculture, especially in the war-torn South. Thus, prior to 1649, the peasants were legally considered “free,” but the economic and political repercussions of the policies pursued by the tsarist government led to mass exploitation.

**Climate, Geography and Economic Freedom**

The geography of Muscovy highlights the delicate balance between land and labour, an on-going theme in Russian history. Located on the Northern Dvina, Archangel Province and the surrounding coastal districts on the White Sea, comprised the Northern territories. Their isolation from Moscow, sparse population and infertile soils were inextricably linked to their social, political and economic autonomy. With limited transport, opportunities for trade, tax collection and law enforcement with such a distant and climatically harsh pocket of Muscovy were rare, affirming the customary autonomy of the region, and fostering a sense of self-sufficiency. Although eighty percent of serfs resided in the central and North-Western provinces, labour shortages did not underpin the rural economy in the North, where subsistence farming was supplemented by independent trade with Westerners through Archangel. Excluded from the land redistribution during the oprichina, which consolidated gentry landholdings, Northern demography was characterised by a heavy peasant population. The absence of an official landholding class eliminated the need for economic regulation and exploitation.

However, to imply that the Northern territories were entirely independent from tsarist interference and external threat is misleading. Operating at the whim of government policy, the economic isolation of the North did not necessarily

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21 Ibid, 89-99.
22 Martin, 9-28.
23 Kolchin, 1-4.
24 Riasanovsky, 185-93.
25 M. Malowist, “Poland, Russia and Western Trade in the Fifteenth and Sixteenth Centuries,” *Past and Present*, 13 (1958), 26-41.
26 Robinson, 12-20.
Each Village Has Ways of Its Own

translate into social and political autonomy. Throughout Russian history, war has been a guiding factor in both the consolidation and subversion of serfdom. Although the expanding Southern frontiers and central provinces were militaristic by necessity, conflict was also evident in the North. The fortified Solovki Monastery acted as the state’s primary defensive outpost against hostile Swedish forces and was subject to prolonged military occupation by tsarist troops during the Great Schism. Further, the establishment of Archangel in 1584, prompted by Western interest in trade, allowed for greater tsarist regulation of the province. Unlike Southern examples, these conflicts did not strain the economic infrastructure of the self-sufficient North, creating no imperative to secure a labour force through serfdom.

Muscovy’s climate was diverse, and peasants throughout the state were vulnerable to its extremities, which determined the nature and success of agricultural economies. Many of the contrasts among peasants stem from climatic differences and their impact on economic activities and peasant-landlord relations. The Northern climate, characterised by harsh, prolonged winters, acidic and infertile soil, and rich animal and natural resources, relegated settled agriculture to a secondary status, enabling local peasants to pursue supplementary, non-agricultural activities, including hunting, herding, fishing, and salt-producing, which generated approximately half the income of Northern peasants. By contrast, fertile chernozem (‘black earth’) comprised the temperate South, encouraging large-scale farming. This climatic variation exerted a direct influence over peasant obligations, with barschina (labour dues) emphasised in the agricultural South, affirming the authority of the landlord as property-owner; and obrok (cash dues) largely prevailing in the mercantile North, encouraging trade and manufacturing, and consolidating the underlying ethos of independence and self-sufficiency.

Trade brought a transformative dimension to the peasant economy, developing dramatically in the sixteenth century, particularly in the North, where traditional farming was not viable, and where extensive networks of north-flowing rivers facilitated foreign trade with Western Europe. Exports of luxury goods by the Muscovy Company and the production of staples

28 Robinson, 268-69.
29 Blum, 117-34, 157-74.
30 Koslow, 36-48.
31 Moon, Peasantry, 37-65, 70-77.
34 Moon, Peasantry, 145.
such as rye and barley—desperately needed commodities in the politically and economically volatile central and Southern provinces—made mercantilism a hallmark of the Northern peasant economy. Under nominal authority, the Tsar was able to establish trade duties and monopolies, but primary sources suggest that Northern peasants largely ignored these controls. By emphasising standardised currency and obrok, trade affirmed the economic autonomy of individual peasant households. At a wider level it reflects the unique circumstances that allowed the Northern provinces to develop “ways of their own,” independent of the central government.

Historians debate the significance of geography and environment in accounts of autonomy. Although the isolation of the North allowed for the prevalence of customary law and undermined tsarist authority, decisive obstacles to freedom persisted. Trade may have consolidated the independent peasant family, but the harsh climate that produced this unique economic structure also severely restricted the production and range of goods available, and created difficulties in transporting produce to market. The short growing season placed enormous pressure on local peasants and exacted grinding poverty on those without the skills or resources to engage in trade. These paradoxes have given rise to a “Frontier Theory” of early Russian history. Valentine Tschebotarioff-Bill described the North as “the meeting place of Russian backwardness with European progress,” attracting pioneers and fugitives from as early as the twelfth century. By engaging with the harsh climate, settlers forged a unique socio-political order, with independence and self-sufficiency informing the emergent ethos, and forming the basis of peasant autonomy.

Monastic Landholdings and Cultural Autonomy

Private land ownership fell into two categories: secular and ecclesiastical. While the pomeshchiki dominated secular landholding, monasteries persisted as a powerful force in the administration of the countryside. Drawing on the Byzantine principle of symphonia, one third of all arable land in Muscovy was under direct monastic administration by the mid-sixteenth century, largely gifted by pious Tsars, donated by local peasants, or transferred by votchinniki

35 Blum, Lord, 168-98.
38 Tschebotarioff-Bill, “Circular Frontier,” 47.
39 Riasanovsky, 183-95.
40 This system was known as a “spiritual insurance plan,” grounded in the belief that holy intercession was made more likely by the gifting of land, labour or resources to the local monastery. Economically, church peasants benefited from the less burdensome taxes placed on monasteries. See Roy R. Robson, Solovki: The Story of Russia Told through Its Most Remarkable Islands (New Haven: Yale Univ. Press, 2004), 29-33.
following Ivan IV’s 1556 pomest’e land redistribution.\textsuperscript{41} The size of these landholdings presupposed extensive peasant labour. An interesting regional comparison can be drawn between Solovki and the St. Sergei Monastery, one of the oldest and wealthiest in the state. While much of the land allotted to Solovki was held on a voluntary basis, St. Sergei is notorious for its role in the establishment of serfdom, exacting political pressure on Prince Vasili III to restrict ecclesiastical peasants’ freedom of movement and producing a series of charters which formed the basis for further legislation.\textsuperscript{42}

A key contemporary debate was whether monasteries should profit from the land and labour available to them. Spearheading internal grain trade and haunted by ongoing accusations of tax aversion, Solovki did not conform to standard monastic landholding. Unlike the central monasteries, loyal to the Tsar and renowned for their harsh labour practices, Solovki emerged from the Time of Troubles as a strong, independent settlement, dominating the Northern salt-boiling industry, and orchestrating trapping, fishing, and dairy production.\textsuperscript{43} Local economies took advantage of the unique Northern environment, forging a “way of its own,” with emphasis resting on mercantilism and providing a new skills-base for church peasants.\textsuperscript{44} Despite the enormous demand for labour, the Solovki economy was not maintained by serfdom, employing free tenant farmers, pilgrims, soldiers, migrants and fugitives, many of whom worked voluntarily as a part of their “spiritual insurance plan”.\textsuperscript{45}

However, Northern monasteries also fulfilled a political function. Unlike the heavily regulated central peasantry, notions of citizenship and patriotism were alien in the isolated and sparsely populated North. While the Tsar retained nominal authority over the entirety of Muscovy, substantive power in the outskirts resided in the monastic elite until the late seventeenth century. Northern ecclesiastical peasants enjoyed comparatively lenient treatment, free to choose their preferred method of payment to the church. This is further illustrated by the Great Schism. When confronted with an ongoing conflict with Muscovite forces, the loyalty of the local peasants lay largely, though not universally,\textsuperscript{46} with the monasteries, rather than Moscow. Monastic dissent was buttressed by agrarian action, orchestrating perilous smuggling systems and attacking invading Muscovite forces.\textsuperscript{47} This political solidarity highlights

\textsuperscript{41} Blum, Lord, 188-98.
\textsuperscript{42} Ibid, 110-11.
\textsuperscript{43} Robson, 32, 39, 77-79.
\textsuperscript{44} Moon, \textit{Peasantry}, 145-46.
\textsuperscript{45} Robson, 32.
\textsuperscript{47} George Michels, “The Patriarch’s Rivals: Local Strongmen and the Limits of Church Reform during the Seventeenth Century.” In: \textit{Modernising Muscovy} (see note 8), 317-42.
both the reciprocity of the monastic system, and cementation of the rebellious separatism and independent ethos of the North.

The question of cultural autonomy must be addressed in accounts of agrarian freedom in the pre-Petrine era, an issue closely linked to the role of monasteries. Historians have argued that Orthodoxy was the sole cultural force that unified the myriad of Russian peasants, binding them to the central government. The contemporary Muscovite term for ‘peasant’ was krest’yanin (Christian), illustrating the extent to which Orthodoxy characterised the rural population.\(^{48}\) However, the cultural infrastructure of the North was more complicated. Running parallel with the teachings of Orthodoxy were the entrenched traditions of pagan antiquity, with elaborate ceremonies in honour of forest spirits, and proverbs sanctifying the Earth as “little mother” still exerting influence over the collective consciousness of the Northern peasantry.\(^ {49}\) This affinity with the land emphasised the independence of the households that populated the region, rather than the social hierarchy of Orthodoxy.

**Social Structure of the Peasant Community**

The internal hierarchies of provincial Muscovy raise issues central to agrarian autonomy. With a primarily oral culture, there is a scarcity of resources detailing the inner workings of the peasant community. Not all peasants were indebted to monasteries or private landholders. Particularly populous in the North, the ‘black-ploughing peasants’ lived and worked independent of immediate landlords.\(^ {50}\) The balance of land and labour in this society offers a telling contrast with indentured peasants. The foundational social institution was the mir (peasant commune), which was governed by a village assembly comprised of khoziainy (ruling males) of each household and a starosta (elected village elder).\(^ {51}\) Responsible for collective tax collection, dispute resolution, and land distribution,\(^ {52}\) the mir affirmed the autonomy of the “free peasants,” providing a “buffer between the lord and the peasants.”\(^ {53}\) While communalism characterised village life throughout the state, the Northern khoziainy were retained much of their customary autonomy despite an expanding central government, due to regional isolation, and the entrenched status of the mir.\(^ {54}\)

\(^{48}\) Moon, *Peasantry*, 17.
\(^{49}\) Koslow, 36.
\(^{50}\) Moon, *Peasantry*, 101-6.
\(^{51}\) Koslow, 11-18.
\(^{52}\) Robinson, 10-12.
\(^{53}\) Blum, *Lord*, 156.
\(^{54}\) Moon, *Peasantry*, 199-236.
The foundation of peasant society was the family. Primarily an economic unit, peasant families throughout Muscovy shared the goals of survival and security in a harsh physical environment and taxing social climate. By necessity, Southern peasant families tended to be larger than those in the North, where emphasis lay with individual family units, due to the predominance of household land tenure. Economic independence provides a further reference point for assessing notions of freedom in the wider context. Land was communally owned and annually redistributed among peasant households by the mir, transferring responsibility for cultivation onto the ‘black-ploughing’ peasantry. While the family paid taxes, they were legally recognised as the owners of their produce, a key difference between free peasants and serfs.

Although there was an independent social order outside of officialdom and serfdom, the issue of the mir as constituting a free peasant society persists. During the 1861 Emancipation, Slavophile commentators glorified the peasant commune, pointing to both the Northern free peasants, and the emerging Southern Cossack communities as examples of “constitutional government of the extreme democratic type,” and symbols of a universal agrarian ethos. The mir has also been interpreted as economically and culturally stagnant, impeding rural progress and preserving the economic dependence of the feudal era. Drawing on the Russian proverb “where there is age, there is also law,” notions of social hierarchy were embedded in the ethos of the mir. Grounded in the overarching dominance of wealthy rural families, the absence of individual freedoms resonated throughout the independent household. Absolute familial authority was vested in the khoziain, mirroring tsarist autocracy and reflecting the ingrained patriarchy that underpinned the workings of the ‘free peasant’ system. Contemporary folklore emphasised the desired female attributes of industriousness and obedience, relegating women to a secondary status, and exposing the contrast between macro-level autonomy and individual freedoms.

The village had ways of its own, with a rich diversity of traditions and circumstances shaping both contemporary mentalities and popular memory of the peasantry. As both a political institution and social phenomenon, serfdom

56 Ibid, 158-60.
58 Ibid, 16.
59 Koslow, 16-19.
60 Ibid, 50.
61 Ibid, 49-50.
62 Moon, Peasantry, 199-236.
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illustrates the cultural, environmental and economic variability of the Russian peasantry. Customary freedom presented an ongoing obstacle to feudalism on the frontiers, where the tsarist government had yet to establish itself. While legal and economic restraints restricted peasant freedom nominally, the primary impediment to Northern agrarian autonomy was the peasant community itself. The harsh environment encouraged trade, but also consolidated monastic authority, and the mir shared many fundamental characteristics with tsarist autocracy. Although notions of freedom pervaded the ideology of the frontier, it rarely found expression in any substantive manner.