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MOVING BEYOND APOCALYPSE: PROPHECY AS A POLITICAL ART IN TWENTIETH CENTURY NOVELS FROM ORWELL TO DELILLO, DYSTOPIAN TO POST COLONIAL

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By

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ABSTRACT

MOVING BEYOND APOCALYPSE: PROPHECY AS A POLITICAL ART IN TWENTIETH CENTURY NOVELS FROM ORWELL TO DELILLO, DYSTOPIAN TO POST COLONIAL

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Christine Patricia Cavanaugh

Prophecy is an important theme and trope in twentieth century literature where it is deployed and critiqued as a political art consonant with its theological tropology. A varied and contradictory speech, prophecy moves between interior and exterior truths, subsiding on a tension between perceptible reality and a hidden truth. Prophetic speech is formed by pairs of contradictory qualities: it is word and deed, it is a sign of presence and of absence, it is immediate and yet mediated, it is sudden and also timeless, imminent and immanent, and it is a dialogue as well as a transmitted message. In the matrix of these qualities, many imbalances and combinations proliferate resulting in less authentic variations of prophetic speech. Addressing and critiquing these variations are Robert Penn Warren, who addresses prophetic speech in the nation's founding, Salman Rushdie and Don DeLillo, for whom terrorism is an imitative prophetic gesture, Flannery O'Connor, and Ngugi Wa Thiongo, who proposes a new prophetic speech that defies the old prophetic speech of the colonizer. These novelists engage the political by showing prophetic speech that participates in tyranny or resists tyranny. They both deploy prophetic speech via their narrators or characters, and employ prophetic themes, drawing on the theological tropology of prophecy and the longstanding role of the prophet as social critic. Adhering to

the topic of prophecy are recurrent themes of violence, sacrifice, and scandal and some important *topoi*: the desert, the city, the cave and the house. Prophetic voice, figures, themes, tropes and *topoi* combine variously in these novels to address the political and the way that prophecy builds or destroys the foundations of civil discourses. The importance of this study is to expand scholarly awareness of prophecy in literature beyond the category of the apocalyptic. Thus this study treats George Orwell's *Nineteen Eighty-Four,* which employs a well-known apocalyptic variant of prophecy. This apocalyptic prophecy is imbalanced in its qualities and tends to be unequivocal. Nonetheless, it is important to address apocalyptic prophecy because apocalypticism is a pole for negative critical perception of prophecy in literature. Not to be sequestered as religious theophany or limited to apocalypticism, prophecy is a varied speech that operates as a political art even in secular twentieth century novels.

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Introduction

Following the Trope

Prophetic speech becomes a political trope in an exemplary scene in *Brother to Dragons*, the Robert Penn Warren verse play about the ignoble nephews of Thomas Jefferson. The climactic action of the story is Lilburn Lewis' apprehension for the brutal murder by dismemberment of an adolescent slave. Warren executes this climax with a prophetic speech adapted from the Book of Ezekiel. The sheriff descends upon the Lewis household, master and slaves, after his discovery of a human bone. Confident in the fearful silence of his slaves, Lilburn Lewis mocks them as a cowardly "passel of niggers" (98). But Aunt Cat, his black nanny, speaks and acts out—not directly, but by a masterly indirection: A voice came,

> "high / All old and screechy, like some old scritch-owl, / "Bones will fly up" it scratches. "Bones will rise. I see them bones, they're flyin' to the sky! . . . She fell down on the ground, / A-staring in the sky, like bones was flying. // Then niggers yelling so, and gabbling wild "Them bones!" they yelled, and pointed to the sky. / And one . . . / He ran to the Sheriff, fell down to grab his knees. / "Oh, Lawd," he yelled, "oh, Valley—oh, Jehoshaphat! / "Oh, white folks, save me, I'll show them bones" (98).

Through this prophetic speech, the helpless "passel of niggers" submits Lilburn to the law. In this extraordinary turn in which slave gains ascendancy over master, Aunt Cat's prophesying makes possible the indictment of Lilburn for his crime. Her prophetic word is politically efficacious. The tyrant, the one who rules without laws, she submits to the rule of law through prophetic speech. Warren's passage foregrounds the prophetic word as deed.

This project asks what literary and theological precedents made it possible for Warren to write this scene. Is Warren's use of prophecy exemplary or idiosyncratic? Is there a mechanism of prophetic rebellion? In this and other twentieth century literary texts, why does prophecy appear also as a tool of the kind of tyranny and injustice that John undergoes? In what sense does prophecy purport or attempt to be politically efficacious? How do a variety of twentieth century novelists utilize the qualities of the prophetic word, especially its status as deed, in order to address tyranny? Walter Benjamin scholar Ian Balfour claims that "Prophecy emerges as 'political art,' and the dominant paradigm for this art is the word as deed" (123). How does prophecy emerge as a political art?

This project investigates the way the literary tropology of prophecy renders prophetic speech political. It inherits those methodologies and vocabularies that allow the analysis of sacred text as literature instead of theology, while it also inherits the hermeneutics that was invented for Biblical interpretation: this background makes possible the consideration of speech that claims to be sacred as a trope or set of tropes. But more is required: the literary tropology of prophecy requires a specific methodology because prophetic speech rendered in literature is doubly complex. While tropes are turns from ordinary speech, prophecy is already a speech in motion: prophecy is word and deed, a sign of absence and a sign of presence, a message that is also a dialogue, a sudden manifestation that is nonetheless timelessness and a mediated language that claims to be immediate. Hovering or vacillating between these oppositions, this

kind of speech is dynamic and elusive. It does not come to a standstill when deployed in literature.

Axiomatic for this project is the statement that prophetic language consists of an "ensemble of contradictory qualities from which it draws the extent of its meanings" (Blanchot 83). The method of this project is to define prophetic speech via its pairs of contradictory qualities and to use the resulting definition to analyze the way that prophetic speech in literature is political. The method is inspired by Blanchot's insistence on the tension of these pairs, a tension that renders prophetic speech equivocal instead of univocal. If univocal means "having a single, sharply defined sense or nature; unambiguous" it also offers the happy coincidence of its pun on voice (*Webster's*). Prophetic speech is a speech of several voices, not one voice: by nature it claims to be both the voice of the prophet and the voice of God, the gods, or some equivalent concept. *Nabi*, the Hebrew word for prophet, means "the speaker of Yahweh", which is sometimes (as in the case of Samuel) likened to a seer (International 1).[1] The message and the messenger are also components of Greek prophecy: "Prophecy is literally 'enthusiastic' in the etymological sense that the god enters the prophet to speak in his or her voice" (Balfour 40).[2]

Prophetic speech is also equivocal instead of univocal because many of its fundamental features are contradictory. The method of depicting each quality of prophecy in light of its opposite could be called a hermeneutics of opposition.

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[1] Nabi also has a broader sense of "poet or musician under divine inspiration" (Balfour 69).

[2] In the Greek, prophet is prophetes, in Latin propheta. Robert Lowth translates nabi always as prophet, while Maurice Blanchot warns us not to equate nabi with prophetes.

This method is exemplified in Martin Heidegger's definitions of *aletheia* in terms of *lethe* in the *Parmenides*.

The urgency of examining prophecy's contradictory features lies in this problem: when the tension of these pairs slackens, prophecy may serve tyranny, violence, or terrorism. Where there are mutations of prophetic speech that align with tyranny, some imbalance rocks these contradictory pairs: presence privileged and absence forgotten, transmission or mediation emphasized over dialogue, etc. The matrix of contradictory qualities can produce different mutations of prophetic speech that alter the politics of prophecy and its ideally subversive relation with tyranny. These contradictions are all present within prophetic speech, and are necessary to it: the tension of these pairs maintains the shape of prophetic speech. Without that tension, the tropes of prophetic speech both turn and tilt. The variations and distortions of these tilted tropes are an important part of the tropology of prophecy: they belong among the ways in which prophecy is a political art, driven by the word as deed.

Among those who study the intersection of prophecy and politics there is a convention of placing politics on a continuum from secular to religious, in which the totalitarian state (with its messianic fervor and leader-worship) is religious and consequently associated with the prophetic, which is reduced to theophanic attestation. Lee Horsley in *Fictions of Power in English Literature* defines the political spectrum as understood broadly today: it ranges from pluralist to monist and libertarian to authoritarian. In this framework the first category is secular and the second category is religious. So the messianic figures of Hitler and Stalin

would be signs of a barbaric, religious, traditional society.[3] "Political scientists . . . tend to think in terms of a continuum—placing regimes, for example, on a liberal-totalitarian or pluralist-monist continuum" which also include the opposition between "secular-libertarian and "collective-sacred" models (Horsley 3). Horsley cites Erik Voegelin's *Die Politschen Religionen* as a guide for such an approach. The recent book *New Political Religions, or an Analysis of Modern Terrorism* by Bryan Cooper aligns terrorism with the apocalyptic, indicting prophecy as bad politics. But the basic division between religious and secular obscures the prophetic in secular societies and in novels about secular societies—for instance, the prophecy of nuclear apocalypse that dominates the cultural landscape of the United States in Don DeLillo's *Underworld*. The unequivocally binary approach fails to recognize the equivocal, adaptable nature of prophetic speech, and thus is of limited usefulness in apprehending the subtleties of prophecy and the political in literature.[4]

In order to approach prophecy via its contradictory qualities, I must address the most basic misunderstanding of prophecy as mere prediction that Samuel Johnson offered in his eighteenth century dictionary. Johnson's definition outlines unequivocal prophetic speech *par excellence*, and it continues

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[3] The idea of the prophet as a charismatic personality makes possible the totalitarian leader cult. This glorification of personality is alien to the Hebrew tradition of the prophet. Gerhard von Rad warns that "Even the idea of 'prophetic personalities' which so readily comes to our minds is very far from being what the sources themselves had to offer us" (17). Rad points to the way that prophets like Hosea obscure rather than reveal themselves as personalities. This approach to prophecy and politics as chiefly a function of messianic leadership we will dismiss early in favor of more important misunderstandings of prophecy.

[4] Ironically, Voegelin's antipositivist *New Science of Politics* seeks transcendental foundation for politics.

as the conventional definition. The definition of mantic speech as foretelling not only occludes the contradictory qualities of prophecy that render its politics tenuous, but also it obscures the basic political involvement of the prophet in society.

Hebrew prophecy is not primarily a matter of foretelling. Prediction is secondary; "Westermann has shown how the lament, the prayer, and the threat are as characteristic of prophetic discourse as are the prediction and the oracle" (Balfour 5). Claus Westermann's work on the Biblical forms of prophetic speech, such as the lament, the prayer, the threat or announcement of ill and the conditional and unconditional judgment speeches permit us to see that the Biblical prophets tried to effect social change (5). Louis Martz explains that the Hebrew prophet's "mind is upon the present" (3). Similarly, pastoral theologian and ethicist Walter Brueggemann examines prophecy as a ministry in society. Brueggemann describes Biblical prophecies as attempts to uncover "the real deathliness that hovers over [. . .] and gnaws within" society, where it is hidden by ignorance and indifference (50). Prophets bring "to public expression those very fears and terrors that have been denied" and occluded from public discourse (50). The static definition of prophecy simply as prediction could not account for Aunt Cat's political deployment of prophecy in Warren's scene.

Prophecy would be a poor political art if it were mere prediction of the future. Instead, it shakes the assumptions of the political order by unsettling the present. When Gale Carrithers insists that "the prophet is far more iconoclastic than theophanic," he points to the way that prophecy unsettles the givens of a

society (144). Maurice Blanchot in the essay "Prophetic Speech" in *The Book to Come* explains that the error of reducing prophesy to prediction is a qualitative misunderstanding of the nature of prophetic speech rather than a quantitative failure to account for its variety. Instead of being language about the future, prophecy "is a dimension of language that engages it in relationships with time that are much more important than the simple discovery of certain events to come," which comprise a future "that happens in the ordinary course of events and finds expression in the regularity of language" (79). Instead, "prophetic speech announces an impossible future, or makes the future it announces, because it announces it, something impossible, a future one would not know how to live and that must upset all the sure givens of existence" (79). The definition of prophecy as prediction of the future ignores the unsettling effect of mantic speech on society and thus obscures the way that prophecy is political.

Prophecy is concerned with the present, and it involves itself politically through iconoclasm and social critique. The ethical involvement of prophecy in society through critique and iconoclasm is complicated by the tension of the conflicting qualities of prophetic speech. This involvement can become inimical: the qualities out of balance can send prophecy into the hands of tyranny. Consequently, it is not easy to categorize prophecy with good politics or bad politics.

The same cliffhanging struggle between oppositions inherent in mantic speech finds expression in themes that are equally agonistic: scandal, violence, sacrifice and betrayal. For instance, the typically fundamentalist effort to

interpret sacred texts as unequivocal and apply them as normative overlooks that "Prophetic speech is always scandalous: the most persistent traits of prophetic existence [are] scandal and argument" (Blanchot 81). Yahweh's command to Hosea to marry a prostitute is "not an image," therefore the scandal and degradation of the command are not mitigated (82). The speech of prophecy gives scandal as well: "You have played the harlot with many lovers; and would you return to me? says the Lord" (Jeremiah 3:1). When prophecies scandalize the public or the king with accusations of wrongdoing, the prophet sometimes endures the accusation of betrayal. The content of a prophecy can threaten society or its leadership: but simply the ability to prophesy can also be treated as a threat. Jacob's eleven sons became jealous of the twelfth, Joseph, in part because he began to have prophetic dreams. "They only hated him the more" and conspired to throw him in a pit to die of exposure in the wilderness: the issue of prophecy divided these progenitors of the twelve tribes of Israel (Gen 37:5). The prophet risks violence: "Your own sword devoured your prophet" (Jere 2:31). Sacrifice and violence are often referenced in judgment speeches such as this segment from Isaiah: "For the Lord will execute judgment by fire . . . And those slain by the Lord will be many" (66:16). A dominant type for the theme of sacrifice is the motif of the ram in the thicket, the sacrifice substituted for Isaac when God asked Abraham to slaughter his only son. In Christian theology the Isaac is a type of Christ and Christ an antitype of Isaac. In Islam this sacrificial event has an important feast day on the calendar: the Feast of Sacrifice, or Id al-Adha. The importance of this motif for the three major religious typologies

deriving from the Pentateuch cannot be overstated. The agonistic themes of betrayal, violence, and sacrifice and the accompanying motifs pervade these prophetic traditions.

The tension of opposites within prophecy is also expressed in the oppositional *topoi* (in the literal sense of places) of the desert, the city, and the cave. These *topoi* refer to a basic conflict between inside and outside, a conflict that Ruth Padel explores in *In and Out of the Greek Mind*. She raises the important point that prophecy in the sense of seeing and reading signs depends on the idea that truth is hidden within nature: the movement of birds and lightening. A prophetic sign is just such a collusion between the natural world and cosmic truth: the lightening is a signifier, the failure of a king is the signified and together they make a divine Sign. The image of the interiority of truth is easier to see in the Greek practice of extispicy in which the intestines of an animal are consulted as a source of auspices. The vital classical motif of the snake in the house draws on both interiority and exteriority: *chthonic* forces intrude into domesticity. This motif suggests a conflict between inside and outside wherein prophecy can move to a position that spans them both, and thus deliver truth to the light of day. The cave in which the *sybil* hides is another expression of the interiority of prophetic truth. Jonah's enclosure in the belly of the whale is a Biblical example of the prophet suffering an enclosure similar to the cave, as is Daniel in the lion's den.

The desert, on the other hand, is a *topos* that is outside: outside of domesticity and outside of civilization as represented by the *topos* of the city.

"Outside" is "where one cannot remain, since to be there is to be always already outside;" in this outside are "only primal powerlessness, wretchedness of hunger and cold" and wandering instead of production (Blanchot 80). There, people are "stripped of their power and separated from the possible;" consequently, they "exist with each other in the bare relationship in which they had been in the desert and which is the desert itself" (81).[5] The structures of society crumble. A crucial motif that emphasizes the wretchedness and powerlessness of the outcast in the desert is the conflict between Isaac, the son of Abraham's wife Sarah, and Ishmael, the son of Hagar, the servant girl of Abraham and Sarah. Because of the jealousy of Sarah, Ishmael was cut off from the dynasty of his father and banished with his mother into the desert.

Maurice Blanchot theorizes that the desert is also a place where prophecy and its fulfillment are possible. Absence is a condition that shapes or allows prophecy, and the desert draws the prophet into this condition. John the Baptist, who lived on wild honey and locusts, exemplifies the condition of the prophet as exterior to civilization. The attributes of the desert are emptiness, desolation (lack of civilization), and hostility to life. An important feature of the desert is that it is difficult to survive there. The withdrawal into the desert is no romantic pastoral retreat into a sympathetic and wholesome nature. Far from it: in Jeremiah, the desert is often mentioned as part of a judgment speech, as in "Her cities have become an object of horror, a parched land and a desert" (51:43). In Isaiah, the

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[5] Blanchot's idea of the outside is comparable to Deleuze' and Guatteri's *Anti-Oedipus* in that both emphasize orphans and nomads as examples of how to "shake off the Oedipal yoke and the effects of power" (xxi).

dryness of the desert can be reversed by Yahweh: "rivers in the desert" (Isaiah 43:19). Desert is sometimes used synonymously with wilderness, as in "He found him in the desert land, And the howling waste of a wilderness" (DE 32:10). The *topos* of the desert marks the quality of absence inherent in prophecy.

Herbert Schneidau in *Sacred Discontent: The Bible and Western Tradition* regards these *topoi* as foundational for the development of knowledge as objectivity in the West. He suggests that the intellectual tradition of the West proceeded from the Biblical experience in which wilderness and civilization are opposed. "The prophets associate themselves with the wilderness", says Schneidau, citing Amos, Elijah (130). The wilderness is essentially alien to civilization and its assumptions and also intractable. Biblical prophets alienated themselves from nature, beginning a reversal of the "savage familiarization" that characterized a mythic kind of knowledge that endowed everything with immutable meaning (19). This reversal, this demythologization, permitted the development of scientific objectivity and other discourses based on alienating oneself from the object at hand. Thus as a speech of alienation it provides "knowledge by revelation of meaninglessness" (the emptiness of culture, its vanity before Yahweh) (26). Prophetic conviction of meaninglessness and the vanity of culture limits, or interrupts the "'totalizing' extent of savage meaningfulness," confronting the "'intransigent refusal on the part of the savage mind to allow anything human (or even living) to remain alien to it'" (Levi Strauss *The Savage Mind* qutd in Schneidau). The flow of cultural meaning breaks on the prophetic pronouncement of vanity and of apocalypse. Schneidau's account is

useful in that it emphasizes the opposition between city and desert, giving prophecy a stake in this battle.

The starkness of prophecy's *topoi* and the agonism of its themes and motifs show prophecy torn between its contradictory qualities. These contradictory qualities are mediation and immediacy, absence and presence, word and deed, imminence and immanence, dialogue and transmission and suddenness and timelessness. The foundation of this struggle is the duality of prophecy as word and deed. The prophetic word has been regarded as deed in many cultures. In *The Masters of Truth in Archaic Greece* classicist Marcel Detienne details the way in which archaic Greek civilization regarded the prophetic word as efficacious. Mantic speech carried a radical power far beyond ordinary speech. It was regarded as enactment. The words of priests or prophets, bards and kings were constitutive and had access to a different register of reality. In the *Iliad* Achilles' anxiousness to be sung by the bards proceeded from the belief that the poet's speech affected reality: it would give him a permanent place in reality.

For the Biblical prophets also the word is deed. Gerhard von Rad speaks of a "conception of language we can call dynamistic, since here a word (or a symbol or symbolic action) is thought to possess a power which extends beyond the realm of the mind and may be effective in the spatial and material world also" (61). In this conception of language the prophetic word manifests change. "Israel took as her starting point her conviction that the word possessed creative power;" this power could shake kings or crown them (65). In the Hebrew tradition

the prophet's words come from Yahweh; these words are "not 'empty,' but effective" (55).

The prophetic word is deed in another sense. The Biblical prophets speak in actions that match their words, as if the divine word is something immediately incarnated in their lives. When Blanchot equates prophecy with "living mimicry," he refers not just to the words repeated in the dialogue with God, but to the way that prophets physically carry out or incarnate these words. Jeremiah, for instance, "does not content himself with saying: you will be bent under the yoke; he gets hold of some cords and goes under a wooden yoke, a fire yoke" (84). Hosea, of course, marries a prostitute in accord with the divine instructions to incarnate the message of the prophecy. Ezekiel 4 offers more examples of living mimicry: Ezekiel lives out the impending punishment of Israel—being tied up, burning his hair etc. In the prophetic mode word and deed are unified.

The unity of word and deed in prophetic speech is another way of saying that the prophetic word is immediate. It is immediate in the sense of instant. It is an action instead of a communication, and in that sense does not proceed through a medium. The prophet is in direct contact. He claims that his words come directly from the source—a divinity or a transcendent plane of truth beyond all speculation. In this sense the prophetic word is immediate: it comes directly from the source. Yet the prophet is by nature a mediator in that he is a messenger. Balfour mentions this mediating function, but emphasizes the immediacy of prophecy. "In relation to all other human discourse, prophecy is marked by its immediacy," because while the prophet is "precisely a mediator,"

yet in his "translation from the divine to the human discourse that is prophecy," "nothing gets lost in the translation" (8). (*The Satanic Verses* addresses precisely this claim of immediacy.) Thus, prophetic speech is dual. It is both mediated and immediate, a "mediated immediacy" which "comes to emblematize the highest and perhaps most definitive language" (8). For this reason Benjamin (and Balfour on his trail) uses prophecy as a model for rethinking "the relations of word and deed" (8). Because prophecy connects word and deed, it is a locus for the study of language.

Prophetic speech needs a mediator, a prophet in the sense of messenger, because of the absence or non-appearance of God. If the divine were constantly visible and unproblematically available, there would be no need for prophecy. The "absence of the divine face" is the basis of the need for prophecy (Balfour 67). This absence "necessitates the use of figurative language by the Biblical poets;" prophetic language must figure or give a face to that which is absent and unseen (67). Prophetic speech employs the "language of the sublime," which indexes negatively something before which knowledge fails. The result is that "the prophetic word is typically ambiguous in its very structure" because of the ambiguous position of the prophet as both "vehicle of divine presence and the sign of its absence" (68). Not simply theophanic, prophetic speech is in part a sign of the absence of the divine. This sense of absence is crucial to the whole activity of prophesying. As a precondition of prophecy the absence of the divine face must not be overlooked among the issues connected to prophecy. The issue of absence becomes important to question of whether tyranny lurks in

some kinds of prophecy. Where there is a refusal to accept the sign of absence, that absence is covered up by legalism, or a disproportionate emphasis on laws which can lead to the kind of intellectual tyranny called fundamentalism. This damaging refusal to face the issue of absence in prophecy is linked to the misunderstanding of prophecy as factical prediction. Prophet figures and auditors who deny the condition of absence may demand instant factical fulfillment of prophecy. They overlook the way that divine absence requires prophecy to be mediated and exalt its immediacy.

For Blanchot there is a certain elemental encounter in the prophetic dialogue, and this encounter happens purely within language: "there is no contact of thoughts or translation into words of the inexpressible divine thought, only exchange of speech" (Blanchot 83). Prophetic language is an encounter. Encounter and relationship form prophetic speech: "the relationship of God to a man by a speech that is repeated and yet entirely other [. . .] introduces into prophetic language an ensemble of contradictory qualities from which it draws the extent of its meanings" (83). The contradictory qualities of prophecy as dialogue and monologue are formative of the other contradictory qualities that make prophetic speech equivocal.

Prophecy, often regarded as a monologue by the prophet or by his or her divine source, is also a dialogue. Blanchot gives primacy to the dialogue that takes place between the prophet and God as a dialogue. The repetition of speech between God and the prophet, because it is not always perspicuous, makes the message content secondary. The repetition shows language to be

primarily productive of relation: it juxtaposes the divinity and the prophet. The content of prophecy is not as important as the ritual signified by its form. Blanchot's argues that "the prophetic word is originally a dialogue" (Blanchot qutd in Balfour 5). It is a dialogue in an "essential way, to the extent that [the prophet] only repeats the word entrusted to him, an affirmation in which an originary word finds expression, one which has nonetheless already been said" (5). Paradoxically, "that [repetition] is its originality. It is primary, but before it there is always a word to which it responds in repeating it" (5). The dialogic element of prophecy is like the game of a young child who is able to speak in perspicuous sentences, but still explores other powers of language:

> "Mama?"
> "Yes?"
> "Mama?"
> "Yes?"
> "Mama?"
> "Yes."
> "*Ma-ma*!"

This ritual emphasizes bare dialogue where repetition and response matter more than content. Samuel, the son of Eli begins his prophetic vocation with just such a bare dialogue:

> "Samuel was lying down within the temple of the Lord, where the ark of God was. Then the Lord called, 'Samuel! Samuel!' and he said, 'Here I am!' and ran to Eli, and said, 'Here I am, for you called me.' But he said, 'I did not call; lie down again.' So he went and lay down. And the Lord called again, 'Samuel!' And Samuel arose and went to Eli, and said, 'Here I am, for you called me.' But he said, 'I did not call my son; Lie down again.' Now Samuel did not yet know the Lord, and the word of the Lord had not yet been revealed to him . . . And the Lord called Samuel again the third time. And he arose and went to Eli, and said, 'Here I am, for you called me.' Then Eli perceived that the Lord was calling the boy. Therefore Eli said to Samuel, 'Go, lie down; and if he calls you, you shall say, "Speak,

> Lord, for thy servant hears"' . . . And the Lord came and stood forth, calling as at other times, 'Samuel! Samuel! Samuel!' And Samuel said 'Speak, for thy servant hears' (1 Samuel 3: 3-11).

This passage, with its repetition in the calling of the prophet and in its lack of content in the exchange of speech between divinity and prophet emphasizes the essential dialogicity of prophecy that is always prior to its message. In this passage (prophetic) language communicates not content, but communication as hailing. Prophetic language puts forward this dialogue as an action. While the passage elevates language, it also suggests that Samuel must proceed from a bare point of poverty of information and poverty of relationship with Yahweh; he does not know who calls him and he must be taught what to say in response. The chapter's opening accounts for this ignorance: "And the word of the Lord was rare in those days; there was no frequent vision" (1 Sam 3:1). The society which has forgotten mantic speech must begin in this state of absence and ignorance and proceed through the pure mechanism of the dialogue itself.

A similar repetition occurs in Abraham's dialogue with Yahweh in the Book of Genesis over the imminent destruction of a corrupt city, but this time accompanied by persuasion. Abraham asks

> "'Wilt thou indeed destroy the righteous with the wicked? Suppose there are fifty righteous within the city; wilt thou then destroy the place and not spare it for the fifty righteous who are in it? Far be it from thee to do such a thing' . . . And the Lord said, 'If I find at Sodom fifty righteous in the city, I will spare the whole place for their sake.' Abraham answered, 'Behold, I have taken upon myself to speak to the Lord, I who am but dust and ashes. Suppose five of the fifty righteous are lacking? Wilt thou destroy the whole city for lack of five?' And he said, 'I will not destroy it if I find forty-five there.' Again he spoke to him, and said, 'Suppose forty are found there.' He answered, 'For the sake of the forty I will not do it.' Then he said, 'Oh let not the Lord be angry, and I will speak. Suppose

thirty are found there.' He answered, 'I will not do it, if I find thirty there'" (Gen 18:22).

Abraham repeats the appeal for twenty, and then for ten, and Yahweh repeats the same response. Here the content of the prophecy is not so important as its utterance, its repetition, and the consequent dialogue of affirmation that it forms. The repetition in the dialogue signals the dialogue itself, overriding the importance of the content and thus displacing the notion of the utility of language.

Benjamin connects prophecy and politics via language. Insofar as prophecy's effectiveness is not in "transmitting content," it resembles language, which to be "effective" will do so "'through the purest disclosure of its dignity and its nature'" (9; Benjamin qutd in Balfour 9). Benjamin maintains "resistance to a certain instrumentalization of language," an instrumentalization that he witnessed in the politics of Europe between the wars. Rejecting notions of language as a means to an end, he "is suspicious of writing that aims to be effective, to be related to action as cause to effect" (10). Instead of being a cause, language itself has the potential to be efficacious. It is efficacious only when it communicates not content (to be used toward some end), but "itself" (8).[6]

The idea of "language as action" finds an exemplar in the prophetic word as deed (11). Balfour cites the correspondence of Benjamin with Martin Buber, who invited him to write in a political magazine in order to combat fascism and antisemitism. Benjamin refused, not because he was indifferent to fascism and antisemitism, but because he did not regard activist political writing as more

[6] On this point Balfour feels obliged to defend Benjamin from the charges of formalism and logocentrism.

effective than his own work. In his interpretation of Benjamin, Balfour goes so far as to suggest that "all writing that matters may be prophetic" (18). To prioritize prophetic writing in this way is to take a position on how language effects change in the world. Having more in common with Heidegger than with Richard Rohrty, the position of Balfour and Benjamin is distinctly anti-pragmatic. They oppose a model wherein change occurs primarily through persuasive debate over policy, manifested and executed in the visible structure of power of the state. To say that "all writing that matters may be prophetic" is not to suggest that the state does not matter or that democratic discourse is without value, but that prophetic speech can change the consciousness of what is possible and desirable for society. It is *prior* to discourse.

Gale Carrithers proposes the priority of prophetic language before discourse in *Mumford, Eiseley, Tate: Watchers in the Night*. He identifies cultural critics (Lewis Mumford, Loren Eiseley and Allen Tate) who consistently used a prophetic mode in their essays in cultural criticism. Carrithers claims that prophetic writing is political, echoing "all writing that matters may be prophetic." In order to make his claim about the prophetic speech as a political activity, he contradicts Edward Said's definition of political writing. In *The World the Text and the Critic*, Said maintains that among "oppositional, or avant-garde literary theory" "nowhere . . . will one encounter a serious study of what authority is, either with reference to the way that authority is carried historically and circumstantially from the State down into a society saturated with authority of one sort or another, or with reference to the actual workings of culture, the role of

intellectuals, institutions, and establishments" (172). Carrithers objects that "precisely those workings and roles concern Mumford, Tate, and Eiseley, who typically meet them at the earlier stages of the etiology of false authority or misapplied power and articulate what they find in tropes—sometimes implicit—other than Said's 'from the State down'" (x). Prophecy figures tyranny in tropes other than "from the State down."

At stake is the question how does prophetic speech alter discourse? In part prophetic speech alters discourse by interrupting it by means of the quality of suddenness. Blanchot explains that the use of the future tense endows prophecies with urgency and suddenness, a quality of radical interruption: "So prediction, using as support the anticipatory intensity of diction, seems to keep trying finally to produce its rupture" (80). Frederick J. Hoffman suggests that "A sudden break in the routine challenges the fullest energy of man's power of adjustment. Suddenness is a quality of violence. It is a sign of force breaking through the design established to contain it" (Hoffman qutd in Muller 79). The interruption of this design destabilizes society and the present. Blanchot continues that "When speech becomes prophetic, it is not the future that is given, it is the present that is taken away, and with it any possibility of a firm, stable, lasting presence" (79). It is not weak social structures that face annihilation, but the most solid: "Even the Eternal City and the indestructible Temple are all of a sudden—unbelievably—destroyed" (79). When the prophet speaks, social stability falters and social production grinds to a halt.

The ambiguity of prophetic texts as generated by figurative language and the occasional use of past tense to indicate the future (and vice versa), allows prophetic texts to resist being confined to one moment (Balfour 3). It is difficult to establish which events a predictive prophetic text refers to and whether they have occurred. Thus they can remain dormant with the potential to disrupt again. Frank Kermode notes the way that by and large prophecies cannot be disconfirmed; "The image of the end can never be *permanently falsified*" (17).

The announcement of judgment and the end suspends normal time in which social order is meted out. The prophet can revoke the suspension so that time resumes, but is altered. The addition of the qualifier "nevertheless" in the contingent announcement of judgment, Blanchot explains, restores time: "when everything is impossible, when the future, given over to the fire, burns, when there is no more rest except in the land of midnight, then prophetic speech, which tells of the impossible future, also tells of the 'nonetheless' that breaks the impossible and restores time" (81). The terrible deprivation or destruction in which God retreats into "Not-God for you" and the people are "Not-[His]-People" accompanies "nonetheless" a rebuilding, new blessing and new relationship (My people, children and father). Blanchot says in effect that prophecy destabilizes the present; because this destabilization interrupts production and briefly contradicts the givens of a society, it is one of the primary ways that prophecy is political.

The absence of the "nonetheless" with its rebuilding and new blessing is an important feature of apocalypticism, a manifestation of the contradictory

prophetic qualities in imbalance. Suddenness and immediacy are favored over timelessness, and a focus on deed diminishes the importance of prophetic speech as word. In its eagerness for a concrete manifestation, apocalypticism forgets that the word as deed is still a word, and that its power lies therein. This imbalance of the contradictory qualities of prophecy has its own literary history and a particular place in twentieth-century literature. Frank Lentricchia, Jane Goldman and Bruce Comens among others have identified a strain of apocalypticism in literary modernism. Lentricchia explains that because modernists regard as a losing battle the promotion of the individual and the values of freedom and originality over and against the culture of the masses, they "tend to be apocalypticists" (290). For certain authors like Eliot, the apocalyptic impulse is not so much a belief in an absolute end after which history does not continue. After all, his characters inhabit the Waste Land. Desolate as it is, life continues in it. But the man who lives in the waste land is akin to Nietzsche's Last Man. Apocalypticism signals not so much the absolute end of time as the end of everything valuable with no hope for something better, with an occlusion of values. The apocalypticism of the modernists was political in that apocalypse was a model or trope for representing or thinking about the direction of world history, the political situation of modern man in the twentieth century, and the possibilities for freedom or tyranny in a postindustrial culture. This attitude tended to be more characteristic of the high modernists than the low. Ezra Pound's participation in vorticism, with its love of destructive violence, is an example of the apocalyptic impulse at work in high modernism. But

apocalypticism is present in low modernist works as well. Nathanael Wests' riots and the emblematized in the main Tod's painting "The Burning of Los Angeles" in *Day of the Locust* is an example. The apocalyptic impulse is present in or even dominates certain canonical modernist texts by T.S. Eliot, Gertrude Stein, Richard Wright, W.B. Yeats, James Joyce, Virginia Woolf, and W.H. Auden and Wyndham Lewis.

The trope of apocalypse in modernist literature actually exhibits conflicts between the features of prophecy and the values of modernism. "Key value terms in the modernist lexicon" are incompatible with basic features of prophecy: "original, creative, individual, free" (Lentricchia 288). Prophetic speech, because it is messenger speech, is not original, creative, or individual. Least of all is it free, as the Stranger argues in *The Violent Bear it Away*. These conflicts between apocalypticism and the category of messenger speech are a sample of the contradictory qualities of prophecy in imbalance. Apocalypse in modernism is an important instance of a prophetic trope at work in twentieth century literature. However, apocalypticism is only an instance—not the whole—of prophetic speech at work in literature. Other strains of prophecy in literature proceeding from other balances and imbalances of prophecy's contradictory qualities contribute to the "political art" at work in twentieth century literature.

Brother to Dragons sets apocalypticism against a skeptical response to apocalypticism, a response that is important to the use of prophetic speech in literature. The coincidence of the New Madrid earthquake—the worst in the history of North America—with Lilburne Lewis' bloody crime suggests to Mrs.

Lewis that the event is a judgment. Letitia Lewis claims that at the time of the earthquake she "prayed for the End" as "folks named the End of Time," and, in an apocalyptic mood, the Mississipi River flowed backwards. RPW (the initials are Warren's) rebukes her, saying "It takes something more to bring the End of Time / Than that Roman circus in your meat-house" (43). She repeats again that she "prayed / For the End of Time," and RPW advances the theory that "each man has / A different set of well-fondled reasons / To make any hour seem perfectly made to order / For God's wrath" (44). RPW mocks the tendency to apocalypticism, and denies a simplistic relationship between prophecy and the punishment of tyranny. RPW's remark signals a (literary) critique of the apocalyptic impulse, a critique that is carried through in other novels that also employ non-apocalyptic prophetic speech.

The nonapocalyptic prophetic may in certain cases be a response to the apocalyptic impulse, as with RPW's response to Letitia. The skepticism about apocalypse exhibited by RPW is imbued with a sense of evil as commonplace (as well as with eschatological modesty) in both the sense of being unremarkable and of being pervasive. For certain thinkers in the twentieth century, as for RPW, the apocalyptic impulse was mitigated or contradicted by a sense of historical anticlimax; Hannah Arendt magnified the anticlimax of the holocaust, itself an apocalyptic undertaking, in the trial of Adolf Eichmann. Her concept of the banality of evil in *Eichmann in Jerusalem* is a sample of a postapocalyptic, which I mean more in the sense of "after the *belief* in apocalypse as a dominant model of history" than in the sense of "after the apocalypse." After the smoke of

the gas ovens cleared, all Arendt found behind it was the small mind of a bureaucrat of limited imagination inclined to platitudes. One can call postapocalyptic this response to the apocalyptic impulse.

This postapocalyptic strain is not *de facto* anti-prophetic. In certain cases novels that employ prophetic speech also exemplify a postapocalyptic strain. The nature of prophecy as equivocal, as composed of contradictory qualities, allows for a critique of apocalypse from within prophetic speech. RPW, in company with the postapocalyptic novelists, does not reject *all* prophetic speech.

The postapocalyptic response is worthy of study in twentieth century literature, especially as it reveals a political response to the conditions of the times. This response becomes important for the literary treatment of cultural recoveries from slavery, the First World War, the cold war, and more recently terrorism, which has become a dark presence in American and European political and cultural consciousness. I would argue that the postapocalyptic response is as important as the apocalyptic. In contemporary literature that treats terrorism, the postapocalyptic strain is possibly *more* important than the apocalyptic. Terrorists' appropriation of apocalyptic rhetoric with religious and prophetic resonances has raised the stakes on the use of prophetic speech as a whole by implicating prophecy in acts of violence. The presence of the idea of apocalypse in politics and in the international cultural climate has been answered by a postapocalyptic strain in literature. Salman Rushdie, for instance, scrutinizes terrorism and prophetic speech in *The Satanic Verses*. He does so with skepticism and a sense of irony. But he also uses such a variety of prophetic

voices that the reader is not permitted to reject prophetic speech out of hand as a bad trope with bad politics. Studying the equivocal nature of prophecy clears the way for an understanding of the various ways that prophecy is a political art. I have chosen for this project twentieth century texts that orient us in the dialogue between apocalyptic and postapocalyptic responses to the events of the century as well as texts that illustrate the different ways that prophecy is political.

RPW's belief that evil or tyranny is commonplace challenges utopia and dystopia as models for political knowledge. For RPW, tyranny and evil are not imminent—about to happen in one overwhelming historical manifestation to end all others. Rather they are immanent—always with us. In this regard the postdystopian in literature is similar to what I have termed the postapocalyptic. The contrast between the dystopian novel and the postdystopian is not that the first has a stronger belief in the prevalence of tyranny, but that the first anticipates tyranny as imminent and the second observes that tyranny is immanent. George Orwell offers us an example of apocalyptic prophecy in his dystopian novel *Nineteen Eighty-four*.

Nineteen Eighty-four, like most of the classic dystopian novels of the West, is written in a prophetic voice, and thus it foregrounds the prophetic qualities of suddenness and interruption in order to achieve a political critique. In using predictions about the future in order to rebuke social injustice in the present, the dystopian novelists engage in the same social-political work as the Biblical prophets. The dystopian chapter establishes the way that prophecy is concerned with the extremes of utopia and dystopia and the basic ways that it

can be political: in the service of the regime and against the regime. However crass and obvious a utilization of prophecy, totalitarian propaganda and messianic leadership force us to ask what about prophecy makes it amenable to the work of tyranny. Via this question the chapter introduces the sinister potential of prophecy that proceeds from mantic speech as instituted in archaic Greece. The regime depicted in *Nineteen Eighty-four* revives prophecy in order to appropriate the all-encompassing political power found in these Greek roots of prophecy.

Warren's *Brother to Dragons* (the 1975 version) confronts the sinister possibilities of prophecy, especially as they juxtapose with prophecy's role in political founding. The verse play proffers the word as deed as an efficacious way that prophecy fights tyranny and achieves justice, exploring the possibility for healing of national memory of slavery via anamnesia. On this point there is critical consensus: "Brother to Dragons is, critics agree, an act of moral accounting, an attempt to balance the books on two hundred years of American experience since the Declaration" (Grimshaw 126). In the relationships depicted between Ishey and Lilburne and between Jefferson and Meriwether Lewis, the verse play deploys the sinister possibilities or dark underside of the word as deed via the themes of violence and mental betrayal. Warren works prophecy into the play through the themes of violence and sacrifice, attended by allusions to archaic practices of divination like extispicy. The theme of sacrifice conjoins the *topoi* of the desert and the city, launching the thesis that something within prophecy opposes civilization and the sacrifices and dynasties that permit it. The

desire for dynasty plays out here between Jefferson and Meriwether in a way that employs the Abraham and Isaac motif as well as the Isaac and Ishmael conflict. Prophecy's opposition to dynastic desire emerges in more character parallels to Isaac and Ishmael in the other primary texts. Of the texts examined in the study, this verse play presents the most complex, thorough and multivalent deployment of the tropes of prophecy.

Flannery O'Connor's *The Violent Bear it Away* is a window into the mind of the prophet: it privies us to the calling of the prophet, his decision to reject or receive the call, his desire for autonomy, his possibilities for freedom, his sense of absence and lack, and his internal conflict between his calling and the values of civilization. Young Tarwater encounters, and invests himself in, the notion that God, the divine originator of the prophetic message, is a tyrant, and that everything proceeding from the message is oppressive. He confronts the possibility that prophecy itself is tyrannical. Three dialogues, between Tarwater and the Old Man, Tarwater and Rayber, and Tarwater and the strangers (culminating in the rapist), assert that prophecy is enslaving and ought not to be undertaken. On the level of language, the stranger seems to suggest that any definition of language that allows for the notion of the word as deed proceeding from dialogicity is dangerous to Tarwater, or the one called to be a prophet. O'Connor gives us the thesis that the prophet proceeds from the margins of society and returns to the desert or wilderness. As the title indicates, the novel confronts violence and the prophetic quality of suddenness. The origins of this violence are multiple. As readers see violence committed against the mind and

person of the prophet, they also see violence committed by the prophet. The theme of sacrifice shows its link to prophecy as O'Connor depicts the prophet identifying which sacrifices his society demands. The prophet's insight into the hidden evil in society identifies the victim of the sacrifice. In this complicated deployment of the motif of the ram in the thicket (the directive that Abraham sacrifice Isaac) O'Connor infers that the prophet in the Christian tradition offers prophecy as a substitute for the sacrifice that society demands.

Ngugi Wa Thiongo's *Devil on the Cross* employs a prophetic mode of narration in a postcolonial analysis of the ills of a society and its possibility for defeating tyrannical rule. In this novel the prophetic potential of the oppressed and marginalized person is actualized by several of the issues surrounding prophecy: suddenness; and dialogue and mediation, where dialogue is blurred with monologue and mediation with immediacy. The distinction of Ngugi's prophecy is that it moves up from below instead of down from above, thus appropriating prophecy from the colonizer.

In *The Satanic Verses*, Salman Rushdie explores the psychology of religious belief and doubt in some cosmopolitan citizens of a postcolonial age. Traditions and typologies of prophecy mix and intertwine in a proliferation of prophet figures. The plenitude of prophetic manifestations and the wide differences between them demand comparison. Ultimately, the themes of violence and sacrifice in the novel compel the reader to adjudicate among kinds of prophecy. Certain imitations of prophecy, proceeding from the basic misunderstanding of prophecy as prediction, produce violence and terrorism.

Tapping in to some authentic roots of prophecy, prophet figures like Tavleen mutate the word as deed and thus align themselves with tyranny. The falsifications, combinations, and reproductions of prophecy each have their own political effects and ethical implications.

Don DeLillo's *Mao II* is a contemporary novel with a postdystopian outlook. In these circumstances tyranny is viewed as immanent instead of imminent. Thus tyrannical rule is something to be apprehended rather than predicted; the false definition of prophecy as prediction does not have the driving force that it did in the classic dystopian novels. Prophecy in this novel tends to serve tyranny: but the novelist Bill Gray tries to appropriate it for better ends by favoring absence over presence.

The course of this exploration of the political activity of prophecy in these novels leads to the question of whether there is a modern prophetic speech that can intervene in political discourse. If one of these novels were to exemplify such a prophetic speech, it would have to maintain the tension between the contradictory qualities of mantic speech, the speech that mediates between inside and outside, hidden and visible.

Chapter One

Unequivocal Disapproval: The Apocalyptic Prophetic in *Nineteen Eighty-Four* and its Post Apocalyptic Critics

Prophecy is an issue for *Nineteen Eighty-Four* on three levels. On the first level, Orwell gives the narrator of his dystopian tale a prophetic voice and an apocalyptic mood, enlarging on the prophetic quality of imminence. On the second level Orwell examines the way prophecy can be used to justify and maintain a tyrannical regime. These tyrannical uses of unequivocal prophecy magnify the prophetic qualities of presence, immediacy and timelessness. On the third level, prophecy is an issue for critics of Orwell who, in their distaste for the apocalyptic, manifest a post apocalyptic critical viewpoint which itself ignores the equivocal nature of prophecy. This chapter addresses Orwell's use of prophecy as well as the limits of the critical perception of prophecy as a political art. These critical limits must be addressed in order to point to the possibility of the alternate political arts of prophecy that other novelists—Robert Penn Warren and Flannery O'Connor among the modernists and Salman Rushdie, Don DeLillo and Ngugi Wa Thiongo among the postmodernists—employ.

Hostility and contempt are a significant part of the criticism of Orwell's work from the nineteen-sixties to the present. To begin with, the dystopian genre in which Orwell's *Nineteen Eighty-Four* stands out as a classic does not always receive critical respect. Edith Clowes and Gary Morson speak of the absence of "challenge to current readers" in dystopian works generally (Clowes cited in Gottlieb 4). Margery Kingsley, in her study of politics and prophecy in

British literature, feels compelled to defend the "genre so often dismissed in academic circles as marginal and unworthy of serious attention," defending the "remarkable historical tenacity" of the genre and "the contemporary potency of the jeremiad impulse," an impulse that Walter Benn Michaels has shown to be important in the development of American literature (192).

Orwell's work is a locus for the critique of the dystopian novel, and it has suffered a number of accusations. The objections given to his work are that it is facile, didactic, elitist, depressing or nihilistic, based on outdated notions of totalitarian rule, quietest, racist and imperialist, the origin of an insincere armchair activism, and treacherously damaging to the Left. Christopher Hitchens reports that "on the political and cultural Left, the very name of Orwell is enough to evoke a shiver of revulsion" (36). His examples are passages from E.P. Thompson, who claimed that Orwell overlooked "the inhumanity of the right" in order to polemicize the left (E.P. Thompson: 'Outside the Whale' 1960 quoted in Hitchens); Salman Rushdie accuses him of a "quietist . . . exhortation to submit to events" and claims that "the Orwell of 'Inside the Whale' and *Nineteen Eighty-Four* is advocating ideas that can only be of service to our masters" ('Outside the Whale' 1984 quoted in Hitchens 37). Conor Cruise O'Brien charges Orwell with supporting British imperialism, despite Orwell's work against the concept of "race-childhood" (30). (Hitchens argues that on the contrary "Orwell can be read as one of the founders of the discipline of post-colonialism" (34).) Edward Said identifies him with amateur or armchair activism and the fostering of "the eye-witness, seemingly opinion-less politics . . . of contemporary Western journalism"

(38). Other detractors are Isaac Deutscher and Raymond Williams, who says that "Orwell prepared the orthodox political beliefs of a generation . . . By viewing the struggle as one between only a few people over the heads of an apathetic mass" (38). Christopher Hitchens sees in this hostile critical response to Orwell a reaction to the conservative appropriation of Orwell as a patron saint of Cold War politics. Hitchens also identifies disgust for his supposed tolerance of rightist politics, and a strong belief that Orwell betrayed the Leftist cause.

The underlying cause of the hostile critiques, the anti-Orwellian mood, is distaste for the narrow kind of prophetic speech that Orwell employs. A post apocalyptic orientation or mood prompts critics to withdraw from his apocalyptic political art, with its authoritative transmission of a warning and its bold claims to the suddenness or imminence of disaster, predicted and fulfilled. The postwar critical treatment of Orwell's *Nineteen Eighty-Four* distills much of the distaste for an apocalyptic prophetic treatment of tyranny as imminent. Thus Orwell's novel offers a good example of uses of prophetic speech that permits critics to overlook more subtle and complex instances of prophecy in literature.

Nonetheless Orwell's use of prophecy does indeed have its limitations: it is polarized around two simplistic oppositions instead of exploring a whole matrix of possible combinations among prophecy's contradictory qualities. In this dystopian novel the corrective prophecy of the narrative contends with the delusive prophecies of utopia utilized by the tyrannical state. Prophetic speech is polarized in these novels in that it either fights or upholds tyranny: it is at odds with itself in a conflict centering on the qualities of imminence and timelessness.

But while this divided prophecy, this apocalypticism, is simplified and didactic, Orwell gestures toward a broader understanding of prophecy as a political art with his use of anamnesia—which is a conscious refusal to submit to the policy of forgetting—as a corrective for those in thrall of a tyrannical prophecy. In using anamnesia, prophetic wrath and grief, Orwell draws on the prophetic tradition. The relative simplicity of Orwell's position must not obscure the equivocalness of prophetic speech, an equivocalness that creates paradoxical relations between the Orwellian apocalyptic mood and the anti-Orwellian post apocalyptic mood.

Many of the charges against Orwell ultimately stem from his use of prophecy as a political art, so they require consideration in light of the prophetic tradition of prophetic speech. One of the chief accusations against Orwell is that his work is depressing. Isaac Deutscher "judges Orwell's *Nineteen Eighty-Four* not as a novel or even as a polemic, but by the possibility that it may depress people" (Hitchens 44). Deutscher accused the novel of "moving millions to despair and apathy," just as Raymond Williams accused him of "spoiling the morale of a whole generation" (45). Raymond Williams regards Orwell as a "spokesman of another kind of despair: the despair born of social and political disillusion" (*Culture and Society* quoted in Hitchens 48). Edith Clowes suggests that the dystopian novels in general, and Orwell's in particular, carry nostalgia for the past and fail to hope for a better society, so that Orwell expresses a "nihilistic attitude toward both the present and the future, closing both off to a new imaginative possibility" (quoted in Gottlieb 5). Erich Fromm puts it more sympathetically: "it is precisely the significance of Orwell's book that it expresses

a new mood of hopelessness which pervades our age before this mood has become manifest and taken hold of the consciousness of people" (Fromm 259). Fromm refers to the "mood of powerlessness and hopelessness of modern man" in a century for which "the moral callousness of the First World War was only the beginning" (259). However, he describes Orwell as prescient of this cultural mood instead of culpable for it. The "mood of despair" is a universal marker of the period, insists Fromm, who writes in the context of the Cold War. He speaks of the potential "destruction of our civilization, if not of all mankind, by thermonuclear weapons as they exist today and as they are being developed in increasingly frightful proportions" (259). "Most people," he continues, "are not consciously aware of this threat and of their own hopelessness" (259). Orwell is associated with a mood of hopelessness characterized by an apocalyptic sense of the imminent ending of civilization.

Orwell creates this sense of despair in the novel partly through drawing on the prophetic tradition that is a source for dystopian novelists. Corrective prophetic speech in the Old Testament is often characterized by reproach and starkness of vision, and is colored by the prophet's polar emotions of wrath and grief and his sense that things must soon come to an end. Orwell participates in the tradition of prophecy by employing a prophetic frame for the narrative. *Nineteen Eighty-Four* is of course prophetic in the narrow sense of the prediction flagged in the title. He also utilizes themes of prophecy, wherein betrayal and political founding are wound up in the regime's prophecy of a utopian age. Corrective prophecy frames the narrative, within which a corrupt prophecy

assists tyranny. This frame of corrective prophecy is a typical model of the dystopian novel. Gottlieb explains that the narrative points to two time planes in the classical dystopic novels by Orwell, Atwood, Vonnegut, Huxley, and Zamiatin. The action occurs on a future time plane in which the characters inhabit a dystopia which readers must understand to be the consequence of or the full expression of some trend of decision-making in the readers' own time plane. Like the prophet, the dystopian novelist perceives, decries and warns against corrupt social practices. Dystopian novels like Orwell's purport to carry this same warning and reproach, bringing before public view tyrannical tendencies in current society. The dystopian novels address the reader's situation, always looking back to some past time (compatible with the reader's) in which there were signs of the coming oppression, but there was still the freedom to change. They offer "a warning that we should not allow the still curable illness of our present world to turn into the abhorrent pathologies of the world of the future" (27). *Nineteen Eighty-Four* and similar dystopian novels like *We* and *Brave New World* contain "a warning for the future" (Fromm 259). Erich Fromm explains that "neither Orwell nor Huxley or Zamyatin wanted to insist that this world of insanity is bound to come. On the contrary, it was quite obviously their intention to sound a warning by showing where we are headed for unless we succeed in a renaissance of the spirit of humanism" (Fromm 267).

This activity of warning is consonant with the prophetic tradition: In societies and civilizations, however content their majorities, prophets see and warn against hidden corruption. The prophetic speech of the Old Testament often

follows what Claus Westermann calls the judgment formula, in which either an individual or the nation of Israel is taken to task for corrupt practices. The formula includes the accusation, the announcement of judgment, and the announcement of ill to come, which are sometimes followed by further reproach (Westermann 5). This pre-exilic version of the formula conveys an entirely dark picture: it is an "unconditional announcement of judgment" (206). It conveys no approbation or even mercy. Nothing matters in the message but the corrupt practices, which cannot be concealed among better social practices, mitigated by necessity or other political claims, or even forgiven. In later periods of prophets "a conditional announcement of salvation . . . appears," so that some brightness contrasts the dark picture (206). Even so, the reprieve depends on reform. There is no suggestion of compromise, of partial reform, or of overlooking certain practices. Walter Brueggemann explains that many of the corrupt practices the prophets decry are social ills. Corrective prophecy uncovers "the real deathliness that hovers among us and gnaws within us" in everyday life (50). The prophet shines a light into the dark places in society, uncovering and bringing "to public expression those very fears and terrors that have been denied . . . and suppressed" (44, 50).

This persistent sense of warning and reproach contributes to the impression of didacticism of which some critics complain. The novel is of course didactic in that it attempts to teach and reform: it openly preaches against tyranny. But the starkness of prophetic speech may also contribute to the sense of didacticism. Prophetic vision appears like a chiaroscuro, in which dark and

light are dramatically juxtaposed so that the qualities of each are more strident. Prophecy sees in the dark—in Winston's prison cell and in Lilburne Lewis' meat shed—and it sees the dark in things. Where there is oppression, prophecy does not wink at it—it does not spare its criticism for practical considerations or considerations of advantage. In a society that calls itself civilized and just, prophecy will see and decry the sacrifice of those who have been marginalized to make that society work. Prophecy is not interested in banalities or in preserving a moderately good rule. The starkness of its vision suits it to see only utopia and dystopia. These extremes of prophetic vision contribute to the impression some critics have of an overwhelming and facile didacticism in Orwell's work. This starkness is not so much meant for simplicity as for ruthlessness.

The impression of gloomy reproach and nihilism does not proceed from a delight in disaster and judgment. Deutscher's and Williams' complaint about the depressing quality of Orwell's work is a criticism that often attaches to prophecy itself. Fromm, for instance, separates dystopian writing from prophecy in order to defend it and so doing exhibits the classic misunderstanding of prophecy when he insists that "Orwell, like the authors of the other negative utopias, is not a prophet of disaster," but instead "wants to warn and to awaken us" (267). Fromm thinks that Orwell is not a prophet because "he still hopes;" a prophet, for Fromm, is simply someone who predicts and who believes wholeheartedly in the inevitability of that prediction (267). In truth, Fromm is describing the qualities of a prophet when he describes Orwell: the desire "to warn and to awaken" and the persistence of hope are essential features of prophecy. Fromm's

misunderstanding underscores the need for a study like this and point to one source of distaste for apocalyptic writing—namely nihilism—that can taint prophetic writing in general for critics.

The reputation of the prophet as scold, which is usually associated with Jeremiah and the form called the jeremiad, is only one way that the insight into corruption is communicated. Abraham Heschel explains that the psychology of the prophet does not typically turn on morbid glee and anticipation of destruction, but on two polar emotions: wrath and grief. The Biblical prophet magnifies divine wrath against injustice: if his wrath exceeds the divine wrath, then he becomes judge instead of the messenger of judgment. While the prophet can certainly be an irritant or a gadfly, Brueggemann claims that grief, not wrath, is the strongest affect of the prophet, which is partly why Orwell's prophetic book comes across as depressing. The prophet *is* depressed. He grieves—but does not fail to hope. Westermann classifies the cry of woe or lamentation as a feature of judgment speech that persists into later forms of prophetic speech in the Bible. The cry of woe expresses the prophet's grief over the retribution that is about to overtake his people. Louis Martz identifies the same oscillation between wrath and grief in the "voice of the prophet:" the voice "tends to oscillate between denunciation and consolation, between despair and hope, between images of desolation and images of redemption, between the actual and the ideal" in visions that are single moments instead of a continuous story (4). This "embrace of pathos" involves apprehending and expressing the already-present morbidity of a society (4).

The purpose of the "dual themes" of wrath and grief is to "achieve a change of heart, a moral and spiritual change in the minds of [the prophet's] people" (Martz 5). The prophet is supposed to convey the divine pathos, including anger, because evil is met with indifference. For Heschel, the prophet's "great contribution to humanity was the discovery of the evil of indifference" which was always presented over and against the compassion of God (284). Heschel points out that prophecy does not just promulgate belief or even rebuke evil, but assaults the indifference to evil and injustice which can accompany even 'correct' belief and righteous behavior (254). The prophetic vision is extreme, and thus may appear both stridently didactic and depressing—as it does in Orwell—because it battles indifference.

Imminent endings are the cause of the prophet's grief and the origin of his apocalyptic rhetoric. The prophet knows that it is "end time" or "cry time," and that peace and business-as-usual are not sustainable (Brueggemann 53, 54). But the imminence and suddenness of that prophetic narrative has a purpose: it combats the utopian fantasy of timelessness. Timelessness and suddenness, two contradictory qualities that prophetic speech bears, line up against each other in Orwell's novel. Timelessness aligns with the state, which tries to obscure history, the passage of time, and the order of years in order to suggest or create a perfect, eternal present—like the Thousand Year Reich—which is above all fulfillment of the messianic prophecy of revolution and the story of utopia. Winston is uncertain about what year it is when he starts his journal. No anniversaries mark the disappearances of his parents or even his own date of

birth. In the absence of time, "everything faded into mist. The past was erased, the erasure was forgotten, the lie became the truth" (64). The timelessness of the state utopia, while it sustains the illusion of living in the age of fulfillment and perfection also serves the practical purpose of obscuring unsavory events and rendering impossible an analysis of cause and effect, success and failure and thus policy: lies easily become the truth in the absence of time and causality. The state posits an eternal present such that the "entire society seems to be laboring in the throes of an enormous fantasmagoria about the future" (Gottlieb 10). The maintenance of this fantasmagoria is part of Winston's job. Called on to cover up a change of policy or position that would mark time in the state, he realizes that "what was needed was a piece of pure fantasy" (Orwell 41). The sense of timelessness produced by the state maintains the official fantasy and vice versa. The purpose of the prophetic narrative is to hail an end to the fantasmagoria and complacent rule, and of the secure hierarchies. The strategy behind Orwell's prophetic framework is to combat this timelessness of prophetic speech as utilized by the tyrannical state with the suddenness of apocalyptic rhetoric. While this fantasmagoria is what Orwell tries to combat, there are different responses to the same problem, responses which Orwell's detractors might consider preferable.

The undercurrent of the disgust with Orwell and the complaint that he destroys morale is a rejection of the apocalyptic outlook that Orwell has come to represent. Behind the accusation of nihilism are deeper objections the notions of dystopia, totalitarianism, apocalypse and imminence (or, in terms of prophecy's

contradictory qualities, suddenness). The beginning of these objections lies with the question of what the apocalypse of society would look like: that is, what is the dystopia, the worst society? When Gottlieb and other sympathetic critics of dystopian novels as a genre deploy rebuttals against postmodernism, defending the existence and the gravity of the genre of the dystopian novel, they defend the notion of dystopia itself. Gottlieb raises another problem for discussing the dystopian novel, that of the postmodern blow-out of the definition of dystopia. If for thinkers like Foucault "any society operating at the present time (or possibly at any other time as well) could be regarded as such a 'bad place'" then dystopic society becomes a redundancy (5). For Gottlieb, what she regards as a postmodern paranoia about present societies is inimical to any clear definition of a dystopian genre.

The idea of a single imminent 'worst' regime, then, has become suspect. It is seen, perhaps, as a red herring that distracts in the hunt for the real sources of oppression. It also distracts us from the magnitude of wrongs in the present, because things could potentially be so much worse for so many more people: the glaring injustices of historical fascism, for instance, are (rightly) a locus for shock and indignation which, however, may not conquer indifference to more commonplace evils in more respectable societies. The notion of totalitarianism offers a category of the worst regime to which other societies can always be favorably contrasted. Thus this concept can offer such a distraction from subtle injustices. Slavoj Zizek in *Did Somebody say Totalitarianism?* explains why the word totalitarian represents a network of interpretive problems, and the ways in

which canonical studies of totalitarianism—like Hannah Arendt's *Origins of Totalitarianism* —have fallen out of favor with many later twentieth century political theorists. The difficulty positions like Zizek's pose for Orwell's novel is that his dystopia closely reflects Hannah Arendt's *Origins* (itself, of course, an analysis of the political workings of German National Socialism). *Nineteen Eighty-Four* reads like a companion piece to *Origins*. Her basic definitions of totalitarian rule Orwell plays out in the novel as well as numerous small details about the principles of its leadership and the workings of its propaganda.

Zizek points to the show trials as an example of a practice labeled 'totalitarian' that can act as a red herring in the search for sources of oppression. He compares the question that the accused party member asks his self in the forced confessions of the purges "what if someone merely pretends to follow the Party line faithfully in order to conceal his true counter-revolutionary attitude" to the Christian self examination in which one asks "have I done the right thing simply from the wrong motivation—to conceal some 'basic vileness?'"(100) "These paradoxes," Zizek insists, "cannot be dismissed as the simple machinations of 'totalitarian' power—they harbour a genuine tragic dimension overlooked by standard liberal diatribes against 'totalitarianism'" (101). Zizek offers this example of how the concept of totalitarianism, as defined by Arendt and illustrated by Orwell, can mislead politcal thinkers to overlook important experiences which cast light on the machinations of power in ordinary—instead of radically dystopic—societies. While Arendt might pinpoint the psychology of this interior betrayal as a product of totalitarian ideology and the totalitarian

state's need for a complete fiction, Zizek urges us to consider this kind of betrayal outside the context of totalitarianism.

But if the avowed purpose of novels like *Nineteen Eighty-Four* and *Anthem* is to make the reader more alert to injustices in the present, scrutinizing society for subtle oppression of the sort that Alexis deTocqueville calls 'soft despotism,' then why is it that these dystopian novels are accused of doing the reverse? The answer is that the dystopian novels seem to separate tyranny from ordinary life. They do so both through the concept of dystopia (a worst regime against which others can be compared) and through apocalypticism, which makes this worst regime something that happens when all ordinary society has collapsed. Arendt defines apocalypse as "a world which everywhere seems to have come to an end" (464). Apocalypticism can distract the gaze from the ordinary present in which the world has palpably not come to an end toward the future, or it can argue that in the everyday present the world *has* actually come to an end. This last alternative requires the cultivation of paranoia. Zizek addresses the former alternative of directing the gaze outward toward a future society (or toward a present society which is sufficiently foreign that it remains outside of the audience's daily reality). For Zizek, tyranny should be considered immanent—always with us—instead of pushed into an imminent future. Imminence itself is suspect, for in pointing us toward a worse future, it causes us to belittle wrongs in the present. The tendency of Zizek's objections to the word totalitarianism is that it is apocalyptic.

Thus the claim that Orwell's novel lays to the imminence of dystopia or the bad society is problematic for many critics. *Nineteen Eighty-Four* is a novel of imminence: the title latches onto claims about the future with an air of certainty. In the year 1984, Orwell's novel enjoyed a flurry of public attention as popular commentators discussed the degree to which the novel's 'predictions' failed to come to pass. The novel is popularly perceived as one of imminence. It is a novel of imminence, but in a sense less crude than the popular one. As Frank Kermode says of all prophecy, whether it predicts or not, *Nineteen Eighty-Four* cannot be disconfirmed. The bad society still lurks in the future if care is not taken to avert it. Thus it remains a novel of imminence even after the date of the title is surpassed.

Orwell's investment in the idea of tyranny as imminent places him in a conflict between two different positions on apocalypse. In *Apocalypse and After* Bruce Comens describes a basic opposition between the apocalyptic mood and its corrective in his description of intellectual responses to the Cold War: "Whether we are swayed by overtly apocalyptic rhetoric or quietly concede that total nuclear war has become 'the absolute referent, the horizon and the condition of all others,' such responses, however significant can be dangerous: They can all too easily dwarf, blot out 'our lives' in discourse as on earth" (Derrida "No Apocalypse" quoted in Comens 1). This danger of nihilism and paralysis in the apocalyptic response to twentieth century global politics is part of what repels critics from Orwell. Comens points to the corrective, though he does not label it 'post apocalyptic:' "as corrective, it is useful to recall that in her last

work, written in 1946, Gertrude Stein professed complete indifference, beginning 'they asked me what I thought of the atomic bomb. I said I had not been able to take any interest'" (Stein "Reflections on the Atomic Bomb" quoted in Comens 1). Stein's proposed corrective amounts to a refusal to participate in the apocalyptic mood: she subjects the bomb to her discursive anticlimax, treating it as a banal topic. The critical stance against Orwell is part of a post apocalyptic attitude like Stein's wherein apocalypse is facile, banal or anticlimactic. Eliot's *Waste Land* gestures toward this post apocalyptic attitude in the lines about London Bridge: "London Bridge is falling down falling down falling down" (25). Eliot evokes apocalypse as a notion with currency, repeated in the background of culture. But the use of the child's rhyme makes the notion appear facile and shallow, a thing that only has power through nagging repetition. Insofar as Orwell is read as apocalyptic, *Nineteen Eighty-Four* is considered facile in the way that the child's rhyme is: a transparent part of early education that becomes tedious with repetition. The postdystopian alternative, presented by novels like *Satanic Verses* and Pynchon's *Vineland,* is part of the post apocalyptic corrective: this literary corrective overturns the straight-faced gravity of the dystopian novels that contribute to their impression of didacticism: it spurns the banal, celebrates the absurd and cultivates the notion that the bad society is immanent instead of imminent.

Ultimately, the apocalyptic mode of prophecy with its sense of the imminence of the worst society has become associated with fundamentalism, terrorism (as the Rushdie chapter will address) and cultural benightedness (as

the O'Connor chapter will address): these are the associations of the apocalyptic. But Orwell's strong corrective of anamnesia against policies of forgetting rescues him from being a casualty of apocalypticism and also differentiates his work from the admittedly more complex literary apocalypticism of canonical modernists like Pound.

The specifically literary apocalypticism of avant-garde modernism differs from the dystopian vision of Orwell. Pound's is the most obvious case: his "frenzied writings of the thirties and forties show a marked increase in overtly apocalyptic rhetoric" and include many "evocations of Utopia" (Comens 64). Even Zukofsky found his rhetoric extremely apocalyptic, saying "to Pound on several occasions 'You seem to think you are the Messiah'" (*Pound Zukovksky Correspondence* 172 quoted in Comens 64). In contrasting Pound's and Orwell's apocalypticism, the first difference is that Pound is committed to fascism (instead of Orwell's socialism) as a way of bringing about a new order, via the sacrifice of the "usurers" (Comens 64). As a poet he works toward historical change and is frustrated when his message is not understood. On Rome Radio he expostulated "I have been twenty years on this job, but you will not read" (*Rome Radio* 382 quoted in Comens 67). In his enthusiasm for "'ideas going into action' Pound willingly, eagerly accepts precisely that political tyranny he always sought to avoid" (Comens 64). Apocalypse for him is tied up in the word as deed: "inseparable from this desire for a fully performative discourse was an acute intensification of Pound's already developed apocalyptic" (64). Pound deploys prophetic speech—in the narrow sense of the apocalyptic—as a political art.

The *Cantos* suggest that poetry can bring about its own apocalypse, creating change through the power of the new-made poetic word as deed. Part of the way Pound hopes to make a new society is through the revelatory deployment of images which will make new thinking possible. The motto about technical innovation in poetic language, "make it new," is part of the commitment to political change and disruption that his early involvement in Vorticism displays. The new-made poem charges image with apocalypse, evoking "a non-linear, revelatory response to image, where a kind of instantaneous, epiphanic reading occurs in an intense moment of lyric aestheticism or subjective introspection" (Goldman 11). The moment of poetic truth belongs to the prophetic category of the apocalyptic because the reader receives it as if it were a divine sign, a revelation, a manifestation or awaited fulfillment. Jane Goldman's account of apocalypse in avant-garde modernism, encapsulated in her title *Image to Apocalypse*, suggests also that avant-garde creative event "refer[s] the reader outwards from the image to revelations of historical, political, technological, and cultural context (11). The poetry of the avant-garde is not passive: it aspires to the word as deed. "Avant-garde texts may be read, then, as reflecting . . . and as . . . interrupting, disrupting and even transforming such [historical, political, technological and cultural] contexts rather than merely escaping them" (11). This is prophecy as a political art indeed: the avant-gardists invoke the status of word as deed through innovative stylistics, and some, like Pound, choose a specifically apocalyptic model of prophecy for the word becoming deed.

But the word as deed has its dangers. William Carlos Williams, with his "various attitudes toward apocalyptics" is aware of the ambivalence of "the bomb," or of an apocalyptic moment as a model for poetic creativity and poetic destruction (Comens 94). It is Orwell who faces and brings forth the sinister aspects of prophecy, not as a literary model, but as political model: Pound accepted and embraced the intellectual dangers of prophecy as a model for thinking change. Orwell does not practice this kind of avant-garde apocalyptic which is tied up in stylistics. His is not the motto of making it new: he is not an innovator. One could argue that despite his attraction to the apocalypse as a model of history, he does not regard apocalypse as a model for what literary technique can and should achieve. Nonetheless, he uses apocalyptic prophecy as a means of political intervention and he magnifies the dangers of prophecy.

Orwell faces, as Pound arguable does not, the banal uses of a prophecy tamed by a fascist fiction. While dystopian authors like Orwell and Rand use prophecy to uncover tyranny, they also depict prophecy in the service of an oppressive regime. In *Nineteen Eighty-Four,* the protagonist Winston Smith works in the Ministry of Information where his job is to rectify any disparity between today's policies and yesterday's government predictions. Winston's business is the fulfillment of official prophecy, which upholds the utopian claims of the government. Winston has to make sure that "day by day and almost minute by minute the past [is] brought up to date" so that "every prediction made by the Party could be shown by documentary evidence to have been correct" (36). This falsified fulfillment upholds the utopian claims and the official fiction of

the regime. Official predictions must appear to be fulfilled: "Wherever totalitarianism possesses absolute control it . . . uses violence not so much to frighten people (this is done only in the initial stages when political opposition still exists) as to *realize constantly* its ideological doctrines and its practical lies (Arendt 341). Arendt explains that "[totalitarian government] will not be satisfied to assert, in the face of contrary facts, that unemployment does not exist; it will abolish unemployment benefits as part of its propaganda" (Arendt 341, emphasis mine). This kind of prophecy works backwards. It must appear to be fulfilled: it must be imminent, rather than immanent. The emphasis on the timeliness of fulfillment—on suddenness rather than timelessness—distinguishes this tyrannical deployment of prophecy as a kind of apocalypticism, far removed from subtle, equivocal forms of prophecy in which the contradictory qualities are balanced. Orwell recognizes that prophetic speech is also useful to a fascist or totalitarian regime: unlike Pound, he is not invested in a stylistic event of the word as deed and he does not conclude that the poet need himself be a fascist.

One of the key differences between the modernist literary apocalyptic and that of Orwell is in his mandate to fight the obliteration of memory via the conscious task of anamnesia. Orwell said of himself that even as a youth, he knew he had "a power of facing unpleasant facts" (Hitchens 13). This statement tells us part of the nature of his project in *Nineteen Eighty-Four*. In this and other works Orwell refused to take the easy path of overlooking tyrannical practices on the far Left: the unpleasantness of acknowledging and critiquing errors on 'his' side of the political spectrum did not deter him. Orwell's power of facing

unpleasant facts did not endear him to intellectual allies on the Left. Hitchens argues that the tendency of the charges against Orwell is toward treachery. Orwell belonged and was committed to the Left, yet "in some semi-articulated way, many major figures of the Left have thought of Orwell as an *enemy*, and an important and frightening one" (Hitchens 46). Hitchens insists that "the real source of anti-Orwell resentment" is that "in the view of many on the official Left, he committed the ultimate sin of 'giving ammunition to the enemy'" by attacking Communism in the thirties when "the cause of anti-fascism supposedly necessitated a closing of ranks" and in the late forties when the political binaries of the Cold War were developing into a frozen discourse (58). Orwell does not permit amnesia even among his allies, and even at the expense of a reputation for treachery.

One of the first recourses for ignoring unpleasant facts, as Orwell did not, is to forget them. Concomitantly, a chief part of the power of facing them is the habit of conscious memory. Orwell has an imperative to realistic memory that differentiates his work from the modernist apocalypticism of Pound. The title *Nineteen Eighty-Four* argues that the reader has a limited time in which to face the unpleasant potentials depicted in the novel. While his title looks forward, his novel is nonetheless reminder instead of poetic catalyst, which differentiates it by nature from the literary apocalypticism of Pound. Significantly, Hitchins claims that Orwell's most sympathetic readers were those people who had a personal memory of totalitarian rule: "The survivors of the Ukrainian famine, and the purges, and the Nazi invasion and the war, and the subsequent extension of

Stalinism into Eastern Europe, were able to decipher the meaning of the pigs (and of the name Napoleon) [in *Animal Farm*] without any undue difficulty, a task of interpretation that had defeated conservatism's most deft and subtle literary critic [T.S. Eliot]" (92). These readers appreciated the novel as an exercise in memory.

Amnesia can be a tool of a regime, totalitarian or otherwise, making anamnesia, or a policy against the different means of obliterating the historical past, an important weapon against tyranny. When Peter the Great re-founded Moscow, he tried to establish the city as a third Rome (after Constantinople). He wanted a clean historical slate for this project, and for this reason dismissed Russia's past as one of ignorance and squalor. This amnesia, this "nihilistic approach to the past" was part of his hope for Moscow's future as the center of empire (Lotman 53). Similarly, amnesia is a dominant tool or goal of the government of Oceania. One of the methods of the state, Winston notices, is to take people who have been impugned and then rehabilitated and make use of them. These dubious people had been "reinstated in the Party, and given posts which were in fact sinecures but which sounded important" (65). Their alleged "acts of sabotage causing the death of hundreds of thousands of people" could be forgotten (65). The process of assigning such posts is one that invites amnesia both in the public that might be impressed by the high-sounding job titles and in the employee dubiously honored with such a title. Those public figures with too great an enthusiasm for the doctrines of the party were a potential embarrassment, and were given not positions of power, but positions of

apparent power. But though the rationale is different between Arendt's example and Orwell's, they both display an invitation to amnesia as a way of overlooking unpleasant facts. Orwell makes amnesia his target, and part of his gadfly role is to remind his readers—intellectuals included—about the temptation of forgetfulness. Insofar as he fights the oblivion of cultural memory with his power to face unpleasant facts and with his depictions of amnesiac complicity, he differs from other modernists like Pound who employed the trope of apocalypse without regard for its dangers. In this respect, Orwell's use of prophecy extends beyond a narrow, unequivocal apocalypticism.

Orwell posits the erasure of past and present as a method of tyranny. One method of this erasure is the disappearance of persons. When Winston sights people who are suspect by the Thought Police, he knows to pretend that they are not there. He notices that "there [is] no one at any of the tables nearest to them" and reflects that "It was not wise even to be seen in the neighborhood of such people" (65). The practice of causing individuals—and any records of their existence—to disappear from society is not just a way to punish and terrorize, but is also necessary because these disappearances are proofs of the totalitarian fiction about the present. Arendt explains that totalitarian rule depends on the "consistency of the system" (Arendt 351). The masses that are ripe for totalitarian rule "refuse to recognize fortuitousness . . . predisposed to all ideologies because they explain facts as mere examples of laws and eliminate coincidences . . . totalitarian propaganda thrives on this escape from reality into fiction, from coincidence into consistency" (352). The author of the fiction, in this

case the government of Oceania, has the power to erase people who do not fit into it. The impression given is not so much that these people are dead or imprisoned, but that they had never been. Arendt explains that "the concentration camps, by making death itself anonymous (making it impossible to find out whether a prisoner is dead or alive) robbed death of its meaning as the end of a fulfilled life" (452). Individual fictions or stories other than the ruling story vanish. In *Nineteen Eighty-Four* when Winston discovers that his coworker "Syme had vanished," he understands the implication of this discreet method of violence: "Syme had ceased to exist; he had never existed" (122). Official forgetfulness sets in.

Even the memory of language is subject to this destruction. The destroyed newspaper records in Nineteen Eighty-four, like the burned histories in Bradbury's *Fahrenheit 451* and the vanished books in Rand's *Anthem* disappear in a holocaust of memory. Before he is purged, Syme reports to Winston: "We're destroying words—scores of them, hundreds of them, every day. We're cutting the language down to the bone" (45). The policy of amnesia encompasses even dictionaries, for from within a reduced and confined vocabulary it is less possible to make statements that contradict or compete with the official fiction. The logic of amnesia meant that for Winston (prior to his rebellion) "the past was dead" (25). Because the past was dead, "the future was unimaginable" (25).

Prophetic speech counteracts the totalitarian oblivion of language and memory by generating new meanings. "Every totalitarian effort," says Brueggemann in his work on prophecy, has the "aim . . . to stop the language of

newness" (9). Prophecy, on the other hand, unfolds newness in language. Brueggemann argues that "a prophetic understanding of reality is based on the notion that all social reality does spring fresh from the word" (9). Winston's journal writing is an act of rebellion because it utilizes language in a way that might generate something new and different from the official fiction. This newness disrupts official fiction and hegemony. The prophet's "*task . . . is to . . . nourish, and evoke a consciousness and perception alternative to the consciousness and perception of the dominant culture*" (13, emphasis in original). "Alternative consciousness" stems from the satiric tradition of prophecy, "serv[ing] to *criticize* in dismantling the dominant consciousness" (13). The Biblical prophets "understood the distinctive power of language, the capacity to speak in ways that evoke newness 'fresh from the word [sic],'" and Orwell retrieves this tradition of prophecy as part of his strategy of against the tyrannical obliteration of the past (9). Winston Smith begins his rebellion by composing prose in his forbidden book. The book is blank when he purchases it: in that form it is already a danger to the regime not simply because it is a codex, but because it is a blatant invitation to the possibility of new speech. Winston knows that "even with nothing written in it, it was a compromising possession (9). "To mark the paper was the decisive act" in the unfolding of his rebellion (10). The first words he writes are a date: "April 4th, 1984" (10). Memory and history come together and lay the foundation for new thought.

The imperative to resist amnesia is thus part of the work of prophetic speech, and this imperative works against the kind of tyranny that Orwell depicts.

When Brueggemann describes the prophet's calling he cites the way that the people's forgetfulness requires the advent of the prophet. In the narrative pattern, a statement about forgetting usually precedes the biblical accounts of a prophet's entry into the public sphere: 'They began to worship false gods, and to forget the Lord'. At this point, the prophet must reactivate their memories in order to generate the possibility of a consciousness alternative to the official fiction (or in Brueggemann's terms, *royal consciousness*). The prophet helps the public to retrieve its memories by bringing "to public expression those very fears and terrors that have been denied . . . and suppressed" within a society (Brueggemann 44). Part of bringing terrors to public expression is "to offer symbols that are adequate to the horror and massiveness of the experience which evokes numbness and requires denial" (49). These symbols are not "to be invented," but pulled out and "reactivate[d] out of our historical past" (49). Thus the possibility of a consciousness alternative to the royal consciousness is retrieved out of out of memory. Memory links the prophet to tradition (though not necessarily to nostalgic traditionalism, which is always ready-to-hand in any culture), and he works against "amnesia" (12). The process of anamnesia is one of the reasons that prophecy can be dangerous to a regime: it uncovers the present and creates links to the past that tyrannical rule tries to destroy. (49). Orwell's imperative to remember, which is carried out in Winston's rebellious act of keeping a journal, redeems his dystopian work to a certain extent from the more sinister potential of apocalypticism and also gestures toward the broader possibilities of prophetic speech. After Winston writes the date in his journal, he

sits "gazing stupidly at the paper" (10). This is not writer's block because "the actual writing would be easy" (10). Rather, he is stupid or speechless because he has no message. He considers his audience of the future. It is not the transmission of information that is important in his enterprise, for "either the future would be resemble the present in which case it would not listen to him, or it would be different from it, and his predicament would be meaningless" (10). It is not the message that matters in Winston's enterprise; it is his entrance into a dialogue. He would "transfer to paper the interminable restless monologue that had been running inside his head" (10). In this prophetic activity, dialogue outweighs transmission.

Orwell identifies a corollary to the policy of amnesia in the recurrence of betrayal in totalitarian psychology. The totalitarian cult of personality is also a cult of amnesia. The system of totalitarianism as described by Arendt and Orwell requires not just a figure to enforce it, but also a whole network of people who agree to be complicit with tyranny, mainly by agreeing to forget. This complicity is not just the obvious cliché of "simply obeying orders" a la Adolf Eichmann, but more specifically gives them a stake in the system through the structure created by the leader principle. Arendt explains that the leader principle necessitates betrayal. The totalitarian leader differs from the usual classical tyrant (one who rules without law) in the "thorough identification of the Leader with every appointed subleader" so that there is "a monopoly of responsibility for everything which is being done" (375). Unlike the Leader, the classical "tyrant would never identify himself with his subordinates, let alone with every one of their acts" (375).

By contrast "The Leader . . . cannot tolerate criticism of his subordinates, since they always act in his name" (375). And if they act imprudently for the regime he must "correct his own errors:" "he must liquidate those who carried them out; if he wants to blame his mistakes on others, he must kill them" and label them traitors (375). The leader requires wholesale amnesia because any mistake of his subordinates must be erased, an erasure made necessary by the complete identification of his subordinates.

The accusation of betrayal against the leader's subordinates is thus built-in to the leader principle. Betrayal is inevitable. The social psychology of totalitarianism as Arendt describes it depends on the complicity and bad conscience of each new crop of participants: "this system is the logical outgrowth of the Leader principle in its full implications and the best possible guarantee for loyalty in that it makes every new generation depend for its livelihood on the current political line of the Leader" (432). What results is a kind of loyalty that depends on both forgetfulness and an uneasy sense of betrayal. The "jobholder [is] a conscious accomplice in the crimes of the government" because he or she replaces someone who was purged (432).

Winston gets an education in the loyalty and bad conscience fostered by Oceania when O'Brien reveals that he is a government agent entrapping traitors like Winston. Winston is surprised that O'Brien, in his high-rank as a secret-policeman, does not insist "that the Party did not seek power for its own ends, but only for the good of the majority" (216). Instead, O'Brien admits "The Party seeks power entirely for its own sake" (217). But if O'Brien does not believe the official

fiction about the disinterestedness of the Party, then in what does his loyalty consist? O'Brien understands that as a power-holder in the party, zeal is not expected of him. Rather, "the point of [the power-holders'] loyalty is not that they believe the Leader is infallible, but that they are convinced that everybody who commands the instruments of violence with the superior methods of totalitarian organization can become infallible . . . Factuality itself depends for its continued existence upon the existence of the nontotalitarian world" (Arendt 388). In this situation "whatever the Party holds to be truth *is* truth" (Orwell quoted in Fromm 263). O'Brien consents to this system of disavowing the non-totalitarian world. He claims on behalf of the Party that "already our control over matter is absolute" (218). The party redefines loyalty as the consent to forget. Winston's forgetfulness must be oblivious, though: for those outside the Inner Party, "zeal was not enough. Orthodoxy was unconsciousness," or the forgetfulness of any reality outside the official fiction (Arendt 49). After his rehabilitation, Winston rejects an image of his childhood that comes back to him: "it was a false memory. He was troubled by false memories occasionally. They did not matter so long as one knew them for what they were" (243). Winston's new loyalty comprises an agreement to forget. Deepening his complicity, this kind of loyalty also requires betrayal: betrayal of those one agrees to forget, as Winston agrees to forget Julia, letting her walk away from him until she is "no longer recognizable" (241).

The persistence of the idea of interior betrayal springs from the state's desire to merge interior and exterior. Traditionally prophecy moves between an

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interior, hidden truth and exterior reality to make a revelation. Oceania's prophecy instead obliterates the distinction between interior and exterior. Between interior and exterior are the gaps where doubt and equivocalness occur, which are dangerous to the totalitarian state. Indeed it is the "equivocal glance" he shares with the treacherous O'Brien that begins Winston's political downfall and rehabilitation (19). Where interior and exterior must be united, all private life becomes a threat to the government. Thus Julia engages in sexual acts as a means of defiance to the regime: Winston's and Julia's encounter is a "blow struck against the party" and a "political act" (105). During the Two Minutes Hate Winston's "entrails seemed to grow cold," this time not in defiance but in sympathy with the "general delirium" and "subhuman chanting" (18). "Thoughtcrime" is the term that best expresses this merging of interior and exterior, wherein treachery is inevitable (19).

A manifestation of the totalitarian psychology of betrayal is the show trial, with its insistence on hidden treachery. Erika Gottlieb notes that among the classic dystopian novels "The structural and thematic importance of the trial is probably most conspicuous" in *Nineteen Eighty-four*, where "Winston's trial . . . takes up one-third of the novel" and "systematically deprives him of selfhood, consciousness, loyalty, and memory" (10). Gottlieb "suggest[s] that the protagonist's trial as an emblem of injustice is a thematically and symbolically central device of dystopian fiction" (10). She cites *Brave New World*, *We*, *Farenheit 451*, *Player Piano*, and *The Handmaid's Tale* (which is a special case), though *Anthem* and the *Manchurian Candidate* could also be candidates for the

list. One of the reasons that Gottlieb thinks the trial appears so consistently in the dystopian novels is that it perfectly showcases "the value we set on selfhood and consciousness" through systematic attacks on these human attributes (12). Consistently throughout the dystopian genre, the dystopian state is seen as inimical to these values, and also consistently, the trial is a symbolic way of depicting this. However, the attack on selfhood is probably secondary to the bad conscience that is built into the system through the leader principle. The show trial does not just try to uncover treachery; it demands admission of betrayal on some interior level. Zizek in his observations on the forced confessions of the Stalinist and Cambodian purges says that the show trials make the accused party member ask himself "what if someone merely pretends to follow the Party line faithfully in order to conceal his true counter-revolutionary attitude" (100)? The interiority of this form of betrayal suggests a deep conflict in the notion of justice that operates in a dystopian society. Gottlieb interrogates this conflict in the notion of justice, asking how an "elite that came into power with the utopian promise of universal justice" can "end up establishing a system based on the deliberate miscarriage of justice" (33). For in the dystopian trial the end result is always "deliberate miscarriage" of justice or what Gottlieb calls *anti-justice* (31). Zizek also notes this in his discussion of Stalin's show trials, pointing to the obvious loyalty of some of Stalin's closest associates who come to trial for treason. "No accused is ever acquitted" and no punishment results in a "new insight" or an "experience of catharsis" (Gottlieb 31). Instead of achieving the utopian dream of justice which the regime promised, the state undertakes a

"conspiracy against its own people" (10). Even the most crass definition of justice, like the one proposed by Thrasymachus in the *Republic*—the gang ethic that justice is doing harm to one's enemies and good for one's friends—even this is reversed in the show trial.

This *anti-justice* that comes to light in the show trial proceeds in part from the totalitarian utilization of prophecy to conjure the utopian dream and to maintain the official fiction. If prophecy can be a weapon for tyranny, it is a weapon with a kick. The speech that purports to combine word and deed has a logic of its own which can combine signifier and signified, eliminating contingency, to make a transcendent Sign. This logic of prophetic speech is not secular. Detienne explains that in classical antiquity, mantic speech is radically a-moral because *Dike* (justice) and *Aletheia* (truth) have "many affinities" so that "at this level of thought no distinction exists between truth and justice" (55). While at first glance this may seem like a happy union, in actuality it is a terrifying one. In such a system the sacrifice of Iphigenia makes sense, and indeed the persistence of sacrifice as a theme that accompanies prophecy also makes sense. One did not ask--and even Clytemnestra didn't (she objected on other grounds)--whether this was a just action. It was a constitutive action that completed the theogenical reality. It made the winds blow. Divination instead of forensics was the tool of judgment. Where mantic speech holds sway, "a distinction does not exist between the domains of justice and truth," for the privileged speaker purveys both" (55). In the absence of this distinction "judicial procedures . . . involve and are confused with forms of divination." Prophecy

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claims power beyond mere persuasion: Detienne explains that for the *masters of truth* (the mantic speakers) "the power of *Aletheia* thus encompasses the twofold domain of prophecy and justice" (55). This is the anti-justice that the critics of dystopian novels and those who describe Stalin's show trials struggle to come to terms with. It is not that the totalitarian systems had no such reference as *justice*—it is simply that it was indistinguishable from truth (the ruling fiction of that system).

Orwell treats the show trial as an instance of prophecy's dark side. For Orwell, the potential of prophecy to be a weapon of tyranny does not so much spring from a prophetic speech that is by nature equivocal as it does from a prophetic speech that is polarized. In the dystopian framework prophetic speech has clear good or bad effects and a clear relation to a social order that we can—unequivocally—call totalitarian, where Arendt can define totalitarianism with a single sentence rather than with the five stances Zizek identifies. The revelatory and subversive nature of prophetic speech, employed by authors like Orwell against tyrannical rule, comes up against features of prophecy that have been yoked by tyranny. In *Nineteen Eighty-Four*, prophecy battles against itself: it is bipolar rather than equivocal. The suddenness of the prophetic narrative battles the timelessness of the state: imminence against immanence. In this novel, the contradictory qualities of prophecy line up into a relatively simple matrix with few of the permutations that one sees, for instance, in Rushdie's *Satanic Verses*. The result is that prophecy either serves tyranny or undoes it.

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The hostility to Orwell is largely the result of this polarized, apocalyptic political art. Not just the political content, but chiefly the manner of his prophesying makes Orwell distasteful to many critics. Hitchens points out that incipient polemics in *Nineteen Eighty-Four* against the Cold War world and the division of the globe among superpowers are overlooked by critics on the Left who accuse Orwell of handing ammunition to the Right. Hitchens insists that "Orwell did not conceive of the Cold War as a one-dimensional fight against the totalitarian menace, but as a contest (rather too well-matched) between superpowers, in which the danger of annihilation could be used to petrify and immobilize dissent" (87). The "constant, shifting hostility between three regional superpowers" of Oceania, Eurasia and Eastasia maintains "the permanent war propaganda" that permits so much tyranny in Oceania (87). Orwell's thinking on the Cold War was unconventional in that he made "the seldom observed distinction . . . between the Stalinization of Eastern Europe and the global ambitions of the United States" (87).[7] Orwell critiques those ideological binaries and global maps of the Cold War in which the Right invested. This intellectual service is overlooked by his detractors on the Left, so the critical distaste does not entirely spring from the content of his prophecies. Rather, his manner of prophesying as a political art is an important cause of distaste because it constitutes an apocalyptic outlook or mode, a mode which results in the accusation that Orwell's work is depressing.

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[7] Hitchens claims that in Orwell's essay of October 1945 entitled "You and the Atom Bomb," "he coined the term 'cold war'" (86). Thus "Orwell took up and separated two threads that were to become fatally entangled in many minds" (87).

Yet there is in the novel a seed of the post apocalyptic outlook. The notion of the banality of life after apocalypse is an element of the mood which rejects the apocalypse of fire and brimstone as a flawed model. The original title of the novel would seem to indicate a post apocalyptic mood in that sense of the banality and disappointment in the end of culture that we see in Eliot's *Waste Land* and the Nietzschean notion of the Last Man, which both have a nihilistic flavor. In this mood, cultural apocalypse leaves behind it a banal existence in which no one knows how to be human. The original title of *Nineteen Eighty-Four* was *The Last Man in Europe*. Hitchens interprets this title as a gesture like that of "the last Roman waiting for the Barbarians" (198). The sense of apocalypse is strong here: Hitchens quotes Winston Smith's diary, addressed "To the future or to the past, to a time when thought is free, when men are different from one another and do not live alone—to a time when truth exists and what is done cannot be undone: From the age of uniformity . . ." (Orwell quoted in Hitchens 198). Hitchens goes on to compare Smith's attitude to that of Adorno, when he said "No poetry after Auschwitz" (199). Here, apocalypse leaves behind a cultural waste land or desert. Hitchens, identifying that apocalyptic, cataclysmic sense that pervades Winston's diary (and, he argues, Orwell's mood), follows it with the Adorno comparison which if anything escalates the sense of apocalypse. Any sense of incipient post apocalyptic disappointment and anticlimax of the sort that Nietzsche and Eliot offer slips away in the last lines of the novel when Winston"[wins] the victory over himself. He [loves] Big Brother" (245). The possibilities of rebellion, of loyalty, and of "selfhood and consciousness" are

crushed (Gottlieb 12). While Orwell recognizes the banality of life after the end of civilization, he ends by stressing the continuance of tyranny and suffering, so that the victory of O'Brien over Winston Smith dominates the scene. The moment when Winston loves Big Brother is the true moment of apocalypse. It is the end of mankind, as the 'last man' succumbs to tyranny. Ultimately, Orwell's novel remains apocalyptic. It does not launch a corrective to the notion of apocalypse.

If Winston's acceptance of Big Brother makes an apocalyptic moment, it is an apocalypse of presence instead of absence. The waste land of human volition comes about through a program of presence: the state practices pervasive observation of its subjects. The famous slogan "BIG BROTHER IS WATCHING YOU" intensifies the psychological experience of pervasive observation (5). Winston is afraid of police searches, of the eyes of his coworkers and neighbors, of the telescreens, and of the Ministry of Love that supervises the gathered information. The official lack of laws in Oceania seems ironic, but actually the ubiquity of the state: laws would imply a limit to its authority. Posters and images of Big Brother proliferate on walls and telescreens, where his "face . . . seemed to persist for several seconds on the screen, as though the impact that it had made on everyone's eyeballs were too vivid to wear off immediately" (17). No absence is permitted in this prophesied utopia—least of all that mental withdrawal called doubt. Equivocal speech, which puts auditors in a position to doubt by opening up a space of absence, is likewise not practiced. Unequivocal prophecy and a saturation of presence maintain Oceania. Orwell's apocalypse is a crisis of presence.

The apocalyptic mood and its post apocalyptic corrective have a paradoxical relationship which does not permit one to categorize these outlooks as simply prophetic and non-prophetic. Comens cites the attraction of William Carlos Williams to the potency of apocalypse: "for Williams stance produces an unavoidable, all-pervading ambivalence. Even as he rejects the apocalyptic consummation, he is immensely attracted to it as an image of power and presence," an image that can shift into one of cruelty or banality (95). This ambivalence is part of a dynamic that occurs between the apocalyptic and post apocalyptic moods. Comens claims that "the rejection of apocalypse is itself apocalyptic—or, as Derrida has recently put it, it constitutes an 'apocalypse *without* apocalypse,' where the *without* 'marks an internal and external catastrophe of the apocalypse, an overturning of sense that does not merge with the catastrophe announced or described in the apocalyptic writings without however being foreign to them'" ("Of an Apocalyptic Tone" 95 quoted in Comens 95). There is consonance and dissonance between apocalypse and post apocalypse. That the rejection of apocalypse can itself be apocalyptic is a testament to the versatility and equivocalness of prophetic speech. Derrida's comment suggests that to be post apocalyptic, insofar as such a position rejects apocalypse, is to be equivocal about prophecy. Even after the rejection of apocalypse one continues to be subject to prophecy's equivocalness; rejecting the apocalyptic does not necessarily remove one from the territory of prophecy. Orwell's polarized apocalypticism gives few clues to these wider paradoxes and conflicts in prophecy as a political art. One of these few clues is his strategy to

resist forgetting. Orwell's use of anamnesia as a corrective to tyranny seems to align apocalyptic suddenness against tyranny instead of with tyranny, as his critics would have it. Thus the reader begins to encounter the equivocalness of prophecy and its relation to tyranny. Even with the glimmerings of this problem, Orwell's dystopian position is relatively simple compared with postdystopian representations of prophecy such as Rushdie's in *The Satanic Verses*. The apparent simplicity of the apocalyptic mode must not mislead critics from equally simplistic interpretations of prophecy as a political art, for the post apocalyptic mood is even more at the mercy of the equivocalness inherent in prophetic speech as a whole.

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Chapter Two

Prophecy and the President: Extispicy in Warren's *Brother to Dragons*

Prophetic speech moves in and out between an exterior, visible world and an interior intimate truth. This vacillating movement sustains prophecy's contradictory qualities so that it is a sign of absence and a sign of presence, immediate and mediated, timeless and sudden, dialogue and message, word and deed. In Robert Penn Warren's verse play *Brother to Dragons* the categories of nation and domesticity (or *polis* and *oikos*, public and private) meet in a manner that reflects the basic in-and-out movement of prophetic speech. Three distinct and variously problematic prophet figures—Aunt Cat, Thomas Jefferson, and Lilburne Lewis, advance this conflict between inside and outside, which finds its central expression in the extispitic sacrifice of the slave boy John, the central premise of the play. Nephew of Jefferson and murderer of John, Lilburne abhors the gap between inside and outside and tries to overcome it by exposing John's insides. He tries to use prophecy to do away with equivocalness. What Lilburne desires most is "the peace of definition," which amounts to the quality of presence in prophecy (39). Refusing to tolerate prophetic contradictions like absence and presence, just as he refuses to tolerate other contradictions that might blur definitions, he thinks and acts apocalyptically. His intolerance for the contradiction of absence and presence move him to think and act apocalyptically. Thomas Jefferson also meets up with contradictions. Via Jefferson, the issues connected to prophecy as interior—betrayal and genealogy come into conflict with the exterior nature of prophecy as a nation—founding force. Jefferson falls

into the conflict between dynasty (a family as a means of political power, ordered around legitimate offspring) and generation (the sharing of blood even with illegitimate or otherwise second-best children). Having occluded generation by dissociating himself from Lilburne and his crimes, and having used generation for profit by procreating slave children, he must touch the bloody hand of Lilburne in acknowledgement not so much of original sin, as of filial connection. Having made himself a prophet figure, Jefferson is shocked to encounter those contradictions that prophecy signals. With his impulse to found a great nation, Jefferson favors a prophecy that doesn't strike home—that is outside only, in a sense. Aunt Cat is the only prophet figure who effectively uses prophecy to bridge the inside and outside gaps—the political and domestic. Thus her use of prophecy as a political art is the most satisfactory and effective of these prophet figures, as it allows her to submit Lilburne to the law for the murder of John.

But *Brother to Dragons* is not only about prophecy: it is also an instance of prophecy as a political art. Where Jefferson denies and in a sense aborts Lilburne in order to forget that history, Warren forces his audience to recall the conditions of slavery and Jim Crowe laws in the founding just as RPW forces Jefferson to touch acknowledge Lilburne.[8] Prophecy can review, encapsulate, reflect and perhaps indict power, seen on the generic level through Warren's treatment of history via a setting in "no place" and "any time" (stage directions 3). Warren chooses a utopia in the literal sense of no place in order to stage this encounter with history. Lewis P. Simpson in "The Poet and The Father"

[8] Critics have noted Warren's preoccupation "with the nature of time and with one of its principle corollaries: history" (Paul Marian quoted in Bloom 216).

interprets the no place and no time that is the setting of *Brother to Dragons* as "not an encounter . . . in the all-embracing dimension of eternity," where eternity is static, perfect and transcends politics and power (138). The setting is not one of perfection, judgment and stasis: it does not transcend politics and power. Rather, the setting imitates the Book of Job (to which the title alludes), which is "a mythic record of an encounter between the soul, history, and the eternal" (137). But note that "eternity [is] a dimension of history" rather than the reverse (137). If history is a dimension of eternity, as, in Simpson's view, the New Testament claims, then the eschatology is one in which history is always trying to fulfill eternity, to get back to it or to move forward to it. The conception of time that Simpson sees in the Book of Job and which he calls "modern" makes eternity always present to and interfering in history in a way that shapes history (137). The 'no time' setting is a downward gesture—descending instead of transcending—that is essentially prophetic: the gesture is the transfer from high to low indicated in the Hebrew prefix *na* in the word *nabe* (prophet). The setting is not eternity. Like the trial of Orestes in *The Eumenides*, the setting is about the present and political reality. The 'no place' of *Brother to Dragons* is pertinent to history, because it allows "an encounter in a placeless historical present" "between history and what has replaced the entity called 'the soul,' the entity whose will to power is idealized and proclaimed—if not directly, by powerful implication—in the Declaration of Independence: the autonomous secular individual or self" (138).

This use of history is distinct from the prophetic treatment of history that Orwell finds so inimical: the occlusion of events instead of recollection. For this latter treatment of history, unequivocal prophecy creates a vacuum which we can call utopia or dystopia in which the present and future events are played out without the recollection of history. Tyranny is an effect of this endeavor, and the result is that the utopia is also a dystopia. Warren nonetheless successfully uses a utopian setting (in the literal sense of no place) in order to reconcile with and recollect history.

Warren's play is an instance of the use of prophecy as a political art, directed toward contemporary problems of the nation. Retrieving the Jefferson scandal, Warren copes with the destructive results of flaws in Jefferson's founding of America. Warren excavates the past in order to provide a healing insight into the present bringing American national identity to terms with its history of slavery. On two levels—the literal level confrontation of Jefferson with the facts of his family tragedy and the historical context of the play within the era of Civil Rights conflicts in America—the play commits to recalling historical events and resolving them rather than jettisoning, forgetting or occluding them. This anamnesiac use of history can be accomplished with prophecy which is authentically equivocal.

In addressing the formation of the present, Warren is engaged in prophetic work. He works "to prophesy the present" which is "to cite the past" (Balfour 16). Warren sets his dramatic poem in a liminal space that accommodates both the citation of the past and the prophesying of the present. Warren's is "The seer's

gaze," which "is precisely directed toward that which for one's own time is far more clearly present than it is to the contemporaries who 'keep pace with it'" (Benjamin cited in Balfour 16). The presumptions of political discourse in the present are clearer to the seer than to the pundit because, in Turgot's words, "a given state of affairs has already changed many times" by the time one apprehends it (Balfour 16). For Warren, who wants Americans to come to grips with the not-so-distant past, it is important that they grapple with the past in light of the prophecy that shaped thinking in the past as well as thinking in their own present. Warren offers literature as a venue for such a meeting with history: it is a utopia that need not be tyrannical, and it can be achieved through the equivocalness of prophecy. His work is thus more akin to Morrison's *Beloved* than to more didactic twentieth century political literature like Richard Wright's *Native Son* or Lillian Hellman's *The Little Foxes*.

Occupying that non-space, the characters remember, testify, dispute and grieve over the conditions of John's and Lilburne's death. Warren wishes the participants to re-present the action to the world in a way that grasps Lilburne's crime as a logical consequence of the nation's values. The utopian setting is useful not so much for judgment, which must be a matter of forensics: who did what where and when, as it is for acknowledging communal complicity, as when Jefferson is able to touch the bloody hand of Lilburne even though he could not, in the march of time, acknowledge that he is "brother to dragons." This complicity is akin to Dostoevsky's notion that "we are all in some way responsible" for evil. The fruit of this exercise in acknowledgment are not justice

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so much as truth. When in *Native Son* the lawyer Max defends Bigger Thomas for the murder of a white woman, he sets aside the forensics of the case and pursues the idea of communal complicity. The courtroom, however, is a place where outcomes ostensibly depend on forensics: the specifics of time, place, and names. He did not expect, as happened in a recent historical trial, that Bigger would be acquitted. *Native Son* addresses the absence of a venue for trying social issues. Warren offers a place that is precisely not a courtroom, and a gathering that is not a trial, wherein communal complicity comes to light. The dialogue broaches the complicity of Lucy, Letitia, Isham, and Jefferson and not just Lilburne, who is the actual murderer of John.

The setting of no place and no time is external to time, reinforcing the work's dichotomy between internal and external. Prophecy provides a bridge between internal and external: the truth inside the body or the cave and the light of day, the present and the eternal. Because of the timeless setting and the admission of RPW as a character, the play has been accused of didacticism.[9] Harold Bloom, in comparing them, sums up the catechistic reading in the following way. The "quite explicit argument" of the play "seemed to be another churchwardenly admonition that original sin was indeed the proper mental burden for our poetry" (Bloom 145). The doctrine of original sin[10] then stands over and against a post-religious understanding of man; "thus, poor Jefferson

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[9] The consensus on Warren's representation of Jefferson is that "Jefferson's belief in human perfectibility is . . . one of the most cherished and, according to Warren, dangerous and superficial of our national myths" (Law 128).

[10] Hugh Holman follows this theme in "Original Sin on the Dark and Bloody Ground" in Grimshaw.

received a massive drubbing, for being an Enlightened rationalist" (145). Like Bloom, Frederick McDowell lights on themes of guilt, original sin, evil, complicity, love, pride, alienation, suffering, grace and redemption which might seem to add up to a catechistic or didactic work. RPW's philosophical utterances and his sometimes pedantic dialogues with Jefferson might support the notion that the play is a thinly disguised catechism.

However, Bloom does not allow the charge of didacticism to stand there. The play exists in two versions: the 1953 and the 1975. Having read the revised version, he reformed his opinion. The new balance brought to the "exchanges between Jefferson and RPW, where the poet no longer maintains a rhetorical advantage over the president" relieves the poem of tendentiousness so that the author "transcended his polemics against Jefferson and Emerson" (147). I indeed agree with Bloom that the rhetorical balance is not on the side of RPW in the discussions with Jefferson. While RPW is reproachful and goading at times, the two characters also converse at other times as equals bending their intellect and experience to the same insoluble problem. This meeting of equals is most evident in the dialogue about the interplay of guilt between John and Lilburne. Also, RPW's philosophical musings tend to be interrupted by the historical characters as when he pontificates about Lilburne's rejection of Aunt Cat: "nothing" he says, "can justify the essential cruelty of—:" his judicious speech about essences and moral justification is broken off by Letitia who says simply "She loved him, that was all" (58). While the poem may seem at times like a free-for-all on the part of Warren, or like a prettified piece of didacticism, these

interruptions continually execute a return from universals to the insuperable particularities of the story. A continual return to the occurrences of love, grief and death, occurrences which refuse to be explained away, shows up the inadequacy of RPW's philosophical statements and prevents the play from being didactic.

RPW's attempts at doctrinal explanation particularly of Jefferson's flaws are shown to be inadequate. An important flaw of Jefferson's character is that he is morally self-satisfied. Jefferson's attitude toward Lilburne's crime resembles that imperturbability that the prophet rails against. According to Abraham Heschel, the prophet fights not so much the failure to accept doctrine (in Jefferson's case, original sin), but a common and pervasive "satiety of the conscience" and "flight from responsibility" that have little to do with doctrine (9). This indifference is as much a factor in Jefferson's fault as is his humanism. Jefferson is smug. His character flaw is not so much doctrinal or intellectual as that "satiety of conscience" which allows him to conduct his household in such an irregular manner. That satiety belongs to the evil of indifference which prophecy opposes. Jefferson's character is such that he does not expect the things that happen in his family. He is disgusted with Lilburne's evil but barely glimpses his own evil in consigning his children into slavery. Historically, the use of slaves in Thomas Jefferson's household and in that of his family has been brought forward as an example of inadequacy or hypocrisy in the American political founding. By using the character of Jefferson—central to the American founding--, and by choosing this particularly horrifying piece of history for his play, Warren evokes those doubts and uncovers those disproportions that are at the roots of the

American political philosophy. The problem of founding comes forward, and the audience is placed in a position where it needs to ask whether our founding by this father at least was sound and legitimate or perhaps otherwise—grievous and misguided. The prophetic undoing of satiety of conscience operates at a national level.

RPW encounters another of Jefferson's flaws that the play showcases is a kind of conceit. RPW wrestles first with Jefferson's epitaph (which the founder himself wrote) as it is highlighted in the play's preface. When Jefferson places the "triple boast" (2) on his gravestone, he omits his role as president of the United States and substitutes other claims instead. He is "Author Of The Declaration of American Independence Of The Statute Of Virginia For Religious Freedom, And Father Of The University Of Virginia" (2). Warren gives us this epitaph up front in the dramatic poem as he is introducing the speakers; they are the first words we encounter after the prologue and title. They are prophetic words in the sense that Jefferson speaks into his posthumous future and places himself on the outside of his life, casting judgment by choosing his greatest achievements. He assumes a position of transcendence. It is this understanding of himself as rational and noble, an understanding which he binds into the identity of the nation, that does not permit him to acknowledge the shame of bestial murder within his family.

While one might interpret his omissions of his presidency and his acquisition of the West as modesty, the second and third claims would have to contradict such a conclusion. What peculiar kind of vanity first of all writes its own

epitaph and second omits one of the most public achievements? Jefferson diminishes his role as political founder. His epitaph implies not that he considered his presidency and his acquisition of the West unimportant, but that an ignorant observer would fail to realize how important the other contributions were. He increases his stature by implying that the observer is not even really capable of calculating it. There is thus a morbid relationship to his public that might be oversimplified as a preoccupation with appearances or a tremendous conceit. He would like to be able to re-write or re-inscribe his relationship with his audience, his public, instead of leaving them to honor him. It is a way of trying to control one's role in history and is not dissimilar to Lilburne's manipulation of Isham into shooting him. The inscription on Jefferson's gravestone serves not only to remind the reader of his importance in the founding and thus of the way that the events of the Kentucky tragedy involve themselves in the nation, but also to model the dynamic of power through constitutive speech. From his writing on his gravestone we can conclude that Jefferson wanted to seize control of how he would be remembered, controlling the viewers of his gravestone through a kind of power-seeking prophecy. The omission of any mention of the Kentucky tragedy in Jefferson's voluminous writings and letters is as much a scandal as the murder itself and that omission follows the epitaph's pattern of control through prophecy, a pattern that Lilburne and his victims (John, Isham, and Letitia) prove destructive.[11]

[11] There is no reference to the incident in the Jefferson papers (Brooks 29).

These flaws of Jefferson's—his satiety of conscience and his attempt to prophetically control his viewer, Warren considers important to the American founding. Jefferson's composition of his own epitaph, while providing a clue to his character, is a minor instance of prophecy as compared to Jefferson's characterization of the West as the Promised Land. The Jefferson of *Brother to Dragons* styles himself as a prophet: Jefferson compares the American West to the Promised Land and himself to Moses. "Like the Israelite" he "saw [his] West," his Bold Louisiana" which is "Canaan's grander counterfeit" (10). Jefferson regards himself as a prophet forming the territory of the new nation. He sets the American founding in a historical relationship between past and future in terms of promise and fulfillment, word and manifestation. He lays the foundation for Manifest Destiny. Jefferson's prophetic characterization of the West was crucial to the notion of Manifest Destiny that drove the settlement and development of the United States. Werner Sollors emphasizes the role of the promised land image in American "transatlantic and rural-urban migrations" where America, or one of its regions, was described as "the fulfillment of the second book of Moses" (44). In the periods of mass immigration in the early twentieth century, America is the "Promised Land," "the city on a hill," the "American Israel," the "New Canaan," and the place of the "Chosen People" (44, 46). The Biblical typology on which Jefferson drew in his annexing of the West was to become central to the development of American ethnicities.

For Warren, Jefferson's prophetic stance is important in the founding of the nation. This verse drama has as "one of its central concerns . . . the problem

of our [American] history as Warren envisions it" (149). Jefferson says that he sent Meriwether "forth / To redeem the wild land to the Western Shore," rather like God the Father (27). Sr. Quinn claims that of all Warren's "symbols of necessity," (using his critical distinction between symbols of necessity and of congruence) "none has the importance of the West, or Promised Land" (19). The early drafts of *Brother to Dragons* rely, according to Law, on certain passages from the *Aeneid* so that "the evidence suggests that . . . [Warren] found special significance in the image of Aeneas, founder of a new world, fleeing the death of the old but carrying his father on his back, symbol of the burden of piety necessary to the new enterprise" (253). Law argues that this significance of Aeneas and Anchises is carried out in the play by the way in which RPW's father guides him through his excavation of the past. Along with the presence of the national patriarch Jefferson, and the theme of the West as the Promised Land, the model of the *Aeneid* suggests that political founding is an issue in the play, interwoven somehow into the very domesticity of the Kentucky tragedy. Jefferson's calling up of the nation through his deployment of Meriwether to the West constitutes a kind of prophecy and makes prophecy important to the play's background of nation-building.

Warren treats Jefferson's prophecy of the Promised Land as part and parcel of the Kentucky tragedy. The presence in the play of Meriwether Lewis, for instance, brings the exploration of the West into the Kentucky tragedy: historically, Lewis was not involved in the Kentucky incident. Warren includes him as well as Lewis' resentment of Jefferson in order to emphasize Jefferson's role

as prophet of the Promised Land. He implicates prophecy in the circumstances of John's death. Warren also characterizes the setting of Rocky Hill, Lilburne's home, as belonging to the edge of the wilderness. Warren does not let the murder of John rest as just an idiosyncrasy of a "bloody sentimental maniac," or even as a morbid curiosity. The way that Warren wrestles with Jefferson as founder, as philosophical father and as builder of the West and as patriotic exemplar lets us know that however petty and domestic the tyrannies of Lilburne are, they still touch on great problems of power that are political and perhaps even mythic.

Lilburne is a prophet figure who is so problematic that it is hard to know whether he is a prophet figure at all. As a prophet, he is something of a fraud. As both tyrant and pseudo-prophet, he resembles tyrannical figures like Big Brother in *Nineteen Eighty-Four* and Ayatollah Khomeini in *The Satanic Verses*—who deploy imitations of prophecy as a way of sustaining the power and royal consciousness that the prophet is supposed to fight. But the prophetic elements of Lilburne's violent actions are to striking to be ignored. His prophet-like actions include his practice of extispicy on John, and his compelling predictions of John breaking the jug and of Isham executing him, predictions which amount to efficacious speech. He has an apocalyptic mindset, regarding prophecy as an unequivocal phenomenon, and desires simplification. In his search for "the peace of definition," he tries to eliminate the gaps between inside and outside, presence and absence, (and truth and justice) (39). He tries to eliminate these gaps

through extispicy: making the inside out. He cannot tolerate equivocalness or hiddenness. He thus cuts out equivocalness by determining what will happen.

Lilburne provokes John to break the jug, foretelling his punishment, "saying soft: 'That pitcher—if you break it—'" and "shoving the pitcher there to John (80 79). Lil walked to the spring "soft behind" John and, Isham suspects, pushes John in. When the pitcher breaks, Isham recalls feeling "no surprise" (81). It was not a chance or contingency; rather, it "'twas natural-like . . . / Like happened long ago" (81). Lilburne had set up John as offender, had made the offense and the punishment inevitable, and in this way mastered the future. Rather, Lilburne deploys something that resembles mantic speech: his words constitute reality, played out in John's actions. Lilburne's word becomes his victims' deed. In this sense he is a prophet. But the sense of fraud persists: he pushes John.

Similarly, Lilburne tries to compel his own and Isham's death. Trying to deploy the word as deed, he actually writes Isham's will along with his own. He shows Isham the will: "Within this inclosure myself and my brother requests / Be entered in the same coffin and / In the same ground. / But ground scratched out, and then / 'Twas grave he writ" (104). He actually inscribes his prophecy of Isham's death, and then begins to bend Isham to that path. He gives "the kiss of necessity" (101). He wants to mold the future, via his actions and his visions and his prophetic writing of the will, and to make it necessary rather than contingent. Lilburne controls his victim by planting a possibility in his imagination, by establishing the conditions of possibility. Ishey thus allows Lilburne to call the

shots. Lilburne orders reality and Isham is unable to exert himself to hope or to break the script. He cannot speak against it: he "don't say nothing" (Warren 72).

Lilburne resembles a prophet in other ways. The scene in which he goes out into the woods with his bride and savages her illusions has some elements of the prophetic style, which is not caressing (a style he does use with Isham) but "luminous and explosive, firm and contingent, harsh and compassionate, a fusion of contradictions" (Heschel 7). Displaying two extremes of vision, he adorns Letitia with sweet-gum flowers and exclaims to her that she's an "angel from the sky" while "smiling like [Letitia] never saw" (47). The next instant, "His face was dark" and he tells her "even hell would be better than this sty" (47). To Lilburne as "To the prophet [the moral state of society] is dreadful" (Heschel 9). In his divided vision he resembles a prophet, but as with his other prophetic characteristics, this one is slightly 'off'.

Lilburne's disgust is both misplaced and overblown, and it makes Lilburne's use of prophecy problematic. Heschel explains hypertrophy using the example of Jeremiah. The biblical prophet has genuine sympathy for God, feeling the "divine wrath" within him (117). But he also has sympathy for Israel, and feels fear and grief on his people's behalf. His "modes of prophetic sympathy are determined by the modes of the divine pathos" so that "the pathos of love and the pathos of anger awake corresponding tones in the heart of the prophet" (119). At The Biblical Jeremiah "had a soul of extreme sensitivity to human suffering" (Heschel 120). Thus the laments and the vivid imagining of the punishment to come: "I heard a cry as of a woman in travail, Anguish as of one

bringing forth her first child, the cry of the daughter of Zion gasping for breath" (Jeremiah 4:31 quoted in Heschel 120). The sympathies of the prophet are extreme and they are in conflict with each other: he is a mediator between the divine and the mortal and "this [is] a part of the complexity of the prophet's inner existence" (121). In addition to this genuine conflict there is pathos in the prophet that floats free of its moorings and becomes excessive and self-feeding: it is hypertrophic and "surpass[es] in intensity the feelings of the person for whom one has sympathy" (126). In all of this complexity and conflict there is a parallel to Lilburne. He manifests the hypertrophic sympathy toward his mother that we see in Jeremiah. His anxiety over her dishes, her spoons, her tea-things and the jug is over and above what she felt for them while living. The slaves she trusted and who loved her become suspect to him. He counts the household spoons and takes inventory of the dishes. His concern on Lucy's behalf far outweighs any pity she had for herself. Hypertrophic in his sympathy, he becomes a source instead of a mouthpiece for another's wrath.

When Lilburne enters the kitchen, drunk asking to "see [his] mother's spoons" and one is missing, he strikes out. He overreacts because "he feels that something / Terrible is happening to his mother" (69). In contrast to Lilburne's obviously excessive care for his mother's honor is the slaves' more moderate and practical affection. They "liked her 'tol-bul well,'" and "would have defended all her spoons against / The Powers of Darkness and Old Scratch Himself" with "reasonable loyalty" (68). This loyalty is reasonable because it has its limits in death: "but now she is dead" (68). Lilburne's sympathy is excessive and, since it

is leant to a dead woman, un-needed and therefore insincere. His sympathy is hypertrophic since it purports falsely to have an external object. When he punishes the slaves "Always somebody gets hurt," which tells us of his cruelty (69). RPW tells us that the slaves get hurt "But Lilburne most" (69). The cliché of the punisher suffering more than the punished is usually taken facetiously or ironically, but in Lilburne it is not. Rather, it is further proof of his morbid sympathy. Jefferson sums up his character as a "bloody sentimental maniac" (16).

The bloody sentimentalism of Lilburne resonates to a certain extent with the image of the "frenzy to which the prophets as a class are subject" (336). This frenzy indicates a complete possession by God: "the worshipper felt the god enter into his own being" (W.K.C. Guthrie quoted in 79). When the prophet speaks, it is literally as the god, and he is entitled to answer to the god's name. Heschel suggests with his argument that the prophet is in some sense passive to "the unconditioned power which exercises sheer compulsion over" him (114). George Palmer Garrett claims that the Pasiphae myth is "a symbolic background for Lilburn's specific crime" by uncovering similarities between the murder and the flesh-burning ritual of an "ecstatic Cretan religion" (79). In another version of the story of Lilburne the slave boy's corpse is thrown in parts into the fire in the meat house. For Garrett, the ecstatic frenzy accounts for the "ritual" quality of the murder (79). In a twist on the original sin thesis, Garrett explains that "the disregard of this fact, the terrible potential of mankind for irrational ecstasy, good or evil . . . Warren sees as the fatal defect in Jefferson's vision" (79). This

omission would amount to an Apollonian blindness to Dionysian forces. But Garrett's Apollonian/Dionysian opposition overlooks the extispitic significance of John's murder not as mere irrationality but as an attempt to bridge inside and outside. Garrett's theory about the Pasiphae myth would enlarge on this "unconditioned power" and "sheer compulsion" (79) his Cretan ecstatic ritual is a prophetic activity: It is exactly the kind of prophecy that Heschel repudiates when he denies the necessity of the ecstatic experience for the Biblical prophets.

This frenzy or ecstasy has a dubious status in the theology of prophecy (Heschel 338). The history of exegesis involves a great deal of mixing between Jewish and Greek theories of prophecy, so that they are not clinically separate from each other in the West. Heschel describes the "syncretist" work of Philo of Alexandria in bringing the Greek idea of an ecstatic frenzy that visits the oracle into his analysis of the Biblical prophets (Heschel 335). Moses Maimonides recognizes this tradition but emphasizes the mental clarity of Moses. The Christian theologian Origen was similarly emphatic that "the will and judgment of the prophets remain in the normal state" (343). There is a history of both acceptance of and ironic distancing from ecstasy as a proof of prophetic sincerity, and Heschel sides with the latter, citing the complete lack of ecstasy in Moses, Amos, Hosea, Isaiah and Jeremiah (352). The frenzy then, is a suspect prophetic practice. Again, Lilburne's prophetic activities have an air of falsity.

Also, the ecstatic frenzy or bacchanal excess that Garrett proposes does not sit well with the stillness or the deliberateness of Lilburne's character. Jefferson wonders whether it was the "rush of wild joy" for which Lilburne struck

(54). The magnificence of Lilburne that Letitia glimpses as he handles a nervous horse might seem to support this. His face was "dark and beautiful" as he calmed the animal, but it was also "still" (41). Letitia exclaims: "oh, it was still, but it was beautiful!" (45). While Lilburne's magnificence would seem to indicate a man too spirited to be confined within the limits of a peaceful existence who is driven by rage, like Achilles dragging the body of Hector around the walls of Troy, his stillness indicates something different. It indicates his desire for unequivocalness and the peace of definition. He moves deliberately, not suddenly, toward this goal as he slowly bates John into breaking the jug.

Lilburne continues to reach for a "knowledge too deep for knowing" and after his apprehension for John's murder, reaches a clarity and has "the certainty of moving toward / That perfect certainty of self that all / His life had yearned for" (99). This certainty is joyful for him, for he had always desired such clarity. RPW explains that the clarity and certainty amount to a "vision" and in this vision "The scales are loosed from his eyes" (100). Lilburne is a kind of ferocious seer-into the dark. He cuts John open to ascertain the future—his own in trial and death, John's in death, and the household's in betrayal. He sets himself up as a seer, to retrieve knowledge from the dark inside the meat shed, inside John's body, inside his house, inside the genealogy of the slave, inside his patrimony. But he is a false seer because he does not accept that equivocalness between an interior world and an exterior world, between absence and presence. Instead, of equivocalness, he wants clarity.

The Greek practice of consulting innards is the model for his false prophecy. Ruth Padel's describes the prophet consulting his own through gut feelings and dreams as well as the innards of or others—an animal slaughtered on an altar or table. The butchery of John on a meat block in the meat house implies that he is an animal of the type usually slaughtered there and it suggests sacrifice, but more particularly it alludes to extispicy, which is "the art of divining the gods' will from animal entrails" (Padel 15). Lilburne goes beyond a simple execution into a fearful and ritualistic slaughter: the dismemberment of John limb by limb with an axe as the chorus of the household slaves looks on.[12]

Even the darkness of the shed suggests the *chthonic* sources of prophecy and the darkness of the innards. Padel identifies a connection between innards and darkness in Greek thought. Innards are hidden from the light: "darkness is the condition . . . of innards" and it is also the color (75). The darkness of the innards in Greek thought corresponded (in a way that is foreign to our modern metaphor of the unconscious as dark) to "core attributes of the human equipment of thinking, feeling and knowing" for the Greeks" (76). The "associations of darkness . . . underpin Greek discourse of inner experience," but are not equivalent to the way in which we apply a metaphor of darkness to the psyche (76). For the Greeks, truth and falsehood, signs of the present and the future

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[12] Padel's subtitle to *In and Out of the Greek Mind* is *Greek Images of the Tragic Self.* She suggests that tragic knowing is steeped in the deaths and blindings that happen behind the stage or in an enclosed hut on the stage, hidden from view (75). The significance of tragedy to the verse-play Brother to Dragons is not fully mapped out, but the way in which the murder of John is witnessed and eventually exposed by a silent, chorus-like crowd, along with the way that Warren presents it ob-skene via distant witnesses is certainly suggestive of Greek tragedy.

had "somatic expression" (77). Truth lay in the dark, and thus blind Tiresius had prophetic sight.

Lilburne's extispitic sacrifice of John belongs to this "discourse of darkness" and proceeds from Lilburne's desire for "the peace of definition," or a clear knowledge about the world (Padel 75). Lilburne wants definition and knowledge in a transparent world, in which there is no gap between appearance and reality or truth and justice. He strives against opacity. Letitia's brother recalls "sometimes his eyes / Just stared . . . so bright with a kind of shine, / Like he was looking through [someone]" (45). His vision seeks transparency: "He had a way to look at a man sort of / Like [he] [was]n't there" (45). This transparent gaze draws Letitia so that she "wanted to be / Just nothing and him everything," and her "Like air he breathed and didn't know or heed" (45). She echoes his desire for transparency in the plea "Oh, God, even if You're God, you haven't got / The right to make me not know anything. / And what it means, and why, / And not be nothing, God" (46). RPW recognizes that her plea is in the same vein as Lilburne's: "All [she] demand[s] is definition, too, / Just like poor Lilburne" (46). Lilburne wants sight and clarity, and he seeks it, like a Greek prophet, in the dark of the cave (the meat house) and innards (John's dismembered body).

Lilburne wants to eliminate the gap between interior and exterior in order to render transparent the question of generation: is John, whom the political realm has rendered a slave, slavish on the inside? Is his slavishness evidenced by his innards? Lilburne wants to ascertain the distinction between the honorable Lewis generations and the nameless economic slave generations who

might, given Jefferson's proclivities, proceed from the same genetic source. He demands the proper respect for the white Lewis generations—specifically, for his mother Lucy's relation to the President, a relation signaled in the household by the jug that was the President's gift to Lucy. He is deeply paranoid that the slaves will mishandle these and other signs of honor. The way in which Lilburne is a prophet is that he brings to light what has been obscured in society: namely, the arbitrariness of the slavery of blacks. While other normal folk are able to 'suspend disbelief' so to speak and look past the arbitrariness of the social system, Lilburne is not. He is dismissed as a "bloody sentimental maniac." He has the extremely clear vision of social reality and is thus a prophet. Lilburne's practice of extispicy flags him as a kind of prophet and suggests the issues of inside and outside that drive the play.

Lilburne's desire for the peace of definition amounts to an apocalyptic outlook. The brothers argue as Lil pleads that it is better to run away and remain living. Lil claims that to be dead differs little from these people's condition, that one "can be dead / And breathe and eat and sleep" (104). He points out "the folks all walking in their clothes!" and claims "they don't know they're dead" (104). For Lilburne all time is frozen, and thus all people are frozen in its certainty and are therefore dead. He recognizes no distinction between the present and past, arguing that the dead Lucy "loves [Isham] still" and that Isham ought not "up and ride and leave [their] mother" (105). Time also does not pass for Lilburne after he kills John. While "Time turns, and the orbed axis leans / to warm Kentucky" and spring comes, "His heart does not unlatch when the first shoots / Of corn

prick punctiliously the black field" (96 99). Instead of inhabiting the earth's seasonal landscape which changes over time, "he now inhabits an inward landscape / Of forms fixed and hieratic, like moon-blasted basalt" (96). He inhabits an apocalyptic landscape. Lilburne's desire for certainty excludes him from the march of time so that, he imagines, the living and the dead are alike frozen in definition. For him the prophetic quality of timelessness permits definition. In this he resembles the Ayatollah Khomeini of *The Satanic Verses*, who smashes clocks, as well as and Brueggemann's portrait of the king, who occupies an unchanging royal time. Lilburne does not accept the prophetic oscillation between timelessness and suddenness.

Like the effort to achieve definition through extispitic violence, Lilburne's embrace of apocalypticism amounts to a refusal to accept a gap or discontinuity between inside and outside, the visible and the hidden. RPW wonders of the New Madrid earthquake following the execution of John "did that poor fellow Lilburne long for more / When midnight vision burst, and sudden, he saw / The world heave like the forest in a storm . . . While darkness danced on tiptoe far above, / And tore / The streaming and apocalyptic horror of its enormous hair" (39)? When the household endures an earthquake, Lilburne has a corresponding mental upheaval in which he "knew / At last, at last, the thrilling absoluteness / Of the pure act. Year after year, to have yearned / For the peace of definition. Here it was" (39).

To Lilburne this earthquake appears to be a sign. The thesis of original sin, that we are all brother to dragons and share complicity, is bolstered by the

extraordinary New Madrid earthquake, which was the worst ever in North America.[13] The occurrence of the earthquake on the night of John's murder would seem to mark the event as something particularly foul, unnatural, and deserving of divine wrath as the disorder in Macbeth's stables do on the night of Duncan's murder. Lilburne's wife Letitia claims that at the time of the earthquake she "prayed for the End" as "folks named the End of Time," and, in an apocalyptic mood, the Mississippi River flowed backwards. RPW rebukes her, saying "It takes something more to bring the End of Time / Than that Roman circus in your meat-house" (43). She repeats again that she "prayed / For the End of Time," and RPW advances the theory that "each man has / A different set of well-fondled reasons / To make any hour seem perfectly made to order / For God's wrath" (44). RPW mocks the tendency to apocalypticism, and denies its relation to small tyrannies because "guilt is common enough . . . to make any one day appropriate for the Judgment" (57). For RPW evil is banal and common, while for Lilburne in his apocalypticism evil is extraordinary and conclusive.[14]

For Lucy apocalypticism results in moral paralysis. Lucy relates the story of John returning, beaten, from an effort to fetch Lilburne home from a drunken spree: John bleeds, and at the sight of the blood her "faculty is frozen" and she fails to bind up the wound. Presented with proof of Lilburne's streak of violence/violent character, she "cried out: 'God!' And suddenly, / Time flowed back. / Flowed back and over. It whirled [her] like a flood" (55). She succumbs

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[13] The date of the earthquake was December 15, 1811 (Brooks 29).

[14] Bloom describes Warren as "suspicious of the doctrine of progress and the blandishments of utopianism," which means that his preoccupation with time is not utopian (27).

to a notion of apocalypse—an end of history—instead of remaining to take part in history which would entail cleaning John's wounds, rebuking Lilburne, and accepting responsibility in this damaged community. Instead of cleaning the wounds, she "prayed it was only a dream" (55) and let go of "the blessedness of the human obligation" (55). Lucy's readiness to regard Lilburne's actions as determined results in her weakness and failure. She put a "distance . . . great as forever" between herself and Lilburne, who stood at the foot of the bed. His "face yearned toward [her] across the valley" (55). She completes her failure by dying. After reaching out "to touch / The brightness of violent blood," hoping to find it "nothing but air" she fainted, awoke and died (54). This death amounts to a "repudiation," a rejection of the messiness of life in time and of her maternal connection to Lilburne (48). This repudiation brings us back to the central problem of the play, which is the silence of Jefferson regarding the murders. This silence is a failure to encounter tyranny particularly as a possibility of one's own blood.

RPW resists apocalypticism and its consequent denial of responsibility by pinning the events of Rocky Hill down to a particular time and place on recognizable everyday maps and timetables deferring to *chronos* instead of *chairos*. The old house, he insists to Jefferson, is no longer there: he drove "Up Highway 109 from Hopkinsville / To Dawson Springs, then west on 62" and "assure[s Jefferson] that it is gone" (12). He also gives the exact date of the earthquake when Letitia describes it. He is impatient with her hope that it was the "End of Time" (43), saying the brutality "was just an episode in the long drift

of human / Experience" (43). RPW proposes an episodic instead of an eschatological timetable as a palliative for the evils of apocalypticism.

While he downplays notion that the earthquake was a sign or judgment, RPW also "expresses . . . the ironical fear that the modern age might be too 'advanced' to . . . fear God's wrath" (57). He describes modern Kentucky as a "God-damn world" in which "Time only" (not rivers or journeys) "will always flow" (14). Yet in this conception of an endless world without fulfillment or apocalypse "even the leathery heart foreknows the end and knows / It will not be long, be long" (13). A sense of hopelessness indicates that while time brings no fulfillment or end, it spoils things "like milk gone sour in July" (15). RPW resists determinism and yet is disturbed by an indifference not only to "the 'horror' of being men," but also to a certain appropriateness of external nature to internal mind and soul which is the peculiar realm of prophetic expression (57). While RPW identifies as a problem the apocalyptic tendency passively to regard events as inevitable, he also rejects the idea that time and meaning, outside and inside are entirely separate. RPW allows for the difficulty of sidestepping the extremes of timelessness or suddenness.

When RPW recalls visiting Rocky Hill, "the house Charles Lewis built" and Lilburne occupied he sees a black snake rise up out of the ruins (22). He creates an interpretive problem: the snake was not "Nidhogg . . . nor even / Eve's interlocutor . . . nor . . . The quintessential evil of that ruin . . . no spirit, symbol, god, / Or Freudian principle" (25). It was, he insists, "just a snake, / Black Snake, Black Pilot Snake, the Mountain Blacksnake" (25). Nonetheless he feels a

"metaphysical chill" (25). His "soul / Sat in [his] hand and could not move" (25). It is "as though those stones / Bled forth earth's inner darkness to the day" (24). Remembering the sinister potential of prophecy as displayed by Lilburne's violence and the damaging paralysis of Lucy's apocalypticism, RPW wants to avoid a determinist connection between the natural world and the moral. He fears a prophecy in which presence dominates over absence and suddenness over timelessness, but nonetheless considers some sort of eschatology necessary to hope.

This image of the black snake in the Lewis house recalls the importance of the snake to prophecy, particularly Greek "cults [in which] snakes were themselves prophetic" (Padel 146). They were prophetic because "snakes [were] the most obvious chthonic creature to emerge in our surface-world" and thus in this way of thinking snakes "are the prime animal intermediary between this world and its underneath" (146). The snake, as coming out of the chthonic regions whose darkness hid divine truth, was a bearer of prophetic sight. Padel helps us understand the snake's appropriateness as a model for this hidden presence via a Greek way of thinking that is also present in the play. The roofs of Greek houses sheltered snakes so that they were within the house—unseen perhaps, but nonetheless "propitiated, given milk, honey-cakes, and shrines" (146). The Greeks regarded them as a chthonic connection to the divine. Part of that daemonic status meant that "they . . . lived with the possibility that gods might turn the snake's power against them at any moment" (146). Equivocal signs, they are "an image of lightning-quick, invisible menace in one's own house"

(146). This ambivalence of the snake as daemon is tied to its domesticity. The snake is a "tight, perfect image of the daemonic within" the house (147).

The Greek way of thinking that permitted this ambivalence and believed in its unseen presence in the home helps us to understand the thesis the play repeats: that "doom is always domestic" (8). In using this image of the snake in the house, Warren both evokes duplicity of prophetic thinking, which travels between inside and outside, and the domesticity of Lilburne's crime. As part of the meeting of disparate categories of nation and *oikos* in this play that is about the effects of a private scandal on national identity, Warren investigates the way that filial relationships bear significance in the calculation of human potential for good and for tyranny. There is a dynastic structure even in a democratic society in which genealogy is secondary to citizenship. The establishment of civilization through dynasty involves the separation of legitimate or favored children, who have an established place in the world (*pietas*) from illegitimate or less favored children who remain in shadow or are cast out into the wilderness. Prophecy, as an equivocal speech darting like Mercury between separate worlds (heaven and earth, seen and unseen) is peculiarly suited to the enterprise of uncovering the flaws of this dynastic structure.

RPW casts Rocky Hill as the site of a hidden interior world bursting forth, of a Minotaur escaping the labyrinth, and of genealogy erupting through a hitherto-honorable dynasty. The snake emerging from the house images the intersection of inside and out, genealogy and dynasty, home and nation that occur in the Jefferson family scandal. The reason that the snake image persists

to be important is because of the way it so completely presents the problem that Lucy, Aunt Cat and Jefferson struggle with: the hidden presence of mystery, shame or betrayal in the house where the house is both a dwelling and a metonymy for genealogy or filiation. Jefferson forefathered (in both senses), Lucy bore, and Aunt Cat suckled "two black-hearted murderers," and the fact of this connection between themselves and the murderous events becomes their inescapable doom (17).

Doom is a prophetic (and even apocalyptic) notion. Doom is always domestic because prophecy doesn't love dynasty, but instead exercises its potential to bring the inside out in the form of uncovering the ill-favored secrets of genealogy. For Jefferson "doom is always domestic," because "the absolute traitor lurks in some sweet corner of the blood" (8). Sweetness suggests the taste of passion and implies that physical desire is the downfall of those noble endeavors of the sort that Jefferson listed on his gravestone. The downfall of the nation can proceed from the secret of the house—in Jefferson's case, the paternity of Jefferson and the hidden paternity of his slave children. Doom—that prophesied downfall of the political order—awaits within genealogy. Prophecy sides with genealogy against dynasty and the maintenance of civilization.

The man who was such a powerful mind behind the development of a democratic government based on a belief in equality, the possibility of enlightened self-rule and the discontinuation of primogeniture is nonetheless obsessed with genealogy. In Warren's portrayal of him, Jefferson meditates on paternity, wondering again and again how young men who were "blood-kin" to

himself could show such a bestial strain. It is clear that he orders human life, to a certain extent and democrat though he is, through genealogy. He wonders again and again that Lilburne and Isham could have come from his blood and ponders the betrayal of this blood: "yes, that's the fact that shakes my heart / With the intrinsic shock: / Born of my sister's body, vessel of my blood, / And yet what it is" (42). For a moment, he imagines that he can "reject, repudiate, / And squeeze from [his] blood the blood of Lilburne" (43). This attempt aside, he looks at the way this blood plays out through the centuries, and understands time as an unfolding of genealogy.

This advocate of equality was also a slaveholder, and to crown these contradictions, he kept a slave mistress by whom he fathered five children: five unacknowledged, illegitimate slave children.[15] The black blood wipes out all trace of Jefferson in his illegitimate children, and in this sense heritage is everything, while in democratic ideals, it is nothing. The Jefferson of *Brother to Dragons* says he never had a son and thus tenderly adopted Meriwether Lewis (a nephew) as son and heir to the promised land, the West. While Jefferson casts himself as a sort of Moses figure in his acquisition of the West, Warren also implies a similarity to Jacob and Esau, who competed for their father's blessing, and to the family of Abraham who, like Jefferson, founds a nation. Abraham saw his son Isaac as the first born of his nation, while his illegitimate son Ishmael,

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[15] In 1998 "DNA tests determined that a male in Jefferson's family fathered the last child of Jefferson's slave, Sally Hemings. This information "makes it difficult to protect him from the old charge that [Jefferson] conceived children with Hemings and reared his own progeny in bondage" (Appleby 8). Recent works on Jefferson's life and presidency include *The Negro President: Jefferson and the Slave Power* and *Mr. Jefferson's Lost Cause: Land, Farmers, Slavery and the Louisiana Purchase*.

born by Hagar the slave girl, was banished. The name of Lilburne's brother Isham alludes to Ishmael. In Warren's concatenation of the Biblical types, Ishey is not the only Ishmael figure: the other Ishmael figures are only tacitly present, represented by that chorus of slave witnesses in the meat house—Jefferson's illegitimate black children. Like Ishmael, they are excluded because they are offspring of a slave.

In the Judeao-Christian tradition, Isaac was brought by Abraham to into the wilderness to be slaughtered as a sacrifice in obedience to God. Isaac asks his father what the sacrificial victim will be, and Abraham answers that God will provide it. God stills Abraham's hand as he lifts the knife and asks instead for the ram in the thicket. In Christian tradition, Isaac is a type of Christ, the sacrifice provided by God. In the Islamic tradition, however, it is Ishmael whom Abraham brings to the altar. Thus the name Ishmael has an ambiguous heritage, but in either tradition there is a suggestion of sacrifice and a background of the rejected illegitimate son who cannot be used for the founding of a dynasty and nation. Ishey's name suggests that the logic of sacrifice is implicated in the deaths of Lilburne and John.

Ishey considers himself a sacrifice and a victim of Lilburne. Even when he murders Lilburne, he does so as a victim of Lilburne's will acting under Lilburne's careful control. Lil spells out Ishey's directions by writing wills for both of them and carefully "count[ing] slow to make [him] do it" (108). Lilburne also wants to

be the sacrifice and wants to be betrayed.[16] He "would count to ten" to "get the last sweet drop" waiting for Isham to shoot him "staring steady at [his brother] all the time" (107). Lilburne wants Isham to kill him so that he can have a "last betrayer" to "leave him in his perfectest delight, / . . . alone in sweet alienation" to "[suck] the sweet injustice like a Christmas bonbon" (108). However, while Ishey is a victim of Lilburne to a certain extent, the biblical import of his name is that he is not the sacrifice. And after all, it is John whom Lilburne destroys on the altar of the chopping block. The sacrifice of John is a consequence of the broken pitcher, which was a material sign of Lucy Lewis' filial relation to Jefferson, a relation that Lilburne values because of Jefferson's status as president and founder. Lilburne offers up the sacrifice of John not to God, but to Jefferson. John's death is a founding sacrifice of the kind that established ancient cities. Jefferson is the recipient of the sacrificial offering. To what extent is Jefferson responsible for this?

Both Lilburne and Meriwether are, in a sense, sons of Jefferson and surrogates for his illegitimate slave children. Both the Lewis's have the potential to fulfill Jefferson's hopes for the common man. Meriwether achieves greatness through territorial exploration. Lilburne also has a potential for greatness: his magnificence, his charisma and ability to command love (Ishey's and Letitia's), his instinctive leadership that Letitia glimpses in his handling of the spirited horse all speak of a person who ought to fulfill Jefferson's highest expectations for the

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16 In another instance of betrayal, it was Lilburne's dog Nero that brought investigators out to the house in the first place by retrieving one of John's bones. Of course the dog's name means "black" and also suggests tyranny.

common man. But he is not the common man: he is the nephew of the president. Genealogy emerges to contradict Jefferson's ideals. Meriwether resents Jefferson for these ideals--for Jefferson's hope in the nobility of man over and against the nobility of the well-born. He indicts Jefferson's hopes in humanity and claims his "lie was the perfect lure" (109). The noble dream "that Man at last is Man's friend" he found to be untrue, and he more than resents Jefferson for telling it to him (114). Believing in this hope, he finds it impossible to endure treachery and the false accusations of embezzlement made against him as governor of the Louisiana Territory. Although it was a liar named Bates who accused him, Meriwether seems to regard Jefferson as the "Great Betrayer" (113). He goes so far as to accuse Jefferson of murdering him: "I knew" he says "who murdered me" (115). Meriwether suggests that Jefferson's crimes are akin to Lilburne's. Meriwether claims to have sympathy or affinity for Lilburne's crime, saying he would "honor more / The axe in the midnight meat-house, as more honest at least, / Than [Jefferson's] murderous lie to prove [him]self / Nobler in man's nobleness" (116). Meriwether thus draws an explicit parallel between Lilburne's actions and Jefferson's: "Look at your arm," he tells Jefferson. "It's lifted! Is the axe there?" he asks, and comments on "the rage of [Jefferson's] virtue" (117). Meriwether implies that Jefferson's ideals chop up and dismember man. But what is this dismemberment? Genealogy is separated from dynasty. More specifically, he dismembers his slave children by separating out their genealogy or paternity from their blackness. According to Kathleen Kelly's reading Morrison's *Beloved* gives a memorable image of this racial

dismemberment with the beheading of Sethe's daughter which, like the sacrifice of John, occurs in a dark shed.[17] This dismemberment of the baby repeats the pulling-apart of Sethe's body and soul by Schoolteacher when he separates her animal and human characteristics on a table with two columns.

The horror of mixed blood contradicts Jefferson's democratic ideals and amounts to the dismemberment of persons. But it also leads to the notion of betrayal. For Werner Sollors, the development of American ethnicities through the prophecy of the Promised Land is connected to the notion of betrayal within families. To be of mixed blood (as were the slave children of Jefferson) was to be a traitor to the lines of generation and to be a contradiction to the story of purity and to the boundaries of race. Sollors explains:

> in the cultural fear of boundary–dissolving characters between categories, an American paradox manifested itself. The products of consent relations were, well into the twentieth century, considered to be exclusively and negatively shaped by one aspect of their descent. In the United States, the country of consent (wherein one chose to be American), mulattoes were not viewed as architects of their own fates . . . in the American imagination, mixed bloods were the culmination of the fear of losing generations (68).

In *Brother to Dragons*, the fear of being related to something monstrous emerges in the master-slave relations in the Lewis and Jefferson households. Lilburne withdraws his consent to any maternal bonds to his black nanny, vowing that he would "puke the last black drop" of her milk that he suckled from her as a child (58). But this theme of blood betrayal also emerges in Lilburne, whose monstrous violence makes him a traitor to the Jefferson blood and thus

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[17] Kathleen Kelly's *Apotropeic Imagination* discusses the way Morrison's characters act in violent ways in order to ward off other evils: the apotropeic gesture is akin to prophecy in its indirect efficacy.

something that Jefferson refuses to acknowledge, just as he refuses to acknowledge his slave children. Lilburne's crime is in a sense the revenge of those contradictions that Jefferson's prophecy of man's nobility in the Promised Land suppresses.

How does Jefferson "murder" Meriwether, though? Jefferson abandons his care of Meriwether, failing to assist, support or defend him when Meriwether is falsely accused of embezzlement. Jefferson assumes a stance of transcendent remoteness. He also affects blindness. The betrayal seems to be a matter both personal and national—having to do with Jefferson's founding ideals. There is an intersection of the *polis* and the *oikos* in the themes of *Brother to Dragons*. While it is clear from the deep involvement of Jefferson in the verse drama and from the addition of Meriwether Lewis to the speakers that this work is concerned with the American national myth, it is also undeniably a story about the household and family and the way that power and political regime interact with personal and filial association. Richard Law in "Doom is Always Domestic: Familial Betrayal in *Brother to Dragons*" claims that the Kentucky tragedy "is presented in Warren's version of the events as a *domestic* tragedy" (250).

The betrayal that Jefferson bemoans is domestic: it is a betrayal of domestic relations of love and of blood. Law connects this domesticity to betrayal claiming that "at the core of the action of *Brother to Dragons* lies this harsh paradigm of double betrayal" of parent by child and child by parent, where Meriwether Lewis and Jefferson exemplify the last. Brother betrays brother in the persons of Ishey and Lilburne as Lilburne tries to drive Ishey to suicide.

Meriwether claims that Jefferson likewise drove him to suicide. This betrayal by the "most dear," which is "finally a betrayal of *self,*" has implications for the "struggle, dark ferocious, in the dark / For power—for power empty and abstract" (Warren 8; Law 254; Warren 59). We could add the betrayal of brother by brother. His filial love for Isham follows the same pattern in that Lilburn's promise that Isham wouldn't die by the hangman may seem affectionate, but it ends in deeper betrayal of Isham by making him a fratricide. Law interprets Jefferson's remark that "the absolute traitor lurks in some sweet corner of the blood" as a remark not just on the possibilities inherent in genealogy, in one's family, but specifically in one's self (8). The conflict between in and out within prophecy results in Lilburne's persistent feeling of betrayal.

With his wife Letitia Lilburne also creates a dynamic of abuse and submission, as when he "'bused [her] in bed" (53). "He did it. / And it was an awful thing / [she] didn't even know the name of" that makes her feel ashamed and "awful that folks could do so awful" (49). The next day, he asks her to tell "exactly what happened" and forces her as proof of love to say that she liked it. Then he swells up with something like an apocalyptic wrath "stood up tall like he would fill the room, / And fill the house maybe, and split the walls. / And nighttime would come pouring in like flood . . . Like 'twas the darkness of an awful sky" and) he blames her "now I see when angels / Come down to earth, they step in dung, like us. / And like it" (52). Lilburne has a horror of incarnation and the animal element of human sexuality, a horror that is nonetheless powerful for all his lechery with the local prostitutes. He cannot reconcile himself to the

contradiction of the human as rational animal. His extremity of vision—Letitia as an angel, Letitia stepping in dung—would seem like the prophet's extremity of vision, sighting heaven and hell, utopia and dystopia. However, Lilburne has a fundamentalist desire for transparency which actually rejects the contradictory qualities of prophecy—absence and presence, suddenness and timelessness--qualities that make it remain equivocal and that withhold the peace of definition that he wants. Prophecy equivocates between contradictory opposites. Contradictions like that of human profanity and human divinity Lilburne cannot endure.

While Lilburne's behavior to his wife (tricking her into shaming herself) and to Aunt Cat (rejecting her) is treacherous, Lilburne casts himself more as betrayed than as traitor. Where Meriwether is unable to bear betrayal, Lilburne loves and requires it. His countdown aloud for Isham to shoot him is done slowly, that he may savor it. Lilburne calculated Isham's character and "knew [he'd] crack, and be / His last betrayer" (108). It seems that Lilburne's self-fulfilling prediction, his compelling prophecy, is one that necessarily produces treachery. He casts betrayal and sacrifice as inevitable. Lilburne constantly requires a sacrifice, be it John, Aunt Cat, Ishey or himself. Here, his resemblance to a prophet proves false.

The prophet exposes the sacrifice on which society depends. Aunt Cat fulfills this prophetic endeavor by exposing the murder of John. The vision of the prophet makes clear the sacrifice that is hidden for the sake of a civilization and the continuation of rule: the corpse is exposed. Aunt Cat practices prophecy as a

political art, defeating the power of Lilburne's discourse and exposing his secret sacrifice. Aunt Cat refuses the invitation to betray Lilburne, avoiding his terms of treachery, injustice and sacrifice. While submitting him to the law, she rejects his call to guilt: she refuses to be either sacrifice or executioner. Her prophetic speech exceeds the limits of the discourse and dynamic of power that Lilburne has arranged with his "mean-weak" subordinates (79). She and the other slaves need no longer be accessories through silence to the murder of John, yet they also avoid the direct betrayal of their master.

Aunt Cat avoids a direct violation of her maternal relation to Lilburne as wet-nurse: "Not that she did it—she would not betray / Her Honey-Chile she once had given suck to. / Nor show the bones, just see them in the sky" (98). Lilburne regards the milk he received as a baby from Aunt Cat as an intolerable obligation and an impurity. He vows to her that he spits it out. When the Sheriff visits to investigate the death of John, Lil believes that the slaves will remain silent. "If Lil said nothing, maybe till this day / Those niggers might just stood all sull and mum. / But Lil, he laughed: "A passel of niggers, ha!" // Then turned, and spat" (98). It is at this point that Aunt Cat executes her revenge: "Then it happens, comes a voice so high . . . / "Bones will fly up! It scratches. "Bones will rise. / I see them bones, they're flyin' to the sky!" // It was Aunt Cat. She fell down on the ground, / A-staring in the sky, like bones was flying" (98). RPW understands "what made her seize that moment" (98). "It was that Lilburne spat. Remember . . . when the mother dies / And Aunt Cat says how she'd given suck / And was his Mammy too—then Lilburne spat. / Spat out her milk, and all her niggerness" (98).

Lilburne denies his relation to Aunt Cat in favor of his nobler lineage to Jefferson through his mother. His rejection notwithstanding, Aunt Cat is both inside the Lewis family and outside it. This makes her a liminal figure suited to take responsibility for Lilburne as well as to relinquish loyalty to him. She acknowledges the blessedness of human obligation in her peculiar role that is both in and out of the Lewis family. As a prophet who moves between interior and exterior, her prophecy is effective in destroying the power of Lilburne without directly betraying him.

With her invocation of the bones, Aunt Cat alludes to the last judgment, an eschatological future in which the dead come back to life as their bodies raise from the ground and all are called to accountability. However, she describes what is actually there in the present. John's bones are indeed present, but veiled from the eyes of the law. Aunt Cat's vision is of what is factically there but hidden from sight. The prophet is able to call people back into the truth of the present moment. Jonah's predictions of the future were meant to bring people into a sharp and critical awareness of the present, just as the dystopian novelists demanded that one root out the budding seeds of totalitarianism in the present. The prophetic strategy uses predictions of the future to uncover brutal things in the present and to awaken people to the present.

Aunt Cat fulfills one of the jobs of the prophet when she denounces Lilburne, because she achieves what the Biblical prophets did when they spoke of divine wrath: she overcomes the "evil of indifference" toward injustice in the community (Heschel 284). The prophet is supposed to convey the divine pathos,

including anger, because evil is met among people with indifference. For Heschel, the prophet's "great contribution to humanity was the discovery of the evil of indifference" which was always presented over and against the compassion of God (284). Aunt Cat overcomes this apathy which we might find in the complicity of Isham and the silence of Letitia and the other slaves. Aunt Cat's prophecy typifies the in and out movement of mantic speech.

By revealing what is hidden in the earth, her prophecy moves between the categories of in and out. It is exactly this movement that allows prophecy to be a political art. The in and out movement allows prophecy to assist in political founding, for instance. Prophecy is useful for founding a nation because it makes a connection between the earth and the people who live on its exterior. This relationship can constitute political identity: who belongs, and who does not, who is a citizen and who is a slave depends on Plato's noble lie: that the citizenry was born of the earth that they live on. This mythic justification for founding connects the hidden and the revealed, the inner and the outer claiming a land and a people as part of one divine sign. The movement of prophecy in and out between generation and dynasty also enables it to be a political art. The political identity created through the idea of common blood can be important in founding. Jefferson's importance as a founder is problematized by his black children. The legend of Aeneas, which Warren evokes consistently, is possible because of the meaning of a founder in the ancient city: "the founder was the man who accomplished the religious act without which a city could not exist . . . After death he became a common ancestor for all the generations that succeeded him" (De

Coulanges 134). Jefferson is in such a position, but his dynasty has a flaw in the person of Lilburne.

Warren casts Jefferson's family scandal as a founding story that echoes the Pasiphae myth and the story of Europa and her offspring—a story of the founding of Crete. Jefferson invokes "poor Pasiphae" "dear mother, mother of all" (6). He recognizes that "the infamy of Crete" that is "[his] Minotaur" is "our brother, our darling brother" (6). He places himself and humankind in the family of Pasiphae, who gave birth to the Minotaur. Granddaughters of Europa, Ariadne and Phaedra "didn't realize . . . that, when their father, Minos, set out to conquer the continent and . . . the moment had come for them to cover up their secrets, and ultimately to be ashamed of them. Daedalus . . . designs a building in Crete that hides behind stone walls both mystery and shame (Asterius, the Minotaur)" who is bull-headed son of Pasiphae and the white bull (Calasso 11). Letitia Lewis' desire for Lilburne as he controls his horse echoes Pasiphae's desire for the big white bull, or Io's memory of Zeus: Lilburne "sat so easy, too and limber-like, / Just sitting sideways while he talked, / His left hand on his hip . . ." (41). This easy grace combines with power and magnetism: "when the mare got restless and she danced, / So limber Lilburne's waist just moved with her moving, / And his face was dark and beautiful . . . And when she danced too much, his hand went strong" (41). Letitia imagines herself as the mare, sot that his hand reached "Of a sudden on [the mare's] neck, and--/ [Letitia] felt the hand on [her] own neck, and [she] was still" (41). Letitia's attraction to Lilburne is like Pasiphae's to the bull. The play's title, which many critics claim refers to Lilburne

as the dragon and Jefferson as the brother, also raises the classical definition of tyrants as only partly human. The tyrant for Plato "transgresses the boundaries that separate human from beast; he becomes a monster, a wolf, an animal masked as a human being" (Rebecca Bushnell 11).[18] Warren's allusions to the Minotaur recall the founding and secrets. Roberto Calasso explains that "from that day . . . the mystery is also the thing you are ashamed of (11). Lilburne's wife, after he "'buses her in bed" joins the ranks of the shamed women: Pasiphae, Io, Phaedra, and Ariadne. Warren's references to this myth point to the dangerous concealment of shame in the American founding, which, like the labyrinth of Crete, concealed a monster. The unnamed shameful coupling of Lilburne and Letitia is also a magnification of Pasiphae's coupling with the bull, and thus a resurgence of the symbol of the Minotaur again. In the generation of monsters like the Minotaur and the dragon of the title, mother, father and child are betrayed. The mother is sullied, the father deprived of dynasty and the son to carry his heritage, and the child rejected. In the symbol of the Minotaur, monstrosity emerges from genealogy: it is produced through a form of miscegenation.

The dual nature of the Minotaur contradicts Jefferson's "old definition of man, which he discovered to be false" (5). He thought humans at the worst as "parrots in pantaloons," for whom "individual evil" was "only provisional paradox / To resolve itself in Time" (7). He detected no possibility of horror: "No thread . . .

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[18] Arendt concluded that this definition put the enterprise of justice at a disadvantage. In *Eichmann in Jerusalem*, she contradicts the idea that Eichmann is a monster.

hulked / In the dark, hock-deep in ordure, its beard / And shag foul-scabbed" (6). "Listen!" he cries, for he now apprehends the Minotaur: "when the hoof heaves . . . the foulness sucks like mire" (6). This Minotaur was masked in beauty when he was at the Philadelphia convention: "No beast then, the towering / Definition, angelic, arrogant, abstract, / Greaved in glory, thewed with light, the bright /Brow tall as dawn" (8)" and he failed to see its eyes (8). These eyes "were blind" (8). The blindness here relates is not the dispassionate, rational blindness of justice. Rather, it is the blindness of prophecy. But the blindness of prophecy has two connotations. Classically, Tiresius' blindness suggests inner sight, for the prophet sees what is in the dark, interior and hidden. However, the blindness of the Minotaur is different. It is related to the source of that dark potential of prophecy that this play illustrates in the actions of Jefferson, Lilburne, and Isham. Prophecy does have a grim, blind side. We can call it blind because it rejects the "logic of contradiction," obeying instead "the logic of ambiguity" in keeping with prophecy's equivocalness (Detienne 136).

This dark potential of prophecy is rooted deep in the nature of magico-religious speech according to Marcel Detienne. Again, in prophetic speech *Dike* (justice) and *Aletheia* (truth) have "many affinities" so that "at this level of thought no distinction exists between truth and justice" (Detienne 55). The absence of this distinction can be frightening and brutal. As Jefferson says of his doom, "Truth, long since, began her hideous justice" (117). Having started the logic of prophecy, he is subject to it. The hideousness of truth's justice (or the absence of a distinction between truth and justice) lies in the indifference to "rational

challenge" (Detienne 134). Where truth is "the prerogative of particular types of men" such as the prophet, instead of being "established in and through dialogue" and forensic or even artistic proofs, a terrifying blindness is the result. In a prophetic moment, interior and exterior come together to make a sign without regard to a logical relationship. Thus the sacrifice of Iphigenia is not a matter for protest, and the extispitic sacrifice of John can offer Lilburne the clarity of a sign and the "peace of definition" (39). This blindness as a danger of prophecy is overt in Lilburne's characterization as a Minotaur. Jefferson also maintains a deliberate blindness to Meriwether's embezzlement crisis. Even the mother of Lilburne also bears the name of Saint Lucy, who was noted for having had her eyes put out. The allusions to blindness in the prophet figures Lilburne and Jefferson show the inimical potentials of prophetic speech as they emerge from its contradictory qualities of inside and outside.

Garrett in "The Function of the Pasiphae Myth in Brother to Dragons" relates both the Pasiphae myth in which a woman couples with a bull via a device constructed by Daedulus, and is then hidden, along with her offspring the Minotaur in the heart of the labyrinth. Frederick McDowell interprets Warren's allusions to the Minotaur as "a symbol which dominates the poem in vividly suggesting the lurking evil in the dark heart of man" (quoted in 77). While this is a useful interpretation, the Minotaur has also been used in political philosophy (de Jouvenal's *On Power*, for instance) as a metaphor for tyrannical power or a tyrannical urge that may manifest itself in a government. This connotation of the Minotaur suggests that the reader consider the story in terms not of the individual

psychological pathologies of the characters—Lilburne as a "bloody sentimental maniac"—or even of the period's social ills, but in terms of the power and tyranny broadly speaking. The hiding of the Minotaur beneath the city also suggests that the potential for the city's destruction exists in the secrets of its foundation.

Prophecy bears another danger with it: though used for founding nations, it nonetheless can set itself against civilization. The prophet's association with the *topos* of the desert suggests that prophecy is in conflict with civilization. Blanchot dwells on the significance of the desert, drawing on Andre Neher's *L'essence du prophetisme* to connect the desert with nomadism. In a take on stillness and prophecy that Salman Rushdie personifies in the Ayatollah of *Satanic Verses*, Blanchot maintains that "Prophetic speech . . . returns to the original demand of movement by *opposing all stillness* . . . any taking root that would be rest" (Balfour 79). Lilburne with his still face and desire for frozen definition comes up against this dynamic inclination of prophecy. Prophecy is "a wandering speech" (79). But the wanderer in the person of Meriwether is no better off. After Jefferson's prophecy sends Meriwether out to wander in the wilderness, Meriwether eventually commits suicide. This nomadic movement was intended as redemptive. Jefferson, in using prophetic speech about the Promised Land as a means of redeeming it for civilization forgets the uncivilized possibilities of prophetic speech. His failure is witnessed in the Kentucky tragedy and in Meriwether's suicide. Charles Lewis (father of Lilburne) presages this failure when he moved to Kentucky to establish Rocky Hill: he said he'd "redeem the wild land" but then "fled" Virginia "Not as redeemer but the damned" (11; 12).

With an emphasis on the opposition between desert and civilization, he refers to himself as "alone and Ishmael" (13). In the conflict between desert and civilization, prophecy cannot be trusted to take the side of civilization. Prophecy, while integral to the founding of nations, does not promise to uphold them.

Prophecy doesn't love dynasty, or the subsuming of genealogy to the political order in order to maintain civilization. In a sense there is a betrayal lurking in prophetic speech, because while prophecy can found a civilization, as Jefferson attempts to with his designation of the American West as the Promised Land, in its ruthlessness it is also willing to end civilization and chiefly dynasty.

Jefferson desires a flawless union between genealogy and nation, pinning his hopes on Meriwether and feeling betrayed by the manifestation of Lilburne's brutality in his blood. This is the betrayal: the gap between interior and exterior where a union is expected. Jefferson feels betrayed by Lilburne for not coming up to the standard of mankind on which he based the nation. Moving between inside and outside, prophecy betrays civilization by exposing the 'pollution' of that nobility on which it is based. In Jefferson's case, the nobility is not a royal family, but the common man, elevated to an ideal which justifies democratic rule. The in and out movement of prophecy can help to found a nation by establishing, but it can also be destructive to civilization and dynasty.

Prophecy emerges as a political art in *Brother to Dragons* through Aunt Cat, who engages the destructive tendency of prophecy to undermine dynasty and the political order. Her deployment of prophecy contrasts with the flawed prophesying of Jefferson and Lilburne, who each betray and are betrayed.

Lilburne expects that prophecy unequivocally unite inside and outside, signified and signifier. Like Jonah who expected God to fulfill his prophecies absolutely, unifying word and deed, Lilburne regards as a betrayal any disruption of the peace of definition. He and Jefferson come up against the equivocal nature of prophecy, which consists of contradictory qualities because it bridges contradictory categories of in and out, truth and sign.

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Chapter Three

The Stinking Mad Shadow of Jesus: The Education of a Southern Prophet

The previous chapter on *Brother to Dragons* discusses dark variants of prophecy's contradictory qualities. This chapter on Flannery O'Connor's *The Violent Bear it Away* furthers the previous discussion about the way prophecy moves in and out of mind and society: the chapter adds the problem of the prophet's reluctance to return to the outside and his perception that tyranny awaits him on the outside and freedom lies within the confines of society. As with *Nineteen Eighty-Four*, there is a temptation to reduce the prophetic dimensions of this novel to mere didacticism or in this case religious attestation. O'Connor's irony, use of the grotesque, and her depictions of the psychological struggles of the prophet prevent this error. More so than in Orwell's novel, the prophet themes in *The Violent Bear it Away* carry the weight and variety of the prophetic tradition. Along with other critics, Karl Martin recognizes their complexity, noting that the themes are "consistent with the prophetic paradigm identified by [Biblical theologian Walter] Brueggemann" in that the protagonists are "shaken by violence and amazed to discover new ethical possibilities revealed by God" (52). O'Connor's complex use of the prophet theme follows the prophet's intervention in social ethics.

Of all the novels examined in this study, O'Connor's is the most theophanic. It seems to testify about the divine. The existence, presence, and character of God are important to the novel. Because of the emphasis on testimony, this novel could seem out of place in an investigation into the political

nature of the prophet theme. However, the prophet theme is not pure theophany. O'Connor once complained (in a letter to Elizabeth Bishop) that "although I am a Catholic writer, I don't care to get labeled as such in the popular sense of it, as it is then assumed that you have some religious axe to grind" (Habit of Being 391). So far from writing a novel for believers, O'Connor "addressed herself precisely to those who were untutored in religious belief" (Shloss quoted in Scott 69). The prophetic themes in this novel are not mere religious attestation or a simple issue of belief. Rather, they challenge the notion that prophecy is essentially tyrannical.

The Violent Bear it Away dramatizes false notions of the prophet, confronting accusations that prophesying is slavish as well as mad and ineffectual. The novel also addresses paradoxes of resisting and opposing prophecy. The failures to resist prophecy and to understand it proceed from the expectation that prophetic speech is unequivocal. To recall from the introduction, my methodology is to identify different balances and imbalances of prophecy's contradictory qualities: prophecy is word and deed, dialogue and transmission, sudden and eternal, mediated and immediate, a sign of absence and a sign of presence, making it an equivocal kind of speech. Variations and falsifications of prophetic speech omit some of the qualities in this matrix. Tarwater and the old man misunderstand the equivocal nature of prophecy, favoring deed over word, transmission over dialogue and signs of presence over signs of absence.

The situation of *The Violent Bear it Away* is that Francis Marion Tarwater, a young illegitimate orphan boy raised in the country, confronts the task of

burying the body of his aged great uncle Mason Tarwater, who kidnapped him from his mother's brother, an atheistic schoolteacher Rayber, in order to teach him to be a prophet. The old man, also a prophet, instructs young Tarwater to baptize Rayber's mentally handicapped young son Bishop, who is named after his estranged mother Berenice Bishop. The voice of an imaginary stranger encourages Tarwater to forgo these tasks. Other corporeal strangers, such as the lavender-eyed man who rapes Tarwater, appear in the novel and generally echo the advice of the invisible stranger.

Prophetic speech in this novel is directed toward persons like Rayber whose ethical behavior is limited by the expectations of his society. The utilitarian paradigm by which Rayber has chosen to live has no place for Bishop. Bishop is unable to benefit from education, unable to carry out Rayber's ambitions for a son, and unable ever to contribute useful work to society. In the idealized enlightened society that Rayber works toward, people would "put [children like Bishop] to sleep when they're born" because of their uselessness (168). The strange climax of *The Violent Bear it Away* in the drowning of Bishop is usually accounted for stylistically as an instance of the grotesque, but undoubtedly O'Connor casts Bishop as a scapegoat for Rayber's ideals of society.

In *The Violent Bear it Away* Tarwater and his great uncle prophesy against the utilitarian treatment of Bishop with the contrary proposal that "even an idiot" is "precious in the eyes of the Lord" (33). They make it possible to imagine the marginalized Bishop as valuable against all the prohibitions of Rayber's society.

The act of baptizing Bishop, of marking him for God, is a way of claiming him as valuable. The parting of the clouds when Bishop climbs into the fountain in which the "the light, falling more gently, rested like a hand on the child's white head" Tarwater recognizes as a sign of divine love for Bishop and as a summons to baptize him as a child of God. His face might have been a mirror where the sun had stopped to watch its reflection" (164). While the prophetic themes are theophanic here (testifying of divine things), they are also very much directed to social practice, "*evok[ing] a consciousness and perception alternative to the consciousness and perception of the dominant culture*" (Brueggemann 13). Mantic speech works against hegemony and enculturation. "Serv[ing] to *criticize* in dismantling the dominant consciousness" prophecy generates an "alternative consciousness" that is satiric rather than hegemonic (13). The prophet's role in society is not to grasp that society's obvious good, but to see the hidden sacrifice necessary to sustain that good. In the mythological terms that Warren employs, the prophet sees the monster in the city's foundations. He or she grasps the central rituals of a society, but he sees them as an outsider, from the wilderness. Thus the mantic speaker sees social reality without the structures of justification that make that society's sacrifices seem acceptable, normal or necessary. For O'Connor prophecy rebukes current social practice in order to open up new ethical possibilities (in this instance, for the treatment of Bishop). The old man raises Tarwater outside of society, withholding him from the mainstream as represented by the school truancy officer and the welfare woman. The old man

directs Tarwater away from mainstream consciousness toward an alternative consciousness.

Tarwater comes from the fringes of the modern industrial society that centers on the city. When he first visits the city in the company of Mason Tarwater, it is radically unfamiliar to them. However, when the boy comes to the city a second time after the death of the old man, he is anxious to appear familiar and streetwise. He subscribes—though not fully—to the traveling salesman's sharp precepts about getting through life successfully. Tarwater's character, while rooted in the wilderness upbringing and staunch in its independence, still partakes of the cynicism taught by the stranger and the traveling salesman. A liminal figure, he moves inside and outside of society, participating in it and rejecting it. For instance, Tarwater is a "bastard," born from a mother who is "unmarried and shameless" (41). His status of illegitimacy aligns with his nature as a jackal. He is outside the order of the civilization that separated genealogy from legitimacy. While society rejects his filial status, the old man does not: "Good blood flows in his veins . . . and good blood knows the Lord" (59). Prophecy takes stock in genealogy and not in society's organization of genealogy to support itself. This absence of the proper respect for the hierarchies of society is one of the stranger's objections to prophecy. Urging Tarwater to resist baptizing Bishop, he says "if it's an idiot this time, the next time it's liable to be a nigger" (166). The suggestion is that association with marginalized people is beneath Tarwater's dignity. Jackal and outsider though he is, Tarwater is to a certain extent invested in the values of his society. The stranger successfully

appeals to Tarwater's belief in the social hierarchy of blood, which I abbreviate as dynasty. But Tarwater's dignity as a prophet does not lie in this hierarchy, but instead in the alternate genealogy of prophet teaching prophet. The essential difference between the prophet's genealogy and social dynasty is that the prophetic genealogy points ever forward. Instead of harking back to royal origins, it anticipates, as with John the Baptist's cry of "one who is coming."[19] Tarwater's social dignity does not matter in his role as a prophet.

The illegitimate Tarwater is both outsider and participant in the social structure that it is his business as a prophet to criticize and contradict. This is why we see Tarwater commits the murder of Bishop, a crime first conceived in the mind of Rayber. A violent impetus for the sacrifice of Bishop clearly proceeds from the society in which Rayber has a place as intellectual and educator. Rayber regards Bishop as not only extraneous to society, but also as a reproach or as a sign of contradiction that cannot be tolerated. As a prophet, Tarwater understands that the society outlined by Rayber requires the sacrifice of Bishop. While drowning Bishop, Tarwater at the same time baptizes him marking him in the Passover tradition as someone to be spared from destruction, as already having Christ as his scapegoat. It is Tarwater's business as a prophet to cope with the question of sacrifice in that society—and to reveal the terms of the

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[19] The Gospel of Matthew begins with "the book of the genealogy of Jesus Christ, the son of David, the son of Abraham" which goes on in some detail (RSV MTT 1:1). King David rubs shoulders with many less illustrious figures, and Erasmus Leiva-Merikakis in *Fire of Mercy, Heart of the Word: Meditations on the Gospel According to Saint Matthew* points out that this genealogy points forward toward Christ.

covenant for a society in which Bishop is not a scapegoat.[20] The drowning of Bishop does not carry out a divine command, but instead the command of the stranger, who urges "its only one dimwit you have to drown" (215). When Tarwater performs the baptism, his disappointed mentor leaves with "sibilant oaths" (216). For the inimical stranger, the drowning was not enough to cancel out the dignity that the ritual of baptism acknowledged in Bishop.

Bishop is a constant irritant to Rayber's values as well as the stranger's, because Bishop's very presence contradicts them. When Berenice Bishop first sees Tarwater, tending to him as a social worker—a representative of society's professed values—she experiences "revulsion" because of the look of "immovable insane convictions" on his countenance (181). Specifically, she thinks of the face as one "she had seen in some medieval paintings where the martyr's limbs are being sawed off and his expression says he is being deprived of nothing essential"(181). Tarwater's difference repels her because "the face for her had expressed the depth of human perversity" (180). This perversity is "the deadly sin of rejecting defiantly one's own obvious good" (181). At issue in the novel is whether this "obvious good" should become Tarwater's compass. The stranger, the salesman Meeks, and Rayber all advocate a change in Tarwater's

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[20] Rene Girard in *I See Satan Fall Like Lightning* argues that the prophets are "preferential victims of this process" of scapegoating because they are "exceptional persons," just as "those who limp, the disabled . . . individuals who are mentally retarded" can be singled out as exceptional and turned into a victim (26). While Tarwater as a prophet and Rayber with his hearing box could qualify for this status, it is Bishop (mentally retarded) who becomes the victim. Unlike Tarwater or Rayber, he is innocent. For Girard, the point often missed (especially by the medieval anti-Semitic reading of the Gospels) is the "eminently typical character of the Passion" (26). It is not just the violence against the scapegoat that is shown to be typical. Rather, the "biblical tradition . . . reveals a truth never revealed before, the innocence not only of Jesus but of all similar victims" (1).

definitions of what is good. The refusal of the obvious good that Rayber promotes and Berenice officially represents is no small matter, resulting in disgust and the accusation of insanity.

Rayber's educational and sociological ideals, baldly stated as the elimination of superstition in favor of tangible goods become ominous under O'Connor's literary devices, such as her vehicle-tenor use of Rayber's hearing aid. Rayber's ideals about the education of children, applied in his well-rehearsed speeches to Tarwater, prove to be not only empty, but productive of a certain mediocrity that one suspects would characterize Rayber's ideal of a "normal life" (103). Tarwater's recalcitrance, fierce "brand of independence," and sharp mind—in short his personality—find nothing worthy of them in Rayber's pop-psychology platitudes: "Now we can have a real talk," "It's high time we got to know each other" (99; 100). Tarwater ignores these efforts as beneath him (which indeed they are). But the kind of "normal life and decent education" that Rayber would like to see dominant in culture (remember he is an active educator, writing articles as a way of effecting policy) attempts to oppress spiritedness, an effort that fails with Tarwater.

The schoolteacher's intellectualism is part of a pattern of navigation between interior and exterior. His uncle describes him as "crawling into [Mason's] soul through the back door" (29). Just as prophecy navigates between interior and exterior, so does Rayber's peculiar antiprophetic thinking. But Rayber's movement between interior and exterior is damaged and damaging, and even exploitative. Rayber's detached demystifying intellectualism becomes

a kind of exploitation when he plies it on Mason Tarwater: "every living thing that passed through the nephew's eyes into his head was turned by his brain into a book or a paper or a chart" (19). The old man warns Tarwater that "if [he] were living with [Rayber, [he'd] be information right now, [he'd] be inside [the schoolteacher's] head" (17). This reductive gaze is also imprisoning: the old man insists that Rayber wanted to trap Mason in his head and "thought once he had [him] in that schoolteacher magazine, Mason would be as good as in his head" (18). On realizing that he was the subject of the schoolteacher's article "for the length of a minute, he could not move. He felt that he was tied had and foot inside the schoolteacher's head, a space as bare and neat as the cell in the asylum. . . Jonah, Ezekiel, Daniel, he was at that moment all of them—the swallowed, the lowered, the enclosed" (76).[21] Mason experiences the enclosure within Rayber's objectifying worldview. The old man recognizes the way that the presuppositions of Rayber comprise a "penitentiary," in spite of Rayber's claims that only these notions can set the boy "free" (70).

While Mason is emphatic about the schoolteacher's perfidy, Tarwater doubts his great uncle's story. He has no belief in the nephew's reductive gaze as violent and imprisoning: "The stranger said . . . that schoolteacher never did him any harm . . . all he did was to watch him and write down what he seen and heard and put it in a paper for schoolteachers to read . . . And the old fool acted like he had been killed in his very soul" (25). But Mason Tarwater has good

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[21] The Biblical references here are to Jonah 1:17, wherein Jonah is swallowed by the whale after trying to escape the divine command that he prophesy, and to Ezekiel 4:4-8 (And Daniel was "cast into the den of lions . . . And a stone brought and laid upon the mouth of the den.")

reason to resent this attitude: he is kept three years against his will in an asylum for the insane, and Rayber threatens to return him there. Besides being imprisoning, Rayber's intellectual approach is treacherous. Ignoring their common genealogy and their common experiences, Rayber describes the old man as a sign in a message that has nothing to do with dialogue, a message about childhood "insecurity" that can be conveyed simply in the journal for schoolteachers (18). The old man was "betrayed for three months in the house of [his] own kin" where he is used as data a means to an end (24). The violence proceeds from Rayber trying to use the old man as a means to an end. The schoolteacher dismembers Mason and would do the same to young Tarwater: "in the schoolteacher's head . . . he would be laid out in parts and numbers" (18). This dismemberment recalls the extispitic sacrifice of John in the meat shed by Lilburne, as well as the fate of Sethe in Beloved. A slave, her person was a means to an end and not an end in itself. Morrison's Schoolteacher violates the slave by making a chart of her human and animal qualities.

The main action of this novel is the alteration in Tarwater's comprehension of what a prophet is and what kind of speech prophecy is. In addition to his training with Mason Tarwater, young Tarwater participates in other dialogues—both spoken and unspoken—about the nature of prophecy. The first is with Rayber. The second is a dialogue without content, characterized by silence which is between him and the silence (God), sometimes mediated by or incarnated in Bishop. The third dialogue is with the stranger, who competes with the second dialogue and opposes the prophetic call.

Tarwater's response to his education in prophecy is to imagine himself as a heroic prophet hung about with a kind of glamour. He is vain about being a prophet, wearing "his isolation like a mantle, wrapped . . . around himself as if it were a garment signifying the elect" (110). Tarwater most admired his teacher when the old man would return from "thrash[ing] out his peace with the Lord" alone in the woods. At such times, he was "bedraggled and hungry," and "he would look the way the boy thought a prophet ought to look" (8). Tarwater would find his appearance satisfactory when his great uncle "would look as if he had been wrestling a wildcat, as if his head were still full of the visions he had seen in its eyes, wheels of light and strange beasts with giant wings of fire and four heads turned to the four points of the universe" (8). Tarwater admires this picture of a prophet, and "these were the times that Tarwater knew that when he was called, he would say, 'Here I am Lord, ready!" (8). The call, he imagines, will suit his consequence. Attributing importance to the fact that "he had been born at the scene of a wreck," he "always felt that it set his existence apart from the ordinary one and he had understood from it that the plans of God for him were special, even though nothing of consequence had happened so far" (41). These grand expectations of dramatic visions continue to go unfulfilled. "He would stop and wait for [a] bush to burst into flame" and find that "it had not done it yet" (41). When his call does come, it is disappointingly prosaic. Encountering Bishop at the door of his uncle's house, Tarwater receives his "revelation" that is "silent, implacable direct as a bullet" (91). Contrary to his glamorous expectations, "he did not look into the eyes of any fiery beast or see a burning bush" (91). Instead

of receiving an extraordinary sign, "he only knew, with a certainty sunk in despair, that he was expected to baptize the child he saw and begin the life his great-uncle had prepared for him" (91). To his disappointment, he realizes "that he was called to be a prophet and that the ways of his prophecy would not be remarkable" (91).

Tarwater fears that his call to prophesy might turn out to be earthly and ordinary. Specifically, he fears that the "hunger" that is "the heart of his great-uncle's madness . . . and what he was secretly afraid . . . might be passed down" might be the nature of his calling. Tarwater encounters the unwelcome information that the prophet is not strictly a messenger: rather, he is a participant in a dialogue. This hunger is part of a dialogue instead of the mere conveyance of a divine message. The hunger is too fleshly as well as intimate, and "he did all he could to avoid this threatened intimacy of creation" (22). He hopes instead that "the Lord's call" would be "a voice from out of a clear and empty sky, the trumpet of the Lord God Almighty, untouched by any fleshly hand or breath" (22). Like Lilburne, he wants to reject incarnation. Even in rebellion, he is proudly "intolerant of unspiritual evils and with those of the flesh he had never truckled" (226). Fastidious, he dislikes it when his great uncle warns that a prophet experiences the "sweat and stink of the cross" (8).

Tarwater's desire for an unequivocal prophecy is related to his fastidiousness and dislike of incarnation. Incarnation is one of those very contradictions that cause the need for an equivocal speech that moves between interior and exterior. The old man, when he first sees Bishop, encounters such

opposites and contradictions: he was "shocked by the likeness and the unlikeness" of the boy to his parents (23). While the old man is can see these contradictions, Tarwater is like Lilburne in *Brother to Dragons*, and wants clarity and purity. He desires prophecy to be unequivocal. The vision he hopes for would be "wheels of fire in the eyes of unearthly beasts," a pure unambiguous and otherworldly sign that does not enter into earthly contradictions (22).

Tarwater wants clarity and not ambiguity, as signaled by the empty sky untouched by gray and the ringing sound of the trumpet. When his perpetual hunger starts, "his friend [the stranger is] adamant that he refuse to entertain hunger as a sign" (162). Instead of hunger, "his friend suggest[s] he demand an unmistakable sign, not a pang of hunger . . . but an unmistakable sign, clear and suitable—water bursting forth from a rock, for instance, fire sweeping down at his command and destroying some site he would point to" (163). He rejects the paradox of prophecy as both word and deed. In his conversations with Rayber and in his violent actions, it becomes clear that Tarwater does not believe in the word as deed. When he gets "ready to do" something he "don't talk no words" but just "do[es] it" (171). He tells the insurance salesman that he is prepared to "make it happen" and that he "can act" (80). For him word and deed are separate. Fundamentally the boy does not believe in the efficacy of the prophetic word. The visiting insurance salesman reinforces this disbelief by claiming "he was a prophet too, a prophet of life insurance, for every right-thinking Christian, he said, knew that it was his Christian duty to protect his family and provide for them in the event of the unexpected" (59). This mockery is a reduction of

prophecy to the merest tool of crass persuasion for gain, obscuring prophecy's contradictory qualities, especially the word as deed.

But Tarwater's mistaken notions of the prophet are not new. His great uncle, too, misunderstood the nature of his calling. Mason's particular failings were hypertrophy of sympathy and the favoring of message over dialogue. He makes a mistake in thinking that as a prophet he ought to be wrathful: "he had been called in his early youth and had set out for the city to proclaim the destruction awaiting a world that had abandoned its Saviour" (5). Like Jonah prophesying Nineveh's doom, his appetite for punitive destruction is greater than his desire for reform: "he proclaimed from the midst of his fury that the world would see the sun burst in blood and fire" (5). Mason is disappointed: "while he raged and waited, it rose every morning, calm and contained in itself, as if not only the world, but the Lord Himself had failed to hear the prophet's message" (5). As the sun "rose and set," "he despaired of the Lord's listening" (5). Mason had thought that prophecy was a content to be conveyed. Instead he learns, as does Tarwater, that the prophet is himself a sign and a locus of prophecy and not just a messenger: lightning burns him, and not the city in this example of the prophet's living mimicry. The old man repeats the lessons of Jonah, who undergoes the living mimicry in the belly of the whale. When Jonah is disappointed that Nineveh was finally spared, he regards the non-fulfillment of his warnings as proof of his ineffectiveness as a prophet. He does not understand that to prophesy is already to do something. The old man, like Jonah, has a lust for action. Mason's former misunderstandings of prophecy include that same

idea of the prophet as detached diviner that Tarwater has; they share a failure to grasp the word as deed.

The stranger tries to distort Tarwater's understanding of prophecy, magnifying his old errors and introducing new ones. He gathers for Tarwater several notions about mantic speech: that it is simple, clear, clean and godly, whereas in fact it is complex, ambiguous, fleshly, messy and human.[22] This insidious mentor conducts a purposive dialogue with Tarwater designed to provoke Tarwater into the particular inaction of not baptizing Bishop and not burying the old man and the particular action of drowning Bishop. Tarwater "would have fallen" and submitted to the call "but for the wise voice that sustained him—the stranger who had kept him company while he dug his uncle's grave" (161). As part of constructing a picture of the prophet as a merciless purveyor of divine judgment, the invisible stranger emphasizes the old man's wrath, recalling that "he was always admitting somebody was an ass or a whore" (40). The stranger extrapolates from this failing: "That's all a prophet is good for—to admit somebody else is an ass or a whore" (40). A picture of religious fundamentalism emerges with the stranger's epithets: "Crazy!" (44) But these charges are "hissed," and the allusion to a snake suggests that the charges are untrue. The stranger also engages in mockery pointing to Mason's disreputable trade: "a prophet with a still!" (45). Mason is "the only prophet [the stranger] ever heard of making liquor for a living" (45). With the incipient accusation of

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[22] In her correspondence, O'Connor interpreted Thomas Aquinas on prophecy, saying "prophetic vision is not a matter of seeing clearly, but of seeing what is distant, hidden" and also that "the prophetic vision is a quality of the imagination" and so "does not have anything to do with the moral life of the prophet" (*Habit* 365).

hypocrisy, he subtly reinforces the thesis that a prophet cannot be an ambiguous figure, that he cannot be a participant in a dialogue, and that he is the unproblematic conveyer of a message. In his efforts to change how Tarwater perceives his calling, the stranger is desperate to convince the boy that prophecy is unequivocal.

The stranger also denies the quality of absence in prophecy. This tempter asks Tarwater "where is the voice of the Lord? I haven't heard it. Who's called you this morning?" (42) He offers the absence of dramatic signs as proof that Tarwater is not called to prophesy. Tarwater "ain't even heard the sound of natural thunder this morning" (42). The stranger emphasizes the notion that prophecy is a mere transmission of a message that does not engage the prophet with either its meaning or its originator. According to him, the absence is absolute: "the truth is the Lord ain't studying about [Tarwater]. [Tarwater] ain't entered His Head" (38). The stranger argues that "The Lord speaks to prophets personally and He's never spoke to you, never lifted a finger, never dropped a gesture" (161). The silence and the signs of absence are hateful to the stranger, and he tries to undo the effects of them. Belittling the other sign of absence, Tarwater's "unfathomable hunger," he tells him that the "strangeness in your gut, that comes from you, not the Lord. When you were a child you had worms. As likely as not you have them again" (99; 161). The dialogue with the stranger tries to downplay the experience of purposive, expectant silence. Tarwater overlooks the signs of absence in his own body: the hunger, and regards absence as unrelated to prophecy.

The stranger also echoes the mockery of Christ, alluding to a long struggle over the nature of prophecy, saying "Lemme hear you prophesy something" (38). After making this mock demand, the stranger "let[s] out a flat sigh that was like a gust of sand raised and dropped suddenly by the wind," and this flat sigh suggests an attenuated version of the breath of the Holy Spirit. With this imagery, O'Connor reinforces the suggestion that the stranger is a sham and that he offers correspondingly false definitions of prophecy. The stranger tries to obscure the prophetic quality of absence that results in the Tarwater's paradoxical dialogue with silence.

Chief among the stranger's falsehoods is that he dismisses the prophetic quality of absence. Tarwater does not recognize the negative qualities of absence and exteriority that belong to prophecy. The signs that Tarwater receives, such as the "ravenous emptiness" that "raged in his stomach" do not absolutely confirm to him that he has been called to prophesy (174). Tarwater's desire for a more positive sign to begin his career as a prophet is a reason for rejecting the sign of hunger. But the real reason for his perception of the absence of God is that the prophetic sign is always (already) a sign of absence. Tarwater encounters God in His silence and absence and in Tarwater's own hunger, also a negative sign, and an experience of emptiness. When he experiences the call to prophesy (via the act of baptizing), the call accompanies an overwhelming "silence" which "each time the temptation came, he would feel . . . [was] about to surround him and he was going to be lost in it forever" (160). When he attempts to reject the call, his "shout" of "'NO!'" is "saturated in silence, lost" (92).

Likewise, he treats Bishop, the object of his call, as if he were "a dangerous hole in space that he must keep away from at all costs" (112). Because Tarwater desires an inauthentic form of prophecy, he avoids the empty eyes of Bishop, the silence, the hunger and other signs of absence. The nature of prophecy as an encounter with the Outside disturbs Tarwater every time he encounters it in the face of the boy he is called to baptize. So often does he turn away from Bishop's face that Rayber comments "I nurse an idiot that you're afraid to look at" and challenges Tarwater to "Look him in the eye" (143). The eyes that Tarwater is unable to encounter contain or remind him of that vast silent country. Among the negatives of absence and emptiness associated with the locus of the desert is the negative quality of silence.

Tarwater avoids these signs of absence and desires a prophecy that can never move between interior and exterior because it does not expose itself to the outside.[23] The outside is characterized by silence. This silence O'Connor casts as a place, and endows it with the qualities of the desert in which the Hebrew prophets awaited God: "it was a strange waiting silence. It seemed to lie all around him like an invisible country whose borders he was always on the edge of, always in danger of crossing" (160). The attributes of the desert: absence, silence, privation, isolation comprise the conditions for the prophetic encounter with God as the principle of the Outside.

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[23] O'Connor sketches out other possibilities of inauthentic prophecy in *Wise Blood*.

The Outside, the silent country or the desert is by definition inhospitable, and Tarwater fears it. When he looks in Bishops eyes he sees "the silent country [. . .] reflected again in the center of his eyes. It stretched out there, limitless and clear" (160). Tarwater takes care to look away, because "each time the temptation came, he would feel that the silence was about to surround him and he was going to be lost in it forever" (160). Because Bishop's eyes reflect the vast emptiness of the outside, they also tempt Rayber to abandon those values according to which he orders society. The empty eyes are unbearable to both Rayber and Tarwater because they indicate the loss and privation of the desert. O'Connor adapts the desert motif, renaming the land of privation and absence as "the silent country" and sometimes "the vast emptiness" (222; 172).

As described in the introduction, Maurice Blanchot explains that in the desert and the outside the importance of relationship in prophecy gradually emerges, and not simply via social justice and injustice. Rather, the desert is "outside, where one cannot remain, since to be there is to be always already outside," and in this outside are "only primal powerlessness, wretchedness of hunger and cold" and wandering instead of production (80). There, people are "stripped of their power and separated from the possible;" consequently, they "exist with each other in the bare relationship in which they had been in the desert and which is the desert itself" (81). The clearing where Tarwater lives also has some qualities of a wilderness or desert. No road goes to it. The stranger derisively calls it "earth's bald patch" and admonishes the boy, saying he "could

have been a city slicker for the last fourteen years" instead of living there in Powderhead (46).

The opposition of wilderness and city are important in this novel. Richard Giannone in "Warfare and Solitude: O'Connor's Prophet and the Word in the Desert" notes the importance of the desert allusions. For instance, young Tarwater is a desert dweller: he is described as a "jackal" (111). A jackal is not only an animal of the desert, but it is also a loner. Living sometimes on the fringes of civilization, it nonetheless is not domesticated and does not ingratiate itself to man. It is dangerous, not to be tamed, cannot "be reasoned with" and it bears a touch of the uncanny (111). Rayber, on the other hand acts like a "ferret," a furtive creature slinking into his uncle's mind (111). While Rayber's epithet seems undignified, Tarwater's is not. A feature of Tarwater's character that belongs to the desert is his separateness: "he wore his isolation like a mantle, wrapped it around himself as if it were a garment signifying the elect" (110). While Tarwater assumes that his separateness is a cause for vanity, it is actually that burden of solitude and that "bare relationship . . . which is the desert itself" (Blanchot 81). He is isolated not because he is elect, but because that isolation of the desert is the nature of prophecy.

Tarwater continually encounters the outside in his prophetic mission. The vastness of the lake where he drowns and baptizes Bishop disturbs him: "It lay there, glass-like, still, reflecting a crown of trees and an infinite overarching sky. It looked so unused that it might only the moment before have been set down by four strapping angels for him to baptize the child in" (167). Only in the water can

the covenant be sealed, just as in Blanchot's formulation the desert is the only place to complete the Hebrew covenants. The vastness of the desert and of the lake, as well as the other signs of emptiness (Tarwater's hunger) indicates pure potential. The potential is for covenant and for relation that does not subscribe to the terms of the established order of civilization. Simply put, the potential is for change from the values and sacrifices prescribed by society. In O'Connor, water and wilderness replace the desert as places of isolation, covenant, confrontation of the Outside, and encounter with God.

But since the outside is where one cannot remain, the prophet is forced to move back and forth from it, in and out. When the old man first takes Tarwater to the city, Tarwater regards the place as evil and reproaches the old man for not crying out against it, asking "what kind of prophet" he is and declaring sarcastically that "Elijah would think a heap of [him]" (27). This reproach does not shame Mason Tarwater, though: "the boy's uncle stops and turns. 'I'm here on bidnis,' he [says] mildly" (27). What Tarwater sees as a contradiction of the old man's calling is merely another instance of the prophet's movement between inside and outside, the desert and the city. The prophet must be nomadic and engage in this in-and-out movement. He cannot remain outside, because to remain outside is impossible. He cannot remain inside because he is drawn to the outside. He also must engage in the in and out movement because, though he is drawn to the outside, he is sent inside as with the order to "WARN THE CHILDREN OF GOD OF THE TERRIBLE SPEED OF MERCY" (242). Tarwater ultimately responds to this call by "mov[ing] steadily on, his face set toward the

dark city, where the children of God lay sleeping" (243). Tarwater consents to a nomadic life in which things are never settled and never clear.

The conflict between Rayber and the old man dramatizes the pervasive idea that the prophet is a "backwoods imbecile," nothing more than a fanatic, delusory and even dangerous (147). The figure of the dangerous fanatic will emerge again in *The Satanic Verses* when terrorists superimpose prophecy and bomb-throwing. This notion of the fanatic precipitates in Rayber's confrontation with his uncle at the age of fourteen when Rayber "stood there shrilling" that the old man was "crazy . . . crazy . . . a liar . . . [with] a head full of crap," and that he belonged "in a nut house" (186). In pointing out the dangers of prophecy, Rayber counsels Tarwater "to avoid extremes" as "they are for violent people" (145). The welfare woman has the same response to young Tarwater when she first sees his countenance as a baby. His face had "the look of an adult, not of a child, and of an adult with immovable insane convictions" (181). Insanity and danger are among the charges against prophets. In the case of the old man, the accusation of insanity actually results in institutionalization: as noted above, Mason Tarwater remains three years in an insane asylum.

Ironically, the smugly rational Rayber adopts the very fanatical facial expression of the insane prophet in his efforts to 'deprogram' Tarwater. Promising to save him "from the old man and everything he stands for," he appeals to Tarwater: "his eyes glistened" and "he looked like a fanatical country preacher" (174). Similarly, when he hears a young girl preaching at the revival, he has "a vision of himself moving like an avenging angel through the world,

gathering up all the children that the Lord, not Herod, had slain" (132). (Indeed, the avenging angel image is adopted by the violently insane Gibreel in *The Satanic Verses*.) Overlooking this passion in Rayber, the stranger claims falsely that Rayber is easily indifferent: "the schoolteacher don't care now if he's baptized or if he ain't" and his call "don't mean a thing to him one way or the other" (37). On the contrary, Rayber must suppress his attraction to the call with the utmost ascetic strictness: "he had kept" what he calls the "undertow in his blood" from "draggin him backwards" and gaining control over him by what amounted to a rigid ascetic discipline" (114). He must avoid ordinary everyday pleasures, denying "his senses unnecessary satisfactions" (114). Eating only "frugally" and "sitting in a straight-backed chair" he also "cultivat[ed] the dullest for friends" (114). Rayber denies his appetites and affections in order to maintain dignified sanity. So far from indifferent, Rayber is angry about the problem of evil, especially as it pertains to Bishop. He remembers when after the birth of Bishop the "impassive, insensitive" doctor explained "the full extent of Bishop's future," and Rayber was told to be "grateful his health [was] good" because the doctor had "seen them born blind as well . . . and one with a heart outside" (136). Rayber "had lurched up, almost ready to strike the man" (137). In a response that recalls the image of the Good Shepherd chasing after one lost sheep, he "hissed" "How can I be grateful . . . when one—just one—is born with a heart outside?" (137) His reasoning detachment is not natural, but cultivated as a corrective to his passionate engagement in dialogue with some transcendent auditor. Thus, "Rayber . . . saw himself divided in two—a violent and a rational

self" (139). The rational self he develops in an effort to suppress the violent self, but many of his attempts to counteract the prophetic calling are themselves apocalyptic. Chief among these is Rayber's attempt to drown Bishop as a way of curing his irrational love for the child. At the moment of his success, he "had a moment of complete terror in which he envisioned his life without the child" (142). With disgust, the schoolteacher too recognizes this potential in himself: "he knew he was the stuff of which fanatics and madmen are made" (115). Despite Rayber's rejection of the message of redemption, he still thinks in terms of prophecy. With his fanatical desire to rescue Tarwater from belief, he adopts the old man's wrathful hypertrophy of sympathy. The schoolteacher imagines himself as an antiprophet, but ironically in rejecting prophecy he takes on prophetic qualities.

Rayber is unaware of the equivocalness of prophecy and its contradictory qualities. He thinks of the prophet as transmitting a message instead of participating in a dialogue. His interaction with Bishop in the woods images Rayber's misunderstanding of dialogue and content. Bishop, who continually stands in or is a sign for God the father in that he is a continual reminder to Tarwater of the mission to baptize and for the old man, reaches for a blackberry among the thorny bushes. Rayber "gingerly . . . pick[s] the child a blackberry and hand[s] it to him" (184). Instead of consuming the berry, "the little boy studie[s] it and then, with his fallen smile, return[s] it to him as if they were performing a ceremony" (184). Frustrated that Bishop failed to understand that the berry was an edible gift, "Rayber [flings] it away and turned to find the trail through the

woods" (184). Rayber's impotent frustration arises from his belief that the usefulness or meaning of this interaction should be the exchange of the berry as content or as that "obvious good" that Berenice Bishop thought Tarwater should recognize (181). The little boy would benefit by gaining and consuming food. But for Bishop, what is significant and important is not the berry, but that they were handing it back and forth. In the calculus of prophecy, the berry corresponds to message or content. This content the literal-minded Rayber wishes to transmit successfully: for him the sole good of prophecy is the transmission of a useful and true message. As a child Rayber was cruelly disappointed when the content of the old man's message about the coming of Christ did not turn out to be true, useful, or verifiably fulfilled. He thus regards as futile the old man's prophesying to him, obscuring the memory that even as a young adult "he loved [the old man] like a daddy" (71). When the message of redemption was not verified, Rayber throws it away as he flung away the berry. Bishop is different. He values the interaction and the dialogue. For Bishop, the interaction itself has meaning.

In O'Connor's calculus of prophecy, the dialogue of prophecy matters just as much as the message. Bishop provides a locus for this understanding because of his very inability to receive a message. The dialogue matters because it engages the auditor in an I-Thou relation which recognizes the value of the auditor, a value that is "completely irrational and abnormal" because it does not correspond to the usefulness of that thing or person (112). Such "love without reason, love for something futureless, love that appeared to exist only to be itself" "terrified [Rayber]" because it was "imperious and all demanding" and

because it "would cause him to make a fool of himself in an instant" (114). Rayber fears this particular unreasoning love because it does not bow to utility: "he was not afraid of love in general. He knew the value of it and how it could be used" (113). For O'Connor, the equivocal nature of prophecy as both message and dialogue always signals that the auditor is an end in him or herself instead, as in Rayber's conception, a means to an end. Rayber, while he hates the "madness" of the old man, nonetheless feels "a rush of longing to have the old man's eyes—insane, fish-coloured, violent with their impossible vision of a world transfigured—turned on him once again" (114). But such a meeting of the eyes would transmit no useful message, so Rayber resists it.

Rayber, like Jefferson in *Brother to Dragons* and even like Winston in *Nineteen Eighty-Four*, fears a betrayal from within. The useless love is what he fears, for he had an occasional "experience [of] a love for [Bishop] so outrageous that he would be left . . . trembling for his sanity" (113). The unreasoning love toward the old man that he tries to resist was "an undertow in his blood dragging him backwards to what he knew to be madness" (114). This "curse . . . lay in his blood," dormant and dangerous (113). His fear of the potentiality of his blood corresponds to Jefferson's notion that doom is always domestic. In his very resistance to prophecy, Rayber grasps onto a corrective that is nonetheless one of its elements. Even his thinking about Bishop, that he was "an *x* signifying the general hideousness of fate" has a touch of determinism (113).

Tarwater similarly gives full weight to prophecy as a message or sign and none to prophecy as dialogue. He also submits to that very contradictory quality

of prophecy that he avoids. In spite of his demands for clear signs, he starts to treat each speaking person and unfolding event as part of a dialogue with God. When Tarwater first meets Bishop at the door of Rayber's house, he sees the child's face and "suddenly he [knows] that the child *recognized* him" (93). Bishop recognizes Tarwater because "The old man himself had primed him from on high that here was the . . . servant of God come to see that he was born again" (93). Tarwater understands his call to prophesy to be part of a full blown dialogue among God and a number of persons. One of his reasons to resist the call to prophesy is his belief, reiterated by the traveling salesman, that God takes no notice of him. The stranger insists again that "the Lord is not studying about [Tarwater], don't know [he] exist, and wouldn't do a thing about it if He did" (166). Nonetheless, he starts an argument with God that ranges over the whole countryside. The fire he sets in Powderhead marks the beginning of his defiance. The defiance continues as a dialogue in his conversations not only with Rayber, but with people he does not know. When the female hotel keeper tells him to desist in "whatever devil's work [he] mean[s] to do," he responds as if she is privy to his whole conflict with God: he complains that he "'never ast for that lake to be set down in front of [him]" (157). As if she were privy to his call and rebellion, he explains "'you can't just say NO,' he said. 'You got to do NO. You got to show it'" (157). In effect, he is prophesying right back at God. He does so with his old disbelief in the word as deed: "'you got to show you mean it by doing it," and "you can't just say NO'" (157). Despite his effort to make a corrective, to be anti-prophetic, he becomes more tangled in the qualities of

mantic speech. Not only the dialogistic nature of prophecy, but also the suddenness of prophetic action grip his imagination and become a model for his anti-prophetic career. He requires an apocalypse, or a show of suddenness : "You got to show you're not going to do one thing by doing another. You got to make an end of it" (157). The fires that Tarwater sets are attempts to shortcut prophecy by creating dramatic and violent gestures. Instead of awaiting the fulfillment of prophecy, he creates a dramatic fulfillment that accords with his notion of a powerful prophetic gesture. In the absence of the burning bush, the water springing from the rock, the sun standing still and the other signs that he expects to perform, he compensates with his own sham signs like torching the woods. Tarwater's need to construct a dramatic fulfillment is apocalyptic. Like Rayber, in resisting or correcting prophecy, he thus engages in one of its variants.

The simultaneous baptism and drowning of Bishop is the great instance of the contradiction. His intention in drowning Bishop is to make clear once and for all his refusal to baptize the boy. This violent act seems to be foreshadowed in the novel's title and the accompanying biblical epigraph: "FROM THE DAYS OF JOHN THE BAPTIST UNTIL NOW, THE KINGDOM OF HEAVEN SUFFERETH VIOLENCE, AND THE VIOLENT BEAR IT AWAY." The title and the epigraph refer to the violence of the prophets in what seems to be an approving way. Fyodor Dostoevsky's *The Devils* begins with a similar biblical epigraph: "Because you are lukewarm I will spew you from my mouth." These epigraphs militate against the many false notions of prophecy, like the one that emerges in

Rayber's father, a salesman who described himself as a "prophet of life insurance" (58). The salesman's explicit comparison of prophecy to salesmanship raises the question of whether mantic speech is not the word as deed, but simply a schuckster form of persuasion deployed by a man whose "brain was as slick as his eyeballs" (58). Meeks, the traveling salesman who drives Tarwater to Rayber's house, reminds Tarwater of such a false prophet. Meeks offers his credentials "from the School of Experience with an H.L.L. degree," an acronym for "Hard Lesson from Life" (59). The suggestion of hell is obvious. That it attaches to this unimpressive salesman instead of to the haunted Rayber indicates that evil attaches not so much to conflict and violence, but to indifference and mediocrity. Like O'Connor's, Dostoevsky's devil is also an insurance salesman, just as William Faulkner depicts the inimical Flem Snopes' soul as a spot of grease. O'Connor continues St. Augustine's notion in which evil is a lack associated with the sin of sloth. Luke warmness, sloth and banality (consider Hannah Arendt's "banality of evil") together shun anything that might suggest madness, absurdity and strife.

Blanchot explains the violent quality of prophetic speech, suggesting that the future tense endows prophecies with urgency and suddenness (or interruption): "So prediction, using as support the anticipatory intensity of diction, seems to keep trying finally to produce its rupture" (85). This anticipatory intensity of diction achieves the effect of suddenness. Frederick J. Hoffman explains that "suddenness is a quality of violence" (quoted in Muller 79). The usefulness of violence as a kind of suddenness is that "A sudden break in the

routine challenges the fullest energy of man's power of adjustment. It is a sign of force breaking through the design established to contain it" (79).

Tarwater cannot simply ignore the call or respond to it with casual indifference. Even Rayber, "bloodless" though he is, is unable to simply ignore the call that he rejects, for Rayber also is called to be a prophet (123). The old man calls him a "false prophet" (24). The stranger acknowledges that the old man "wanted to make a prophet out of that schoolteacher too" (37). The stranger suggests that the schoolteacher successfully escaped the call: "the schoolteacher was too smart for him. He got away" (37). Tarwater wants to be similarly smart and escape any demeaning service.

The greatest issue in Tarwater's education about prophecy and in the dialogues conducted with the stranger and the old man is whether being a prophet constitutes tyranny or freedom. Tarwater continually thinks about the vocation of the prophet: whether or not it permits freedom for the prophet; whether or not it is efficacious in the world; whether or not it is dignified; what difference it makes; whether it can stand up to the charges of "futility," "absurdity," "exploitation" and irrelevance (146; 132). When the old man declares that Tarwater was "born into bondage and baptized into freedom . . . the child would feel a sullenness creeping over him, a slow warm rising resentment that this freedom had to be connected with Jesus and that Jesus had to be the Lord" (21). He would prefer instead an autonomous freedom. Before the old man connected Tarwater's promised freedom with "the death of the Lord," he "felt he could smell his freedom, pine-scented, coming out of the woods" (20). But that

same pine scent in the woods turns out to be a sign of violation and exploitation. When he wakes in the woods and realizes he has been raped by the stranger, he is surrounded by these same woods: "he tore off a pine branch and set it on fire and began to fire all the bushes around the spot until the fire was eating greedily at the evil ground" (232). The contradictory associations of this pine scent correspond to the change in his understanding of freedom.

The stranger and Rayber argue for a form of independence which is yet not the strange brand of self-reliance the old man placed in Tarwater. This independence consists in rejecting the divine call to the vocation of prophecy, amplified by the old man. Both argue for freedom as autonomy, and struggle against the Mason's notions of service, rejecting the call to prophecy as tyrannical and exploitative. Rayber interests himself in Tarwater as a surrogate son is in order to rescue him from the burden of belief and from the deprivation of those goods and utilitarian values that Rayber, with his characteristic clichés, calls the "real world" (70). Rayber occupies himself with the notion of exploitation —of himself, of Tarwater of Bishop and of other children—over and against the dignity of those obvious goods that belong to the "real world," goods that people like Bishop can never be privy to. Ever patronizing, Rayber's "pity encompassed all exploited children—himself when he was a child, Tarwater exploited by the old man, [the Carmody's for Christ preaching girl] exploited by parents, Bishop exploited by the very fact that he was alive" (131). Of the girl who speaks at the revival, he thinks that "because she believed" in redemption "she was . . . chained hand and foot" (130). Rayber understands the case of the little girl to be

exemplary of the way Tarwater is used by Mason and by God. Belief, like an "empty" baptismal rite performed over Bishop, is "cheap" and undignified, depriving a person of real goods (146).

Likewise the stranger chides Tarwater for considering the redemptive message important, and offers a choice. Tarwater can "do one thing or . . . the opposite" and the boy responds "Jesus or the devil" (39). Here, the stranger corrects him "no no no . . . there ain't no such thing as a devil . . . it's Jesus or *you*" (39). A man Tarwater meets by the lake urges the same independence, inviting Tarwater to "be like [him] . . . [and] don't let no jackasses tell [the boy] what to do" (166). Tarwater regards himself as potentially the "forced servant of God" and wants to reject this compulsion in favor of independence (93). After killing Bishop, Tarwater thinks he has gained his autonomy. He tells a truck driver that he is "going home" because he is "in charge there now" as if with that act he had achieved his freedom (216). Unlike the "empty act" of "baptism," this drowning he imagines as efficacious and part of the way of being "born again . . . that you accomplish yourself" and "through your own efforts" (194; 195).

It is not the antireligious element of this statement that is important for this study, but the judgment about prophecy in general: that the act of prophecy is a theophanic speech that by its nature imprisons both speaker and hearer and possibly produces violence. Gerhard Von Rad addresses this question of the freedom of prophets, confronting the Biblical prophets' "mysterious compulsion" to speak (50). In the case of Jeremiah, obedience to the calling did not mean a complete surrender of freedom. Von Rad cites Jeremiah's 'Confessions' "where,

in spite of all [Jeremiah's] suffering, he continues in closest contact with Yahweh, questioning him, professing his faith in him, and complaining to him" (51). Surprisingly, this "freedom which Jeremiah kept and used in his dealings with God . . . occasionally led him almost to the verge of blasphemy" (52). Moses also exemplifies the Biblical prophet as dialogist. In Exodus, God directs Moses, and Moses objects, prefacing his argument with "But, Behold," which is to say "but *look*."

The epistemology to which Rayber subscribes, and which he self-consciously represents as the theorist of education who writes a scholarly article about the old man, does not allow for the indirect knowing that a prophet receives. The messenger aspect of the prophet disturbs Rayber because of the passiveness of the knower as a conduit for the message of God. Rayber's notion of the knowing subject is basically Cartesian. Instead of the knower finding proof of his existence as a person separate from others in the fact that he thinks, the prophet finds proof not of himself but of God (the source of the prophecy). The prophet's inspired thoughts are not his own: they come from outside him. Within the Cartesian episteme, Rayber can only regard the old man's prophetic speech as pathological. Instead of an instance of mantic speech or even a variety of persuasion, the old man's prophesying is a psychological aberration, a "'fixation of being called by the Lord'" that has "'its origins in insecurity" (75). The schoolteacher thinks in terms of the isolated subject. Rayber can only describe the old man's prophetic speech in terms of the old man's self: "'He needed the assurance of a call and so he called himself" (75). With this explanation Rayber

eliminates the possibilities of dialogue and of the outside. Further, any movement between interior and exterior becomes impossible, for the self is a sealed subject. Thus his hearing aid amplifies the sound of his own heartbeat as he runs after Tarwater in the city (106). His ability to participate in a dialogue is crippled. At the same time, his attempts at dialogue are feeble and one-sided, accounting for his numerous failures to "get through" to Tarwater. Rayber invites the old man to similar autonomy and isolation: 'You've got to be born again, Uncle . . . by your own efforts, back to the real world where there's no saviour but yourself" (76). Rayber insists of Tarwater: "He's going to be brought up to live in the real world . . . He's going to be his own saviour" (70). Rayber's views are like the stranger's, who says "the way it ought to be in this world" is with "nobody owing nobody nothing" (51). For the stranger, the interdependence of persons is unacceptable, a question of "ought," while for Rayber, invested as he is in the Cartesian subject, such interdependence is impossible, a question of truth. For both, the dependence of the prophet on an external or transcendent source for his word and the imposition of the source on the prophet for his mouth are alike degrading. They disallow freedom by pre-empting autonomy.

The living mimicry that Blanchot notes in the Biblical prophets also offends autonomy. The undignified subordination of the prophet to society, the giving over of himself to represent (mimic) the failure of a society or its impending punishment is a violation of autonomy. The Biblical example of Hosea being called to marry a prostitute in order to become a living sign of the broken covenant is the sort of prophetic mimicry disregards autonomy. The punishments

predicted for society happen to the prophet: lightning strikes Mason. The prophets seem to become loci of divine wrath instead of conveyances of a warning message. The prophet sometimes experiences the oppression to which he is witness, and this experience is another instance of that undignified lack of autonomy that Rayber deplores.

O'Connor lets the argument that prophecy is tyrannical unfold fully. The "extreme passivity" in which Tarwater's forbearers received revelation would seem to suggest that Tarwater's vocation might be a form of exploitation (von Rad 52). However, it is the stranger, the embodiment of that voice urging Tarwater to independence, who rapes Tarwater. Thus the novel ultimately reverses Rayber's thesis on exploitation. The old man's prediction that Tarwater is "the kind of boy . . . that the devil is always going to be offering to assist, to give . . . a smoke or a drink or a ride, and to ask . . . [his] bidnis" comes about when a man offers Tarwater a ride and an adulterated drink (58). When the drugged drink takes effect, the man pulls Tarwater into the woods and rapes him.

After his rape, Tarwater recognizes the duplicity of the stranger's invitation to autonomy and he decides to take on his prophetic vocation. Tarwater sheds his false notions of a dignified, dramatic and unequivocal prophecy and becomes an authentic prophet. When he emerges from the woods where his rape takes place, he fulfills the parable of the seeds that die so that "his eyes looked small and seedlike as if while he was asleep, they had been lifted out, scorched, and dropped back into his head" (232). These seeds contrast the "dry and seedless fruit, incapable even of rotting, dead from the beginning" that are the "dead

words" he spoke of redemption to the schoolteacher" (19). Tarwater is again like the old man in that he undergoes this transformation. The inefficacy of Mason's homilies to the schoolteacher humble the old man, who is "struck down in [his] pride" (20). He learns from this and other experiences that "even the mercy of the Lord burns" as the humbled Mason warns (20).

The rape of Tarwater and developments in the behavior of the stranger constitute a rebuttal to the notion of freedom as autonomy that Tarwater is drawn to. The drugged drink given to Tarwater by the man with the lavender eyes inverts the thesis (ever-present in Rayber's arguments) that religion is a drug (Marx' famous opium of the people) that deprives one of freedom and renders one helpless in society. When the man "pick[s] him up and carrie[s] him into the woods," the "air itself might have been drugged" (231). While Rayber decries as exploitation the old man's baptism and conversion of Tarwater, Tarwater undergoes grievous bodily exploitation from another source. Indeed, the boy opens the drugged liquor bottle using the "corkscrew-bottleopener" that was a gift from Rayber (229). This "little instrument . . . promised to open great things for him:" it makes him "appreciate" the schoolteacher and it becomes "his talisman" (224). The man with the lavender eyes is the final embodiment of that stranger, friend, and "mentor" that accompanies Tarwater and persuades him to take the path of autonomy (225). As he rejects "the essence of all the old man's foolishness" along with "his great-uncle's warnings about poisonous liquor," he puts himself in danger of rape (229). The autonomy promised by his wise guide turns out to be no such thing. Several of the strangers that Tarwater meets, like

Meeks with his H.L.L. credentials, that ask him his "bidnis" as the old man warned, are manifestations of this inner guide. The man with the hole in his shoe who advises Tarwater not to let "jackasses tell [him] what to do" is another manifestation of the stranger: his "voice sound[s] familiar" because it is that of his counselor. Presaging the non-consensual intimacy of the rapist, this man's eyes carry the "malevolent promise of unwanted friendship" (166). The undesired intimacy belies the promise of independence and autonomy that the stranger offers. To the picture of a life "with only [him]self to ask or thank or judge" the stranger eventually adds his malevolent presence: "And me. I'll never desert you" (167). The stranger, Tarwater knew, had a face that "was sharp and friendly and wise" but it was "shadowed under a stiff broad-brimmed panama hat that obscured the color of his eyes" (35). These eyes, as they accompany Tarwater in the boat, "were violet-colored, very close and intense, and fixed on him with a peculiar look of hunger and attraction" (214). The eyes of his counselor presage the violet eyes of the man in the lavender and cream car, so that from the beginning of the novel, the stranger entices Tarwater in preparation for this rape. The narrator offers the rape as a rebuttal to the stranger's claims that prophecy is tyrannical; the event shatters some of Tarwater's misunderstandings of prophecy.

To summarize, first Tarwater falsely imagines that he will be a prophet who is dramatic, powerful and dignified and aloof from the world. However, the prophet is not separate: he sustains a relationship both between himself and the transcendent source and between this source and the people, the auditors of

prophecy. Most of all, the prophet moves in and out between hidden and visible and between desert and city. Being liminal, he cannot sustain separateness. Tarwater later concedes to the schoolteacher that prophets are insane, dangerous and ineffectual charlatans. He acts out rebellious gestures, such as the cremation of his great uncle and the drowning of Bishop, in order to reject what he imagines as the tyranny of prophecy. Like Rayber, however, his rejection of prophecy is itself an apocalyptic variant of prophecy. Finally, Tarwater drops his resistance to the contradictory qualities of prophecy, signaled in the novel by the motifs of silence, emptiness and the desert: that it is dialogue as well as message, deed as well as word, sudden as well as timeless, mediated as well as immediate and a sign of absence as well as a sign of presence.

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Chapter Four

Auguries of Power: Prophecy and Violence in *The Satanic Verses*

"All India is full of holy men stammering gospels in strange tongues; shaken and consumed in the fires of their own zeal; dreamers, babblers, and visionaries: as it has been from the beginning and will continue to the end," predicts the narrator of *Kim*, Rudyard Kipling's classic orientalist adventure (45). The incendiary energy of Kipling's 1901 portrait of the religious zeal of prophecy persists in the imagination of the West. But a century later, it seems, holy zeal has lost its innocence: the frenzy of the visionary—now called the fanatic or the fundamentalist—is charged with violence. The change from the exotic to the terrifying in the Western view of Eastern prophets calls for analysis. Salman Rushdie's *The Satanic Verses*, with its infamous inversions of the prophecies that shaped Islamic culture and Indian society, boldly confronts the aura of violence that now surrounds prophecy.

Rushdie invites the reader to listen attentively to a multitude of babbling voices as they clamor against one another. Rushdie challenges the reader to adjudicate this novel's founding competition between prophecy and its falsifications, between inspired verses and satanic verses. Indeed, the narrator asks "who has the best tunes?" (10) Because some of the prophets' "tunes" are deadly, the task of adjudicating among mantic voices is all the more urgent. Which babblers and visionaries are dangerous? Does their violence stem from prophecy itself, from falsifications of prophecy, or from both?

In listening to the voices, it is not enough to distinguish the degree of their religious fervor (moderate, zealous or extreme) or even the content of their predictions. Rather, to determine why many prophets are violent in *The Satanic Verses*, one must ask what kind of prophesying they engage in. Instead of simply condemning or acquitting one kind of prophecy or another, Rushdie presents prophets that defy categorization.[24] The theological and literary tropology of prophecy suggests that terrorism in this novel is a hybridized prophetic activity that exaggerates some elements of prophecy and falsifies others.

Many characters in the novel distort the prophetic tradition in three ways that generate violence. First, the violent prophet figures exaggerate mantic sympathy for divine wrath against injustice. Second, they collapse prediction and fulfillment into a single action. Third, they manipulate the fusion of truth and justice that characterizes the prophetic imagination.

A fourth distortion of the prophetic tradition emerges in the novel. The novel's critique of inscription and sacred text would seem to account for the violence of certain prophets by pitting textuality, the letter of the law, and tyranny against orality, spirit, and freedom. Ultimately, however, these oppositions break down in face of the violence of the clerical tyrant. The tyrant's fantasy of timelessness requires one to look beyond the three distortions of the prophetic tradition to the fourth: the reversal of prophecy's mandate of newness.

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[24] Timothy Brennan warns that the novel is not a "fable of Western freedom and Oriental fanaticism" as it appeared in the Affair (144).

Like the dystopian novelist George Orwell, Rushdie draws on the dual potential of prophecy to serve the regime or rebel against it. But he also does something else: instead of permitting two simple categories of authentic and inauthentic prophecy, Rushdie depicts hybrids of prophecy and its falsifications. Genuine elements of the prophetic tradition such as wrath against injustice combine with distortions of that tradition within single prophetic figures. In a novel with such ambiguous prophets, for whom visions may be hallucinations and inspiration may be manipulation, it would seem that no distinctions about prophecy are possible. Such distinctions are not impossible: they are imperative. Rushdie makes difficult the adjudication between inspired speakers and satanic speakers.

Rushdie portrays prophecy and prophets with myriad variations on present and past traditions of revelation—mantic speaking, the receipt of visions and revelation, the transcription of the divine word, inspiration or divine possession, inspired dreaming, invocations of type and antitype, eschatological pronouncements, and prediction—so that the reader can examine their relation to violence. The most prominent prophet figure is Mahound, who represents Mohammed. He appears in a crucial moment of prophetic activity: receiving the divine word. Alleluia Cone, another seer figure, receives visions while mountain climbing. Ayesha, the "butterfly girl," styles herself as a messianic leader, calling her followers to a deadly pilgrimage into the sea. The most sinister of the seer figures are the Ayatollah Khomeini and Tavleen, the female hijacker. Gibreel Farishta is perhaps the most complicated seer figure: much of the book occurs

as part of his dreams, which he believes to be divinely inspired. He names himself after the Angel Gabriel and imagines himself as "God's postman" (114).

The Satanic Verses exhibits not only different kinds of mantic speech, but also different stages of transmission. For example, Gibreel, the central seer, shifts roles from viewer to participant: his "point of view is sometimes that of the camera and at other moments, spectator" in the theatre of sacred revelation (110). In another permutation of the calculus of prophecy (god-angel-prophet-man) Gibreel finds himself "*inside the Prophet*" (112).[25] He occupies sequentially all of the different positions that are necessary to mantic speech: auditor, prophet-speaker, divine source, deaf masses.

Rushdie shows flaws in the transmission of the divine word.[26] The title *Satanic Verses* alludes to the historical event recorded by an almost contemporaneous Arab historian that "the Prophet at first sanctioned, and later deemed corrupt, certain verses of the Quran that he believed had originated not from Allah but from the devil" (Brennan 152). One such historical reversal involved the Meccan practice of worshipping Al-Lat along with two other goddesses: it was at first permitted, presumably because acceptance of their cult was vital to "the peaceful expansion of Islam in its crucial early period" (152). Yet Mohammed reversed his original propitiatory position and forbade the practice.

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[25] As Ian Balfour notes, "though the Hebrew prophets are sometimes figured as voices crying out in the wilderness, the prophetic word is typically nothing, or at best 'imperfect,' without an audience to be forewarned, threatened or consoled" (21).

[26] Rushdie's use of blasphemy as a trope that fights tyranny has received critical attention from Simona Sawhney and others.

The plurality of prophets described above and the exposure of flaws in all the stages of prophesying prompts questions about whether prophecy assists justice, or on the contrary, tyranny. The multitude and complexity of Rushdie's instances of prophecy prevent a simple equation of prophecy and violence or prophecy and injustice. Rushdie portrays Mohammed in the act of sacrificing prophetic accuracy for expediency; this act is a departure from the tradition of prophecy. As noted in the introductory chapter, theologian Abraham Heschel explains that prophecy should not be politically expedient. Instead, conveyers of the divine word (like Jeremiah) risk the accusation of treachery as a consequence of speaking against the ruling order. Rushdie exposes the conflict between political expediency and the mandate that prophecy critique the ruling order, even at grave personal risk. Thus, the narrator's indictment of the Prophet does not so much pit religion against secularism as prophecy against its falsifications. The critique of the Prophet opens up prophecy itself to a rigorous testing of its nature, its imitations, and its possibilities.

One of the possibilities of prophecy is violence. It is not the only possibility: the novel contains peaceful prophets as well. But the violent prophets endanger them. Allie Cone, for instance, perishes—apparently at the hands of Gibreel. Innocents are among the casualties of the violent prophets: Ayesha directs her followers to stone an infant to death. Other prophets kill on a larger scale. The bloodthirstiness of Gibreel, of the Ayatollah Khomeini, and of Tavleen needs to be understood. How much of this violence stems from prophecy itself? Where do the violent prophets part from the traditions of prophecy, and where do

they cleave? Which are the incendiary combinations that set to flame not minds, but bodies and buildings?

An incendiary combination of prophecy and its falsifications in the beautiful Tavleen initiates the novel's action. Tavleen styles herself as a Jeremiah, denouncing corrupt social practices and rebuking the passengers for faithlessness. Jalandri she calls a "traitor to his faith" because he violates religious prescriptions for hair length (87). Some of her concerns are graver: she wants "religious freedom" and "the release of political detainees" (80). Tavleen has a genuine anger against injustice with which "some of the passengers [come] to sympathize" (80). Her wrath against injustice is excessive, though, to the point that it precludes mercy. The rows upon rows of hand grenades she wears under her robe like "fatal breasts" indicate a lack of mercy (89). Instead of breasts of the milk of human kindness, she offers fifty grenades of dynamite and gelignite for suck. She is *la belle Dame sans Merci*. She suffers from what Heschel, in his analysis of the Old Testament prophets, calls "hypertrophy of sympathy," a kind of sickness of the visionary who is supposed to speak for the divine. The prophet reports the anger of God, and he is supposed to have sympathy with this divine wrath. However if this sympathy grows so that it exceeds the divine *pathos* of anger and obliterates the *pathos* of mercy, then it is overblown or hypertrophic. Tavleen's wrath is a distortion of the prophetic sympathy for divine wrath against injustice. In her summary execution of Jalandri and her suicide bombing, it is clear that her excessive sympathy with divine wrath has transformed mercy to malevolence.

Apart from her amplification of divine wrath, Tavleen also distorts prophecy by collapsing prediction and fulfillment. She predicts an eternal community that her homicide and suicide are supposed to achieve: "martyrdom is a privilege [. . .] we shall be like the stars; like the sun" (88). (Note that Tavleen employs the syntactic parallelism that Robert Lowth's philological work identifies as typical of Hebrew prophetic poetry (Balfour 60)). In communion with the other martyrs, she hopes to achieve the timelessness and glory of the celestial bodies. While she bargains earlier for an earthly justice that she wants to achieve, the reference to martyrdom hints at the real nature of her ambitions for society, an "independent homeland" and "justice" (80). She desires for society the same things she desires for her martyrdom: an unequivocal identity as visible, as universal, and as unchanging as the heavens. To achieve this unchanging community she is willing to utilize the deaths of herself and her companions. Tavleen prophesies two communities: the eternal community formed by martyrdom and the earthly society that excludes anyone who might mar its perfection.

But simply to predict the two perfect communities is not enough for Tavleen. She also manifests them. By igniting her bombs, she tries to achieve the community of martyrs. By executing Jalandri, she inaugurates with this "first sacrifice" perfect society—a nation free of "apostate" and "traitor" elements (87). Tavleen's violent acts collapse prophecy and fulfillment.

Tavleen tries to achieve a mantic speech that is enactment. Her attempts to fulfill her own prophecies presume that prophecy cannot be both word and

deed. If her prophecy were efficacious—if its utterance were a species of action—she would not need to manufacture her own pyrotechnic special effects. Tavleen rejects those contradictory qualities that sustain the dynamism of mantic speech. Tavleen's explosions resemble Tarwater's destructive actions in *The Violent Bear it Away*. The torching of the old man's body, of the house at Powderhead, and the murder of Bishop are similar efforts to compensate for the inadequacy of the word. Just as these actions testify to Tarwater's disbelief in the word as deed, Tavleen's violence reflects her imbalanced notion of prophecy, in which word does not weigh up to deed.

Alleluia Cone's mother expresses the terrorist's adaptation of the mantic voice with the phrase "bombs are destiny" (447). Tavleen thinks that the only way to reach destiny, or a foreordained order of history, is with an apocalyptic intervention. While Allie's mother asks, "What does a famine, a gas chamber, a grenade care how you lived your life?" Tavleen asks "Are we uncompromising, absolute, strong, or will we show ourselves to be timeservers, who compromise, trim and yield?" (447; 82) For both women, the impression of an inevitable destiny and the fulfillment of history are manufactured and proffered by violent events. Apocalypticism characterizes both their positions.

Where do these apocalyptic statements stand on the matrix of prophecy? Again, they are apocalyptic versions of prophecy. To recall from the chapter on *Nineteen Eighty-Four*, not every prophetic stance is apocalyptic per se. On the matrix of prophecy's contradictory qualities, apocalypticism favors suddenness over timelessness and deed over word. This dramatic combination is what

Tarwater expects of prophecy in *The Violent Bear it Away*. Awaiting his call, Tarwater looks for a burning bush. He has not the patience to wait for a more subtle manifestation.

Tavleen also lacks patience, trying to master time in order to fulfill prophecy. Rejecting the passiveness of "timeservers," Tavleen and her companions try to end the imperfection of time and bring about the prophesied new order and to create a realized eschatology (83). What is dangerous about Tavleen is not her faith. It is that she has none: she will not permit of a gap between revelation and fulfillment, the present and the eschaton. If she lacks faith, she also lacks the patience to await the divine fulfillment of prophecy. The mentality that requires an apocalyptic intervention or a brutal sign shows not faith but an impatient prophetic consciousness.[27] The pseudo-prophet's impatience is dangerous especially when it preempts an apocalyptic prophecy. Rushdie's terrorists use bombs to magnify a Jeremiah-like rebuke to society and to manifest and confirm for one instant the apocalypse that awaits the unjust society.

Like the sacrifice of Iphigenia, before which her guilt or innocence was not the subject of persuasive discussion, Tavleen's sacrifice of Jalandri depends on a unity between the perceptible world and a cosmic order that forms one perfect prophetic "sign" from on high. As with augury, in which the diviner discerns the will of the gods from birds in the sky, the violent prophets identify and create divine signs.

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[27] The Book of Jonah offers an example of hypertrophic wrath and impatience. When Jonah's prophecy of destruction leads Ninevah to repent, God also repents of His decision to destroy the city; this "displeased Jonah exceedingly, and he was angry" (Jonah 3:10).

The ethical contradictions of violent prophecy appear in another terrorist incident in *The Satanic Verses*. In a wrathful response to unjust social practices, Gibreel firebombs a London café and an office building. He walks through London with a trumpet named "the exterminator, Azraeel" deciding that he will be the "the agent of God's wrath" (472). This wrath grows as Gibreel takes a Jeremiadic inventory of "Babylondon" where pimps and child prostitutes abound (474). On this journey he gives way to the temptation to fulfill the prophecy he conveys (472). Gibreel decides to manifest the prophesied apocalypse by blowing the "last trumpet." He sees himself as the "Archangel Gibreel, the angel of the Recitation, with the power of revelation in his hands" (476): using this power, he sets about burning the city until he sees "the hair and teeth of the citizenry [. . .] smoking and red [as] glass burns, and birds fly overhead on blazing wings" (477). Among other casualties is a "heavily pregnant" woman, which emphasizes Gibreel's indifference to guilt and innocence (480). His arsons are a judgment, the manifestation of the threat of divine wrath that he magnifies. Like Tavleen, Gibreel collapses prophecy and fulfillment, *aletheia* and *dike*.

In the love affair of Gibreel and Allie Cone Rushdie juxtaposes expectations about prophecy; Allie Cone accepts that prophecy can be a sign of absence, while Gibreel emphatically cannot. These characters have correspondingly different dispositions as prophets. While Gibreel is a wrathful and impatient prophet, Allie is another kind of visionary altogether. Cone's first name, Alleluia, is an affirmation and praise of the divine and, though it seems to

contradict her freethinking character, sits well with her mysticism. She "has a religious experience of the divine face" when she climbs the Himalayan mountains (Petersson 259). Although the narrator downplays her visions as "visual aberrations," her prophetic character surfaces again in her original surname, Cohen, which means "narrator" with echoes of "priest, wizard or soothsayer" (260). Many critics also associate her name with Mount Cone, the place of Mohammed's divine visitation.

Despite being a visionary, Allie is not a pious character. She practices no religion. Gibreel is different in this respect. He is a Muslim who has starred as a divinity in so many theological films that in India his face is "the most acceptable, and instantly recognizable, face of the Supreme" (17). While exemplifying religion and faith through films, he struggles in his private life with the silence of Allah during a long illness. He complains of this silence, but Allie rebukes him: "You're alive [. . .] You got your life back. *That's* the point" (31). These two people have opposite responses to this silence: Allie accepts the sign of absence, while Gibreel thinks that prophecy must be pure presence, that it executes no sign of absence. Gibreel lacks the spontaneous affirmation signaled in the name Alleluia. His outlook is exacting and impatient: because "nothing" answered his prayers, he undertakes "to prove to himself the non-existence of God" by violating his religion's prohibition against eating pork (30; 31). Gibreel requires proof in exchange for belief. In this desire to see an immediate and merciless rebuke for his impiety—a lightening bolt to bring God out of concealment—Gibreel resembles Tavleen. Like Tavleen, he wants the proof of divine wrath and

the fulfillment of prophecy to happen before his eyes. Gibreel also resembles Lilburne Lewis in *Brother to Dragons* insofar as he desires clarity and the peace of definition. Gibreel cannot accept ambiguity, paradox or contradiction.

Gibreel's exacting prophetic imagination inimical to Allie's peaceful and unexacting mysticism. In the course of the love affair, Allie becomes the bewildered and misjudged lover, Gibreel the jealous maniac, provoked by Saladin Chamcha's anonymous obscene phone calls about Allie. Gradually, Gibreel becomes wrathful and homicidal. It seems that paranoia is the outcome of Gibreel's exacting and impatient prophetic imagination: prophetic vision becomes delusion, a murderous hypertrophy of sympathy. Gibreel Farishta's prophetic zeal—delusional instead of visionary—is indeed dangerous. Its fruits are murder and suicide, each proceeding from the same sense of betrayal cherished by Lilburne Lewis, who also commits murder and suicide. While Lilburne thinks that his slaves, brother, and wife betray him, Gibreel thinks that his lover and his best friend are traitors. Both madmen are steeped in sentiment that drives their sense of betrayal: babbling, Gibreel confesses to Saladin that "Bloody hell [he] loved that girl" (559). In both cases, there is a desire for clarity over and against ambiguity. In the absence of proof of affection, they sieze on proof of betrayal: in Lilburne's case, the broken jug proves the contempt of the slaves for the memory of Lucy Lewis; in Gibreel's case, Saladin's obscene poems about Allie are proof of her infidelity. Gibreel's desire to seize a positive sign is another instance of his intolerance for silence and absence, an intolerance that makes him a dangerous prophet.

Some critics suggest that another differentiating factor between Allie's peaceful prophecy and Gibreel violent prophecy is the factor of textuality.[28] Gibreel obsessively relives prophetic speech (concerning the Angel Gabriel) which has been written down as sacred text, while Allie does not connect her visions to any inscribed revelation. One could say that Gibreel depends too much on what has been written down, as when he believes the content of the 'other satanic verses,' Saladin Chamcha's obscene rhymes about Allie (Petersson 253). Does the factor of inscription make one prophet dangerous and the other peaceful?

What happens to prophecies that are written down? Theologian Claus Westermann comments that "there must surely be a *distance* between the work of the prophets as speakers and its fixation in writing" (16). Does this distance render prophecies less authentic? *The Satanic Verses* flirts with a letter-spirit opposition and a textual-oral opposition with regard to revelation, sacred text and prophecy. Brennan argues that "in portraying the Prophet [. . .] (knowing it to be taboo) [. . . and in] placing him back into history" Rushdie resurrects the spirit of the sacred text, "because the letter of the law is today being observed without reverence for the original message" (146). Jaqueline Bardolph asks "in transcription onto paper, is there not a loss of divine essence?" (214). The freethinking Alleluia is not violent. On the other hand, those prophet figures who are preoccupied with the letter of an inscribed prophecy are dangerous: Gibreel,

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[28] Timothy Brennan and Sara Suleri identify the influence of free-thinking Sufism over and against clerical Shiaism in the novel. Peter Craven also suggests that the scribes and Pharisees of Shi'ite theocracy are Rushdie's particular target.

who tries to relive the written story of the Angel Gabriel, Tavleen, who uses the letter of a law derived from revelation to justify the summary execution of Jalandri, and the Ayatollah Khomeini, whose claim to textual authority provokes homicides and suicides.

However, the letter-spirit and text-voice oppositions fail in the face of Ayesha's dangerous messianic leadership. While her leadership is charismatic, spirit-oriented, disestablishmentarian and oral instead of textual, it is also violent. Her pilgrimage ends in her followers' mass suicide in the sea. More importantly, she, like Gibreel, eschews the distinction between guilt and innocence when she orders the death of a child. In Ayesha's prophecy letter and text fail to align with violence; spirit and voice fail to align with peace. As the letter-spirit oppositions break apart, the reader must seek elsewhere to understand how Rushdie relates prophecy and violence.

But Rushdie connects the inscription of prophecy with doubt and inaccuracy. The repealed "satanic" verses of the Koran are scandalous because they suggest that all recorded prophecies might contain error. Rushdie showcases the nature of prophecy as mediated when he casts doubt on the scribe. Prophecy is mediated by the prophet. Yet, in another instance of prophecy's paradoxical nature, it claims to be immediate. It is the word from on high, yet it is delivered by a human. The Islamic injunction against representing the prophet Mohammed sidesteps the dangers of mediation: error and misrepresentation. Rushdie violates this injunction, depicts the Prophet, and

highlights the possibilities of error. In so doing, he points to the dual nature of prophecy as immediate and mediated.

The reversal of the prophetic mandate to newness emerges as another distortion of prophecy that leads to violence and as an important factor in the novel's apparent indictment of sacred text. In the figure of the Ayatollah Khomeini, Rushdie investigates the power of written revelation reduced to prescription and transformed to law. But instead of simply depicting the Imam's pharisaical pre-occupation with text and authority, Rushdie also describes the tyrant's attempts to resist time and the tyrant's alienation. Prophecy is undoubtedly a tool of tyranny for the Imam. Indeed, he utilizes it in his radio polemics, calling his political enemy "the Babylonian whore" (19). Revelation is not a tool for this tyrant because it is inscribed and codified, but because it is declared closed and unchanging. Witness the Imam's interpretation of prophecy: "history," he declares, "is a deviation from the Path [. . .] because the essence of knowledge was complete the day Al-Lah finished his revelation to Mahound" (217). If the sum of knowledge is already contained in a single book, and all revelation complete, then nothing new can proceed from either mantic speech or ordinary discourse. No further prophecy is possible, nor can one renew interpretive conversation about prophecies. The completeness of revelation that the Imam describes would render other creative and critical enterprises (like writing novels) not only superfluous, but presumptuous and risky.

The Imam's claim that prophecy can be frozen and completed in sacred text for all time is echoed in his treatment of timepieces. In his effort to achieve

timelessness, he smashes clocks and imagines that "there will be no birthdays" because the faithful "shall all be born again, all . . . the same age in the eyes of Almighty God" (220).

With regard to the prophetic tradition, the primary significance of the Imam's declaration is that it militates against a vital function of prophecy: the introduction of newness to the relations between words and things and among persons. The theological typology of prophecy discloses as one of prophecy's functions the alteration of discourse and the generation of "alternative consciousness:" the possibilities for social change (Brueggemann 13). On the other hand, "every totalitarian effort" has the "aim to stop the language of newness" because this language can potentially undo the regime (9). Any sort of tyrant indulging what Brueggemann calls the "royal fantasy" has an antagonistic attitude toward time: "the king does not know, never knows, what time it is" (53). (The genuine prophet will tell him the time by warning that for the regime, the end is near.) "Because the king wants to banish time and live in an uninterrupted eternal now," he smashes clocks (53). The tyrannical king "would have it be like a casino in Las Vegas where there is no clock and no time, but only an enduring and unchanging now" (53). The Imam, with his destruction of timepieces and his personal "stillness" and "immobility" embodies this royal fantasy (Rushdie 216).

The tyrant who engages in the royal fantasy not only prohibits change in revelation and discourse (the relations between words and things) but also among persons. Living apart, the Imam tries to perpetuate his distance from the victims of his rule. In Gibreel's vision, hordes of the Ayatollah's followers die

marching on his enemy's house. Over the "giggle of guns" he urges them, "*go, be a martyr, do the needful, die*" (220). Instead of regarding these deaths as the insuperable and final ends of separate people, he reads them as a sign, a proof of "how they love [him]" (220). He keeps himself at a distance from the deaths of his followers. As a leader, the Ayatollah lives in "exile," and this exile is not simply political quarantine. Rather, it is a statement about his nature and his identity. "Who is he?" asks the narrator. The answer is "an exile" (211). He lives without allegiance in isolation from relationship.

Rushdie depicts prophetic speech generating newness in language and in human relationships that contrast the Ayatollah's frozen isolation. As Gibreel and Saladin Chamcha fall from the exploded jet, they engage in a competition of verses that presages the coming competition between the divine verses and the satanic (6). As they fall through the clouds, Chamcha is struck with what appears to be divine inspiration: "a shaft of sunlight pierced his open mouth and set it free" (8). In this Pentecostal event, the sunlight releases something that is "more than noise," more than ordinary speech (8). What does he say? First, "Fly . . . Start flying, now" (8). He adds "without knowing its source, the second command: 'And sing'" (8).

Immediately after Chamcha's mantic utterance the narrator proposes the question "how does newness come into the world?" (8) The proximity of this question with Chamcha's song suggests that his inspired speech is a conduit for newness. The newness of Chamcha's mantic song involves "fusions, translations, [and] conjoinings" (8). Like the Biblical prophets, Chamcha

"[evokes] newness 'fresh from the word'" (Brueggemann 9). The careful balance of the contradictory qualities of prophecy allows change, produces newness and resists ossification. In the gap between each opposing quality, there is space for change. Because prophecy is both word and deed, a sign of absence and sign of presence, it persists in flux. Written or oral, prophetic speech cannot be fixed. Frank Kermode notes this flexibility when he says "the image of the end can never be *permanently falsified*" and that particular prophecies can make multiple recurrences in popular culture (17). They recur because they cannot be disconfirmed: they cannot be disconfirmed because prophetic speech must respond to the tug of its opposing qualities.

The "newness" of genuine prophecy opens up not just discourse but the encounter of persons. Levinas speaks of "prophetism," which he uses in "a very much larger sense than that admitted by the gift, the talent or the special vocation of those whom one calls the prophets" (113). Like Rushdie, the ethicist expands the term beyond the limits of officially approved revelation to embrace a wider range of phenomena. Levinas claims that these phenomena emerge out of "assuming responsibility for the Other," as "a way of testifying to the glory of the infinite" (Levinas 113). Alleluia, "her very name an exaltation," engages in this prophetism by achieving a "newness" of encounter through her prophetic speech to Gibreel (458; 32). At their first meeting she "read [his] thoughts and the right words just came out of [her] mouth" (307). This speech on his behalf—and mediation is at "the core of the character of prophecy"—constitutes a new revelation: "in the beginning was the word," Allie says about the experience of

voicing his thoughts (Balfour 8; 307). This revelation is about the possibility of genuine interpersonal encounter, and she proposes it in lieu of the revelation that Gibreel has diminished into a prescription against eating pork.

But the encounter fails: Gibreel's jealous possessiveness of Allie Cone places him in an exile similar to the Imam's. Chamcha draws an analogy about their relationship when he tells Gibreel the story of a playwright who tried to lock up his lovely young wife, whom people admired as an "angel of peace," a perfect exponent of encounter. "She left him," Chamcha explains, because "she said she could not reconcile him with the human race" (456). Chamcha implies that Gibreel's jealousy of Allie signals a profound isolation from others.

His jealousy, stoked by Saladin's anonymous phone calls, is fatal for Allie; the violent prophet destroys the peaceful prophet. Saladin Chamcha's antagonistic friendship with Gibreel also ends in disaster. They seem to renew their friendship with an act of mutual forgiveness when Gibreel saves Chamcha's life instead of taking it in the Brickhall fire. Yet, Saladin later realizes that "no cure," for malice "[is] complete" (554). Saladin listens as Gibreel's delusions take hold of him. Gibreel begins to babble about his relationship with Allie and the narration breaks down into paratactic fragments. This babbling, this degenerated mantic speech that fails to account for relations with the other leads to the ultimate obliteration of all relations with others: suicide. Gibreel puts "the barrel of [a] gun into his own mouth, and [pulls] the trigger" (561). The suicide is his final occlusion of the people with whom he failed to relate.

Gibreel's tendency to reduce prophecy to prescription and to cast himself as both prophet and fulfiller of prophecy is tyrannical, dangerous, and alienating: both homicidal and suicidal. His impatient and exacting mantic imagination conflicts violently with Allie's prophetism.

While prophecy is not inherently violent, it is also not a safe enterprise. It threatens the *status quo* and in that sense a genuine prophecy must always be "extreme and dangerous" to established regimes (Brueggemann 8). Nonetheless, one can adjudicate between genuine prophecy and its violent distortions and re-creations. When prophecy is tamed by a regime, it is oppressive. When prophecy is undertaken wrathfully and in the absence of hope it is terrifying. If Rushdie offered pure examples of authentic and inauthentic prophecy, the reader could conclude more. But Rushdie does not simplify. He does not separate for us prophecy from its falsifications. Instead, he tests the incendiary combinations that, though difficult to understand, are some of the realizations of prophecy as a political art.

The apocalyptic statements that characters make in this and other novels offer clues to the possibilities of prophecy as a political art. Allie Cone's mother's profession that "bombs are destiny" bears some resemblance to Jefferson's statement that "doom is always domestic" in *Brother to Dragons*. Doom and destiny are similar notions in that they are both apocalyptic and determinist, suggesting some inevitable fulfillment or absolute ending. However, the two apocalyptic professions about this ending are fundamentally different. For Jefferson determinist inevitability is "domestic." That is to say, one's prophesied

end emerges out of one's private life, one's genealogy, one's personal life: "the absolute traitor" that "lurks in some sweet corner of the blood" (8). For Allie's mother, on the other hand, "*bombs* are destiny." A bomb is a weapon of unfocused and impersonal violence. Unlike a sniper's bullet that kills specifically and singly, a bomb kills and wounds indiscriminately and on a mass scale. Indifferent to its victim, this destiny is not private, but public. Another difference between the apocalyptic statements is that Jefferson's has a presumption of difference between an interior (domestic) world and an exterior (public) world. The statement "bombs are destiny" has no such presumption. Instead, it suggests a flattened two-dimensional picture in which the hidden factors of genealogy and blood hold no sway in the face of the bomb's indifferent destruction. Thus in *Satanic Verses* apocalypticism and the effects of prophecy are a fundamentally public matter, but so pervasive that the category of the private disappears. Allie's mother makes the argument that bombs are destiny in an effort to dissuade Allie from risking travel in order to see Gibreel. Everything happens on a mass scale. The flattening of any distinction between interior and exterior prohibits the in-and-out movement of prophecy.

The opening scene of Rushdie's novel in which Gibreel and Saladin Chamcha fall through the air from an exploded airplane also suggests the absence of a distinction between interior and exterior. Rushdie's opening epigraph from Daniel Defoe's *History of the Devil* relates the notion that "Satan" in his "wandering, unsettled condition" has a "kind of empire in the liquid waste or air . . . without any fixed place, or space . . . to rest the sole of his foot upon."

Rootless, he occupies neither interior nor exterior. Chief among the variations of prophecy that this novel examines is a flattened kind of prophecy that does not sustain contradictory qualities. Like the radio voice of the Ayatollah's broadcaster, it occupies no space; perhaps this kind of prophecy is peculiarly suited to mechanical reproduction and could only appear in a postmodern novel. Whether postmodern or not, this prophecy does not move between inside and outside.

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Chapter Five

Devil on the Cross and Upward Prophecy: The Ascent from the Grave

The previous chapter on *The Satanic Verses* discusses those imitations of prophecy which result in tyranny, examining particularly the imitation of prophetic fulfillment through terrorist gestures. In Ngugi Wa Thiong'o's *Devil on the Cross*, written while he was imprisoned following the performance of *The Trial of Dedan Kimathi*, the narrator critiques prophecy that has been used for oppression, namely the colonial justification for unethical capitalism through Gospel parables such as the parable of the talents of gold. The Bible is used as a means to convince the workers that "to obey the Kimeendeeri [ruling] class is to obey God and that to anger or oppose their overlords is to anger and oppose God" (189). In this novel, which was written originally in Gikuyu[29] and translated by its author, the narrator learns to recognize and uncover duplicity in the capitalist mandate to prosperity. For this narrator, the call to prophesy through a process of recollection and projection to the future is a great burden. Further, it is a burden that he must carry upward: unlike the *nabi* of the Judeo-Christian tradition, who carries a message down from above, or the *prophetes* of the Greco-Roman tradition, who carries a sign from interior to exterior, this prophet moves from the roots of the lives of the oppressed up to the problem of nation, and from the

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[29] Ngugi's position on languages is that "just as English had been imposed on the African people by the colonizers, its continued use in writing is detrimental to the development of African languages and furthers the creation of an elite alienated from the people" (Nazareth 10). In this respect he departs from Salman Rushdie, who composed *Satanic Verses* in English without apology. In fact, Ngugui "succeeded in abolishing the Department of English at the University of Nairobi and replacing it with the Department of Literature, which emphasized East African, African, and other relevant literatures" (11).

grave up to the church bells of the prosperous city (26). The narrator is the prophet bearing the burden: he calls himself "Prophet of Justice" (9).

The Prophet of Justice, who is also called Gicaandi Player,[30] narrates the story of Wariinga, bright young Kenyan woman whose education and career ambitions were derailed at a young age by an affair with a person known as the Rich Old Man resulting in the birth of a daughter. She leaves the capital city of Nairobi after sexual harassment drives her from her typing job and her contemptuous young lover. Assisted by a stranger who returns her meager wallet and averts her suicide, she sets off for her home town of Ilmorog on the *matatu* (bus or van) driven by Robin Mwaura. On the bus, political discussions commence when a female passenger named Wangari confesses that she is unable to pay the fare, despite a life of consistent hard work and honorable service to the Mau Mau rebellion against British rule. They discuss the problems of neocolonial conditions in which a few natives hold capital and power in the same unscrupulous way that their white predecessors did. Gatuiria, an idealistic young composer, and Muturi, a school watchman, are shocked when another passenger, Mwireri, proclaims that he will be a participant in the Competition in Modern Theft and Robbery in Ilmorog, a competition that rebellious university students have named "the devil's feast."

In this novel, Kenyan businessmen prostitute the culture and soul of Kenya to foreign interests, as represented by the International Organization of

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[30] The Gicaandi is a rhythm instrument made out of a seed-filled gourd inscribed with pictures. It is used in a song and dance with "riddles and conundrums in which two persons compete" (Kikuyu-English Dictionary quoted in Gititi 221).

Thieves and Robbers. The thefts of land, resources and labor through deceit, extortion, intimidation and political corruption result in wealth for a few and poverty and famine for everyone else. The Biblical prophecy of eternal reward for earthly suffering, along with other foreign cultural notions, ensures the continued subservience of the masses. The novel's title casts doubt on Christian prophecy by substituting Jesus on the cross for a devil on the cross. In Wariinga's recurring dream, "instead of Jesus on the Cross, she would see the Devil, with skin as white as that of a very fat European she once saw" (139). Wariinga has a vision of the devil being crucified "by people in tattered clothes", and then restored by his disciples (139). These disciples who take him down "after three days" are "black people in suits and ties" (131). The vision suggests that after Independence from colonial rule, a new set of evils enters the land as the new native rulers adapt corrupt colonial practices to their country after it has been "saved" from tyranny.

These devil's disciples become pregnant with all the evils of the colonial devil who was crucified, and thus the evils spread. Muturi uses the metaphor of illicit generation with regard to the nation: "this country . . . should have given birth to its offspring long ago" (46). To the question "who is responsible for the pregnancy" Mwaura replies "the Devil doing his work" (46). Generation has this negative connotation which is not inherent, but adheres because the model of profit and self interest, as taught through the Biblical parable of the talents, organizes all parts of society. In the novel the abuse of generation is part of the downfall of the country. The possibility of change recedes because the people

are "bearers of doomed children" (137). Chiefly, the exploitation of young women like Wariinga results in children like Wambui who are not acknowledged or supported by their fathers. These girls grow up to the same exploitation: "a woman's youth has become a rotting corpse" (136). The narrator speaks of women aborting or throwing their babies into latrines," or of children "emerging from their mother's wombs as corpses" (136; 18). Because of exploitation, the womb is "a grave in which [a young woman's] fertility is buried" (136).[31] So the next generation comes forth from the grave.

The ruling motif in this novel is of the woman who has "every part of [her] body buried except one:" her "single organ" of sexuality (26). Here, generation is managed and oppressed through denied paternity, abortion, and the "*International Planned Parenthood Association*:" as the robber Mwireri wa Mukiraai explains, "the greatest threat to [thieves and robbers] is the increase in the number of people who will be demanding food, clothing, and shelter" (161). Wariinga discovers this oppression after encountering the false hope of "modern love:" John Kimwana tells her that her illegitimate child does not scandalize him, kissing Wariinga and saying " 'a child is not a leopard, capable of wounding people' " (20). She finds, of course, that these "modern, progressive views" are professed hypocritically (20).

The pattern of abuse that women like Wariinga experience after they are acquired by men like the Rich Old Man is one of false promises, rebukes and abandonment. Even her young lover John Kimwana "motivated by hypocrisy . . .

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[31] Ngugi alludes, perhaps, to the white supremacist stance taken by Margaret Sanger, founder of Planned Parenthood.

lectures [Wariinga]," claiming that "Kihara is not the first to eat from [her] thighs" and that "a girl who has sipped at the delights of money can never stop drinking" (25). In fact, he benefits financially from her; she promises to "help him with his keep so that he can finish his education without trouble or delay" (20). Poor young student though he is, Kimwana is no different from the Rich Old Man who originally seduced Wariinga. When the woman becomes a burden and not a benefit, be he "student, loafer [or] rich man," his "response is the same" (17). Wariinga encounters protestations of innocence: "who are you claiming is responsible for the pregnancy? Me?" (18) The Rich Old Man tells her not to "collect pregnancies wherever [she] may and then lay them at [his] door just because one day [he] happened to tease [her]" (18). Likewise, Kimwana rejects Wariinga because she loses her job for refusing to yield to Boss Kihara's desires. Among all these men, self-interest prevails. The narrator complains of sexual harassment in the business world being prevalent to the extent that "women's thighs are the tables on which contracts are signed" and that "modern problems are resolved with the aid of thighs" (19). The imported capitalist pattern of using people up has spread through all levels of society. One of the thieves sums up this situation when he proposes the sale of extra phalluses to men who want to multiply their desires.

Ngugi's description of modern love is tied up with foreign influence. Wariinga complains of prostitution and the way that developers build "tourist hotel[s]" so that Kenyan "women can have facilities for selling their flesh to foreigners" (223). Indeed, the wrinkled old foreigner Mwaura meets exclaims on

the "*fantastic wild game . . . and afterwards fantastic women*" of Kenya (223). The sacrifice of women's lives to other people's desires is a national problem in this novel. The Rich Old Man, for instance, offers a foreign lifestyle to Wariinga when he tries to seduce her a second time: "a house with the kind of furniture and carpets . . . and other things imported from abroad—from Hong Kong, Tokyo, Paris, London, Rome, New York" together with "clothes and jewelry made in Europe" (251). He assumes that the desire to be a European is enough to make Wariinga yield to him. The submission of the colonized to European and Asian tastes causes Kenyan women to turn over their lives and bodies. The Kenyan men are complicit in this abuse. The nation's capacity for generation, then, is in the control of foreigners.

Wariinga overcomes the obstacles of poverty for her daughter Wambui, who is raised by her grandmother, and seems on the brink of happiness when she is about to marry Gatuiria. In the surprise ending of the novel, Gatuiria turns out to be the son of the Rich Old Man and therefore, the brother of Wambui. The illicit generation prevents the marriage of Gatuiria and Wariinga. The happy, natural ending is averted and the wedding feast becomes a scene of death when Wariinga kills her prospective father-in-law and former sugar-daddy. Wariinga's reason for the killing is that he is "a parasite that lives on the trees of other people's lives" (254). The Rich Old Man uses up Wariinga's life: it is only the intervention of others that saves Wariinga from committing suicide on more than one occasion. This "modern love" that is a function of the modern, capitalist social model of self-seeking interest results in death.

Mazrui argues that "Ngugi reclaims oral tradition and liberates it from its traditional, relatively passive use as a vehicle for authentication and passing messages from generation to generation" (245). As a justification for using the oral tradition, mere passing down is not enough

Prophecy in this novel is distinct from prophecy in *The Violent Bear it Away* and *Brother to Dragons* in that it moves upwards instead of downwards from on high. As noted in the introduction, the Hebrew word for prophet is *nabi*. The prefix *na* indicates a downward movement, indicating that the prophetic word originates in a high place and descends to a low place, moving from God to the people. In *Devil on the Cross*, however, the movement is reversed. As the narrator accepts the call to prophesy, he declares "the voice of the people is the voice of God" (8). He elevates the people from the auditors of prophecy to the source. Here, prophecy is not theophanic. Gatuiria relates learning this proverb about the voice of the people from his mentor, the old man in the village. He prefaces it with the admonition "never despise the people" and repeats "the voice of the people is the voice of God" (63). The old man's third tale of Nding'uri, who sold his soul to an evil spirit, amplifies and explains this upward movement. Nding'uri's neighbors rebuke him to "listen to the voice of the people" (65). They identify the voice: "the voice of the village is the voice of the Ridge, and it is the voice of the country, and it is the voice of the nation, and it is the voice of the people. Nding'uri, the voice of the people is the voice of God . . . in the glory of your nation you'll see the face of God" (65). Note that this statement moves ever outward and upward, from micro level to macro, from village to country. This

resulting collective of the people has mantic power. The "delegation of elders" from the village in the tale warns Nding'uri that "he who sells the shadow of his nation is damned, for his name shall forever be cursed by generations to come, and when he dies he will become an evil spirit" (65). The encomium of the people is no fleeting glory or infamy. More than mere notoriety, this collective voice can convey damnation or eternal life: "happy is the man who willingly defends the shadow of his nation, for he will never die" (65). "His name," explains the elders, "shall live forever in the hearts of the people" (65). What is offered is not mere fame, but a kind of reality conveyed only by mantic speech. The voice of the people, then, is constitutive of reality. The people are their own prophetic source. Nding'uri treats this warning with contempt and responds "what's a village? What's a nation? What's a people? Go away and tell all this to someone else" (65). The tale shows his contempt to be fatal when the village destroys him.

This upward movement of prophecy contrasts with the downward hierarchy of colonial Christianity described by Mwireri: In his contempt for the collective people, Mwireri declares that "people can never be equal like teeth" (78). "Look," he says, "at God's Heaven. God sits on the throne. On his right side stands his only Son. On his left side stands the Holy Spirit. At his feet the angels sit. At the feet of the angels sit the saints. At the feet of the saints sit all the Disciples , and so on, one rank standing below another, until we come to the class of believers here on Earth" (78). Likewise "hell is structured in the same way" (78). The movement of the realizing word, the word as deed, downward is

a western import and part of the imperial mindset. Like the Bible itself, the whole notion of the constitutive word as deed moving downward from on high is abused: it is made an instrument of the colonial and neocolonial enslavement of Kenya. Only the collective, upward voice can effectively rebel against this imperial structure. The routing of the devil's feast by the workers and students of Ilmorog, led by Wangari and Muturi, models the power of the collective voice. When this impromptu grassroots army chases away the thieves and robbers, they clash with the police and military, who belong to that colonial hierarchy which passes power down from on high.

Literature and music are part of the upward movement of the nation's voice. In an allegory of Kenya's national identity, the tale of Nding'uri demonstrates the importance of this voice. When the bad spirit makes a bid for his soul, Nding'uri asks himself "what is a soul? Just a whispering voice" and then "he [tells] the bad spirit 'take [his] soul'" (64). The bad spirit immediately tells him the importance of this whispering voice that he does not value. When he takes possession of the voice, the spirit instructs him "never tell anybody [he is] a man without a soul" and to "seize the child [he] love[s] most , pierce one of the veins in his neck, drink up all his blood until his body is completely dry, cook the body, eat the flesh" (64). The implicit parallel is to the nation giving up its culture in order to imitate and ingratiate itself to European culture. The numerous examples not only of foreign automobiles, but foreign dress, foreign houses with imported rugs, and foreign speech demonstrate how completely the whispering voice of native culture has been abandoned. Even Gatuiria, who self-consciously

retrieves native culture, cannot speak his native language fluently, instead stuttering and inserting English words and excusing himself with shame. The consequences, the novel suggests, are the sacrifice of the nation's goods by its own people. The neocolonial exploitation of Kenya by its own businessmen and civic leaders is comparable to a parent eating its own child, which is the consequence of Nding'uri selling his soul. It is Gatuiria's job as a composer and potential prophet to restore the lost whispering voice or the soul of Kenya.

However, Gatuiria's attempts to restore the national voice through music fail. Gatuiria is an intellectual, "a *junior research fellow in African culture*" who undergoes years of foreign education in order to avoid working for his father in his exploitative business (58). But Gatuiria's ideals and education are not enough to make him an effective force of liberation. He specifically tailors his education toward some kind of liberation for Africa. Conscious of the shortcomings of a European education, he explains that Kenyan "culture has been dominated by the Western imperialist cultures" by a process "we call in English *cultural imperialism*" (58). (Note that all italicized material was written in English in the original Gikuyu edition of the novel.) Gatuiria is no sycophant to Western culture: he knowledgably defines cultural imperialism as "the mother to the slavery of the mind and the body," describing the way that it "gives birth to the mental blindness and deafness that persuades people to allow foreigners to tell them what to do in their own country, to make foreigners the ears and mouths of their national affairs" (58). Gatuiria might have read Ngugi's *Decolonizing the*

Mind.[32] Despite his intellectual and political commitment, his extensive education and training, Gatuiria still cannot produce that "tune or . . . theme" with "all kinds of national instruments" that he studies in order to revitalize native national expression (59). An intellectual is not enough, the story seems to indicate. The renewal of Kenya will not come from the university, but from the village.

Revival of "the roots of Kenyan national culture" is only part of what he wants to accomplish. When he asks who today "can play the wandindi, the one-stringed violin, making it sound liked the voice of a young man wooing his love as she comes back from picking peas in the field," he addresses the loss and retrieval of national culture. But when he asks "who can play on the gicaandi . . . today and read and interpret the verses written on the gourd" he asks a more important question (59). More than a flavor of culture, "a delicious national dish" instead of "foreign shit," what has been lost is the means of producing an efficacious word: the very possibility of effective rebellion depends on the ability to imagine and speak something else (59). "The youth of the nation has hung up its shields and spears" in a gesture that says they have lost the means of resistance (59). Alamin Mazrui speaks of the way the Mau Mau (Kenya Land and Freedom Army) had generated the means of resistance through Gikuyu prophecies during the Emergency. The Mau Mau used these prophecies "not only to fire up nationalistic sentiment and resolve against colonial oppression and land alienation in Kenya, but also to project their nationalist leaders in the form of

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[32] Subtitled *The Politics of Language in African Literature*, this influential critical work was published in 1986.

Biblical seers, prophets who had come to remind the people that their lush land now in European settlers' hands was once given to them by God" (236). For Ngugi as well, "prophecy is another oral strand . . . [used] . . . to legitimize the Gikuyu's claims to the land" (Mazrui 235). While the businessmen of the International Organization of Thieves and Robbers plot to sell "soil to peasants in pots and tins" and to "import some air from abroad" and label it "made in USA," Mau Mau prophecies fight this opportunism by reconnecting the people to their alienated land (Ngugi 107). The land was alienated partly by force but also imaginatively through renaming cities. When Wangari asks Wariinga where she comes from, she replies "the village called Ngaindeithia near *New Jerusalem* Njeruca" (38). The New Jerusalem is the Western model of colonial development based on the Biblical prophecy of the Promised Land. For Kenya, this prophecy was a means of exploitation; thus again Christianity was a weapon brought by the white man along with his gun. This prophetic landscaping of Kenya needs to be replaced chiefly because it was exploitative but also because it was borrowed. Searching for a new imaginative territorialization, the prophet has to shape his prophecies out of indigenous material.

These uses of prophecy as a political art for resistance to neocolonial rule in Kenya are a backdrop to Ngugi's use of prophecy in this novel. Recall that Ngugi makes himself a historian of the Mau Mau and its leader with his play *The Trial of Dedan Kimathoi*, which he wrote shortly before being detained in prison

(Mazrui 233).[33] This history was an alternative account to the prior written accounts which were all from the perspective of the colonizers. While in prison for retrieving this alternate history, Ngugi wrote *Devil on the Cross*. Thus, this imagining of resistance has much to do with retrieval of "the history of [his] country" and national memory (59).

But more than memory and retrieval of a national past, the prophet must adapt a new speech in order to transform the shape of reality in the national imagination.[34] This is where Gatuiria falls short as a prophet. That he is a potential prophet figure is evident from the way he talks about his creative work in music. Gatuiria's *magnum opus* is the symphony he writes to tell the story of the exploitation and revolt of Kenya. He "hopes above all that his music will inspire people with patriotic love for Kenya," filling them with anger "at those who sold the soul of the nation to foreigners" and overturning "*cultural imperialism*" (226 58). Gatuiria is able to complete this work because he is inspired by Wariinga. He intends the symphony to be a symbol of their marriage. Wariinga encourages him to "finish it . . . so that [they] can go away together" (226). "Gatuiria had decided that his score would be Wariinga's engagement ring" and its "first performance would take place on their wedding night" (226). His failure

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[33] The political message of the play *I Will Marry When I Want To* was the reason for his arrest in 1977 (Wikipedia).

[34] Divination and the word as deed are important to the historical background of rebellion against the British which precede the neocolonial period in which the novel takes place. Wangari recalls her participation in the Mau Mau group, which "engaged in guerilla warfare and terrorism" during the Emergency (1). This group's members took an oath of allegiance so absolute that to break it was to die. The Mau Mau oath is an instance of the word as deed operating as a political art. The use of female prophets for Mau Mau warfare is an instance of the literal referent for the narrator's prophesying: "the Mau Mau . . . included women, apparently often enough women with powers of prediction, who worked directly with platoon commanders" (Kikuyu Mau Mau Uprising 1).

to fulfill his engagement with Wariinga becomes the final failure of his potential as a prophet. After Wariinga kills his father, he "does not know what to do . . . so he just [stands] in the courtyard, hearing in his mind music that leads nowhere" (254). But even before he meets Wariinga, Gatuiria is already a failing prophet. Identifying his weak prophet role, Wangari compares him to "the chameleon which once was sent by God to the people but never delivered the message it carried because it hesitated so long" (67). Feeling the inadequacy of his colonial education, he seeks out an old man of Nakuru to tell him authentic "old stories—tales of ogres or animals" (61). As he composes music, hoping that the tales will inspire his work, he "[feels] the flames die, and the ashes of the work [are] left without even the tiniest spark" (67). The reasons for this failure is, he surmises, a lack of belief "in the existence of the subject of [his] composition" (67). He wonders how to "acquire belief" (67). Dissatisfied with mere satire, he wants to know whether the devil has "seven horns" (73). He echoes Wariinga's question what "if the Devil did exist, and if he visited Kenya, and if he hosted feasts on Earth and arranged competitions for his earthly disciples?" (70) He complains of an intellectual difficulty, a "knot" the center of which is the question "does the Devil [as advertised in the Devil's Feast pamphlet] exist or not?" (73) The value of stories and figurative language eludes him. His mentor, the old storyteller, explains that all stories are about men: "there is no difference between old stories and modern stories. Stories are stories. All stories are old. All stories are new. All stories belong to tomorrow" (61). Despite the storyteller's efforts, Gatuiria does not understand that "all stories are about human beings" (62). Like the

Kenyan thieves and robbers who organize themselves around "Modern Theft and Robbery," he preoccupies himself with modernity as it is shaped and defined by the colonizer (87).

Gatuiria misses a great opportunity when his mentor tells him three stories, the third of which "left a indelible mark in [his] heart" (62). This third story is about a Job-like man named Nding'uri who despite virtue and hard work is struck by a "pestilence [which] destroyed all Nding'uri's possessions" (63). Unlike Job, he decides to abandon his piety and sell his soul to a bad spirit, becoming from that time on a cruel and rapacious exploiter of his neighbors. Eventually, his victims send a delegation claiming, prophet-like, to be "the voice of the village" and "the voice of God:" they rebuke him, suffer his boasts and then attack and burn him (65). This tale is the story of the workers' encounter with the devil's feast writ small: the Njeruca crowd breaks up the devil's fest, leaving the cave "reeking of burnt debris and smoke" while they sing of "chasing away the Devil / And all his disciples" (207). Clearly, the old tale of Nding'uri is analogous to the Kenyan suffering and rebellion that Gatuiria witnesses. While desiring to represent the soul of Kenya he misses his opportunity to use this story. At first inspired by the three tales, he stops composing his music because "in [his] heart [he] did not believe in the existence of ogres, spirits or creatures from any world but this" described in the tales (67). Gatuiria is too literal minded to be a prophet. In terms of prophecy's contradictory qualities, Gatuiria cannot be a prophet because he thinks that the word as deed is irrelevant to the modern world.

Fundamentally, he cannot make the prophetic movement between hiddenness and revelation or between past and future.

Gatuiria also fails as a prophet because of his secretive attitude toward the past. Like Jefferson in *Brother to Dragons*, Gatuiria prefers to keep silent about shameful relatives. Gatuiria conceals his family name so that no one will know that he is the son of an unscrupulous businessman who practices the worst neocolonial exploitation of his own country, the modern Haraambe (organized unity). He confesses shame at his parentage and refuses to reveal it. Because he conceals his family name, Wariinga does not discover that Gatuiria is the son of the Rich Old Man and in effect her stepson until they are already engaged.

The narrator, who is the Prophet of Justice, offers acknowledgment of the past as one of the most important effects of prophesying. Unlike Gatuiria, the narrator faces the past and relates it to the next generation as part of a meaningful story. The first auditor of Wariinga's troubles tells her that they "must never despair" about Kenya, for "Despair is the one sin that cannot be forgiven . . . by the nation and generations to come" (27). Hope is the business of the prophet, but not a hope that conceals pitfalls. Rather, the prophet has to retrieve memories like those of Wariinga. This digging up of the past is part of a resurrection theme in the novel. But rather than a nefarious resurrection of the Devil that multiplies evils, the prophet assists in recovering the lives of the young. The graves in which Kenya's young women have been buried (minus their sexual organs) must be opened. In another burial metaphor, the narrator argues that pits have been dug and concealed in order to trap the next generation. While

"certain people in Ilmorog" argued that "this story [of Wariinga and the devil's feast] was too disgraceful, too shameful" and "that it should be concealed in the depths of everlasting darkness," the narrator disagrees (7). On the contrary, he argues that revelation instead of concealment should be the strategy of those seeking justice. His response to the quietists is that to conceal these events is to "cover up pits in our courtyard with leaves or grass, saying . . . that because our eyes cannot now see the holes, our children can prance about the yard as they like" (7). The prophet must engage the past in order to give a clear path for the future, a path without "pitfalls" and "tree stumps" (7).

While the prophet-narrator engages in recollection, Robin Mwaura, on the other hand, scoffs at memory: in a churlish response to Wangari's sad musings about how little she gained from her faithful service to Kenya in the Mau Mau, he says "Independence is not tales about the past but the sound of money in one's pocket" (37). This attitude is not just a distasteful crass materialism, but rather a summary of neocolonial exploitation. It contrasts with the Mau Mau song "a bean fell to the ground--/ We split it among ourselves" (39). Mwaura is no harmless figure of small time greed, but actually a former thug and assassin, shortly to be reinstated after the devil's feast. His opposition to memory is important, signaling that the obliteration of national memory is part of the neocolonial pattern of exploitation in Kenya. Thus when the narrator brings Wariinga's story into the national memory he works against that pattern of exploitation.

Gatuiria's ability to perform the prophetic remembering of the nation's past is compromised by his years of foreign education. Through this education, the

colonizer has framed Gatuiria's relationship with his own culture. Even in his desire to retrieve Kenyan culture from the colonizer, he is distanced from it. After years of pursuing education abroad, he approaches his own country clumsily instead of living in it naturally, experiencing "estrangement from [his] existential and cultural being" (Mazrui 230). Fritz Fanon describes the stilted work of the intellectual alienated from his or her own culture: "old legends will be reinterpreted in the light of a borrowed aestheticism and of a conception of the world which was discovered under other skies" (*Wretched of the Earth* quoted in Mazrui 231). When Gatuiria asks where he can find belief, he betrays the way colonialism has restricted his viewpoint: modernized by the colonizer, he rejects the old tales of ogres and devils as irrelevant and superstitious. (Likewise, the newer Christian tales of hell Mwaura describes as superstitions used to frighten children into behaving.) On the other hand, as a resistant colonial subject, he wants to recover his own "authentic" culture. The result is a stultified, preserved version which critic Alamin Mazrui calls "the fossilization of oral literature" (231). The kind of literature and music that are composed as if by an outsider are analogous to Christian prophecy in *The Devil on the Cross*: they are imposed from above, instead of emerging up from the masses. The stuttering Gatuiria can only be an imitator of his own culture and language instead of a creator.

Even Gatuiria's praise of Wariinga is unoriginal. When the young man takes Wariinga to meet his parents, he admires her beauty saying that her "skin has a depth of blackness that is softer and more tender than the most expensive perfume oil" (225). Her eyes and cheeks earn similar epithets. With growing

hyperbole, he adds that her "hair is so black and soft and smooth that all men feel like sheltering from the sun in its shade" (225). As his compliments unfold, they evoke a memory in Wariinga and in the reader. The words of his rhapsody are the exact words of the voice of the devil as he speaks to her in her dream: her "the blackness of [her] skin is smoother and more tender than the most expensive perfume oils" and her hair such that "all men must feel like sheltering from the sun in its shade" (192). The sameness of these words "startle[s] Wariinga" (225). The devil's words in her dream were an invitation to join him and become an "oppressor," "exploiter" "liar" and "grabber" (192). This passage implies that Gatuiria is something worse than a failed prophet: rather, he is a mouthpiece (albeit unwitting) for the voice of tyranny. He loses power over his voice by mimicking the colonizer and keeping silence about his parentage and his past. In speaking words of admiration to Wariinga, Gatuiria slips into the role of exploiter. Unwittingly, he speaks to her as if he is his father, her former sugar-daddy. In two ways, Gatuiria does not examine his antecedents: he covers up his parentage instead of revealing it, and he mimics the colonizer by approaching his own culture and language as a foreigner. Because of these omissions and in spite of his best intentions he becomes a mouthpiece for tyranny.

Gicaandi Player, on the other hand, is a successful prophet. He begins the gicaandi ritual, adapting a Gikuyu speech form instead of submitting to the colonizer's way of knowing. He responds to the plea of Wariinga's mother: "Gicaandi Player, reveal all that is hidden," and thus begins "an extended divination of the ills of the nation" (Ngugi 7). This prophet, unlike the ineffectual

Gatuiria, "discharge[s] the office of diviner/priest, investigator, philosopher, counselor, comforter [and] the voice of conscience" in his role as the Prophet of Justice (Gititi 220). Gitahi Gititi describes the ritual of *gicaandi*, "an event that takes place in the public square . . . providing a model for discourse" involving poetry, divination and riddles (Gititi 221, 225). The ritual's opening incantation states that it is more than "magical divination . . . [or] diagnosing the cause of illness and prescribing a remedial ceremony" (225). Gititi explains that the *gicaandi* ritual is also a communal treasury of knowledge and adaptable figures, and the gourd used for it is "an emblem of a people's cultural 'wisdom'" (224). The gourd is used to store seeds (for annual plants) and the seeds differ from each other. Symbolically, the ritual contains both history and the possibility of new speech adapted to new conditions (225). In this respect, it is a superb symbol of the work of prophecy in culture. The injunction (repeated many times by Wangari and others) to "change, for the seeds in the gourd are not all of one kind" emphasizes the virtues of adaptability and responsiveness (224).

These virtues are necessary for successful rebellion against neocolonialism. The task of the postcolonial writer, as well as the prophet of justice, is to adapt native forms for a "resistance culture" that is a "creative culture, unleashing tremendous energies" (Gititi 215). The development of a resistance culture involves retrieval of native language and its adaptation to new circumstances. Ngugi's "rendering of *Devil on the Cross* as a 'gicaandi' novel represents an effort to contemporize gicaandi," making it politically effective (217). Mazrui makes it clear that this contemporizing is vital to a work that will be

artistically successful and politically relevant. Christopher Miller explains that "orality in its broadest sense . . . has a clear political connotation in Africa, representing the authenticity of the precolonial world" so that "'tradition' and orality are synonymous," but that Ngugi transcends this usage of orality as a testament to cultural authenticity (quoted in Mazrui 230). Orality is not enough. Rather, the language has to be made tenable for the present. Gititi argues that *Devil on the Cross* is obviously Ngugi's "test case for the adequacy of the Gikuyu language to articulate political, economic, linguistic, religious, philosophical, and scientific concepts" (215). In *Decolonizing the Mind*, Ngugi defines the task of African writers as one of "creating a literature in [African languages] . . . which process opens the languages for philosophy, science, technology and all the other areas of human creative endeavors" (quoted in Gititi 217). While opening up the language to new disciplines, the composition of literature in these languages also implies and creates an audience that is African, instead of serving a foreign audience: it interpolates a nation with an identity tied to that language, instead of creating more alienated intellectuals like Gatuiria. Mazrui explains that Ngugi "redefine[s] the audience of African literature" by "turn[ing] away from the audience defined by the oppressor" (231). Ngugi adapts the *gicaandi* ritual for the novel so that this prophetic form can be an effective political art. He offers it as an alternative to the Biblical prophecy employed by the colonizers.

But while the gourd that is an instrument of music and divination is a good symbol of the way that prophecy works to retrieve the past and to generate

newness for the future, the *gicaandi* ritual also contains features which are unique among the forms of prophecy described in previous chapters. The element of dialogue is radically shifted in this form of prophecy. *Gicaandi* is performed within a "communal ethos," in which "collaboration" and "collective participation" support the ritual (Gititi 225). It is not a solo performance. The "pleading cries of many voices" that encourage Gicaandi Player contrast the solitude of Tarwater and his imaging as a jackal in *The Violent Bear it Away* (7). Gicaandi Player does not continue the tradition of Jeremiah and John the Baptist, wherein the prophet comes from the margin. (This is also the case with the title character of Ngugi's *Matigari*, who "instead of preaching from the wilderness . . . stamps through the country to confront his enemies" (241).) Gititi emphasizes that the "Prophet of Justice" should "constitute himself into an oracle" but that this "task cannot ultimately remain an individual one" (220). "Prophecy," he concludes, "is a collective concern" (220).

Part of the work of this collective concern is to diagnose the ills of society by indicating how people, power and goods move within it. Much of the movement is lateral, as when Wangari recalls carrying messages back and forth across enemy lines, and as with the busload of characters that moves across the trans-African highway (68). Conveyances such as the old Ford *matatu* in which they all ride (Mwaura's livelihood for which he is willing to commit murder), the train that Wangari almost throws herself under, and the Mercedes Benz in which Wariinga loses her virginity and her hopes sustain movement in the novel. Women like Wariinga are continually seduced in BMW's, such that a man at the

devil's feast nicknames the automobile "*Be My Woman*" (179). The Mercedes in which Wariinga is seduced is called a "four wheeled tomb" (147). Movement—of influence, goods, labor and capital—and not the static social hierarchy centered on sacred property—is the key to justice and injustice. Even when Mwaura prints the warning "never play with other people's property" beside his murder victim, the property in question is a vehicle. His movement in the game of prosperity was temporarily hindered by his enemy.

One of the thieves emphasizes the means of movement in the game, stating that "a car is a man's *identity*" and tells the tale of failing to recognize his wife in town "because she had left her car at home" (163). Note that the robbers judge one another by how they traveled to the feast. Mwireri is rejected as a competitor because he arrives in a *matatu*. The master of ceremonies requires each competitor to describe the vehicles he owns. Thereafter, the boast of one competitor is much like another: Gitutu claims to "normally go about in a chauffeur-driven Mercedes Benz 280" and to have also "a Peugeot 604 and a Range Rover . . . for [his] personal use" (100). His wife has a "Toyota Carina" which is "just a little shopping basket for carrying goods from the market" (100). Each of the competitors repeats this understatement of the shopping basket. For Gitutu's "young girlfriends" he boasts of buying a "Toyota Corolla and a Datsun 1600 SS," gifts which reflect his ability to control the movement of property (100). The vehicles are all foreign—British, American, Japanese, European—and as such are status symbols denoting both wealth and a dignified assimilation of foreign culture. The most extreme example of the car metaphor is the nickname

of Kimeendeeri, a competitor in the feast whose name was given "during the Emergency [that is, the period of martial law imposed by the British in Kenya between 1952 and 1960] because of the way he used to grind workers and peasants to death:" he would "make men and women lie flat on the ground in a row, and then he would drive his Land Rover over the bodies" (187). The character of Kimeendeeri was prominent in the Emergency when he was a "District Officer" (187). Here Ngugi makes Kimeendeeri an example of the kind of postcolonial opportunistic tyranny that is his central concern in this novel. After the atrocities he conducted on behalf of the regime during the Emergency, "when Independence came, Kimeendeeri quickly climbed the administrative ladder" in the new order "to become a Permanent Secretary," enabling the growth of his financial empire such that "his skill at theft and robbery is visible from a great distance" (187). The narrator generalizes this example, referring to a "Kimeendeeri class" of oppressors (189). Atrocity, cruelty, and opportunistic postcolonial exploitation come together in the image of the Land Rover. Ngugi continually utilizes the transport motif to illustrate crucial economic and political issues.

As the master of ceremonies indicates at the feast, there are differences between the kinds of transport. Unlike the exclusive Mercedes and BMW sedans, the train is a public place. Yet it also has negative connotations. On two occasions Wangari nearly commits suicide by throwing herself in front of a train. The conveyance that receives the most attention from the narrator is the *matatu*. The comically decrepit *matatu* is an object of frustration to Mwaura, who wishes

he had something thirty years newer, and to Mwireri, who is rejected from the competition for arriving in a *matatu*. Aside from being a conveyance for the impecunious, the *matatu* also differs from a car in that it is public. More than public, it is communal. It is not a place of dignified reserve where strangers pretend not to see one another. On the contrary, the bus advertises unreserved conversation: "IF YOU WANT GOSSIP OR RUMOURS RIDE IN MWAURA'S MATATU" (30). Nikolai Gogol sets up the troika as an image of Russian national culture in Dead Souls, and the narrator's treatment of the *matatu* has something of this communal flavor. The *matatu* seemed as if it "was the very first motor vehicle to have been made on Earth" (31). It is a primordial instance of transport.[35] The narrator also offers an image of cooperation occurring in the *matatu*, both when the passengers come together to pay Wangari's missing fare and when the *matatu* stalls: "Muturi, Wangari, Gatuiria and the man in dark glasses got out and pushed," and "The engine roared into life" (69). The suggestion of cooperation here is attenuated by Wariinga's inability to participate due to a collapse which the male passengers attribute to "the woman's disease" (69). The *matatu* becomes a specific kind of communal venue that is implicated in the oppression of Kenya when the narrator compares it to a church. As Mwireri, promoting the ideals of modern theft and robbery, begins the proverb of the talents "as if he were singing a lullaby to send their souls and minds to sleep, "Jacinta Wariinga, Gatuiria, Mwaura, Muturi and Wangari leaned forward so they would not miss a single word" and Matatu Matata Matamu Model T Ford,

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[35] Critic Andrew Lytle suggests that conveyances reflect the degree of community or privacy in local cultures.

registration number MMM 333, was like a church" (81). The negative connotations of a church in his novel as a place for subduing lower-class discontent with promises of eternal rewards comes together with the simile of the lullaby to suggest that religion is a soporific drug. This drug is administered communally. Mwaura boasts that "God's kingdom has been brought closer by Mwaura's Matatu Matata Matamu Model T Ford," and "Even the journey to the Devil's place is nothing to Mwaura's . . . Ford" (31). This conveyance has infernal connotations.

Wangari has false hopes about the *matatu* when she says "Matatus are the only places left where people can discuss things freely" (56). Her conviction that "in a matatu you can speak your thoughts without first looking over your shoulder to see who is listening" is encouraged by Mwaura, who claims that in his bus one is "in the heartland of democracy" (56). The openness and freedom of the *matatu* turns out to be no such thing. Mwaura, so far from encouraging free discussion, continually tries to turn the subject from political matters and ultimately reports the rebellious things that Wangari and Muturi say, assisting in their arrest. When he says that "in [his] matatu, [one] could be inside a prison or a grave" where "there's nothing [one] can't say" he is foreshadowing the fate of three of the passengers. Mwireri will be dead: indeed, Mwaura reopens his career as assassin for the Devil's Angels and kills him at the orders of one of the competitors at the feast. Wangari and Muturi ultimately disappear after their trial for the crime of breaking up the feast, presumably into either a prison or a grave. The matatu, while described comically and appearing to be a haven of

democracy and a symbol of lower class community, actually carries implications of death and imprisonment. When Muturi claims that there are two possible journeys, one to heaven and one to hell, Mwaura responds with atypical gravity. When asked which path he chooses, he replies "laughing a little, as if he were joking," "'the road to death!' " (55) He continues "mockingly," "where do you think we are headed now?" (55) While the *matatu* might seem to be a symbol of that organized unity of the people that the narrator espouses, its journey is a dark one.

The transportation theme becomes more complicated when Wariinga fulfills her potential as a worker, a person, and a political player (instead of victim) when she studies engineering and becomes a top-notch mechanic. Her mechanical ability and knowledge give her dignity and status, especially among men. In her encounter with a group of men puzzling over a broken-down truck by the side of the road she earns respect for herself and the ability of women in general, which is one of the narrator's themes. On offering her services for the first time, the other mechanics are "beside themselves with laughter" and ask why she doesn't "go and sell beer in a bar" where she can "swing [her] skirt to attract men" (220). When she proves her abilities by using a wooden spoon to diagnose a "loose bolt that joined the conrad to the crankshaft, she earns accolades. The observers wonder that "[their] women have acquired so much learning" (221). Thereafter, "her fame spread[s] to every corner of the city"

(221).[36] Her mastery of engines gives her a meaningful place in society. When she leaves the scene of the Rich Old Man's death, she does so on her feet, a master of political movement and not a mere passenger.

While conveyances seem to be morally ambivalent or neutral in the transportation theme, they are still a part of the message of the Prophet of Justice. When he divines the reality of life in Kenya with its ills and its possibilities for change, he presents the movement of action in that society as occurring along mainly horizontal trajectories. There are a number of these trajectories. Roads and railways crisscross Kenya and men and women move along them in their conveyances toward wealth or death or freedom, exploiting or fleeing or rebelling. By emphasizing this variety of movement, the narrator contradicts the static model of society taught by the colonizers (and their neocolonial heirs in tyranny) for which the kingdom of heaven described in the gospel parables is the paradigm. This kingdom, as Mwireri explains, has a hierarchical structure that plummets from high to low, from God, the angels, the disciples, the saints on down to the believers on earth. Truth and power drop down from above in this static model: nothing changes and all has the ordered air of inevitability. Resistance, then, is not only useless but wrong or (as in the historical accusation lodged against Ngugi) *destabilizing*. One of the thieves offers another glimpse of this false projection of a static society when he describes his Euro daycare scheme with the inflatable white children designed to

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[36] Elleke Boehmer argues that in spite of Wariinga's revolutionary energy, "Ngugi betrays his firm patriarchal affiliations" by not "dismantling those structures that marginalize and oppress women" (150). Instead, he "places a male weapon in the hands of his women characters" so that "male values thus come encased in female shape" (150).

attract parents who wanted their children to resemble Europeans. These anxious imitators of foreign customs are fooled by a static scene. The daycare with inflatable children is like the unmoving set of a play: it is an image and not real. This play set with its stationary figures is a model made to fool outsiders, and it provides a metaphor for the colonial structure of society that native outsiders gaze upon. Ngugi's prophet-narrator draws attention away from this false model in order to point out living, moving social reality. The narrator encourages Kenyans to enter and master this movement as the thieves and robbers have.

Ngugi retrieves the power of word as deed from those who use Christian prophecy to support unjust conditions of economic rule left over from imperialist practices. He utilizes a prophecy that instead of coming down from on high moves upward from below, resurrecting what has been buried in a grave: the personhood of Kenya's young women, the vitality of the land, and native language-creation. While the whole enterprise of the story becomes a piece of prophecy, it also calls for contemplation: "come and . . . reason together. / Come and . . . reason together now . . . about / Jacinta Wariinga before . . . pass[ing] judgment on [Kenya's] children" invites the narrator (9). The word as deed that he relates, then, has the purpose of reasoning and averting judgment, which are activities performed not by the prophet but by the assembly of people and authorized not by a single voice but by communal argument.

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Chapter Six

DeLillo's Novelist: Absence versus Apocalypse in *Mao II*

The previous chapter describes Ngugi Wa Thiongo's Marxist ethic of prophecy in which the prophet figure guides prophetic truth in an upward movement from the masses instead of in a downward movement from a divine source, as is traditional. Ngugi's prophetic speech moves up from below because it contradicts the colonizer's truth which is imposed from above. This revisionist prophecy also holds in abeyance judgment of the oppressed. For instance, the reader is asked not to judge Wariinga for murdering her prospective father-in-law. Thus it is not surprising that the historical allegations of terrorism do not accompany the frequent mentions of the Mau Mau resistance group, which is ever-present in the dialogue and background of *Devil on the Cross*. Ngugi's prophet does not cast judgment. Nonetheless, the question of what kind of political art prophecy is persists. Don DeLillo's *Mao II* asks frankly whether all resistance is akin to terrorism and whether the terrorist is an extension of the novelist. The title *Mao II*—which could be read as *Mao Mao*—recalls the problem of whether resistance to tyranny can itself be tyrannical. *Mao II* calls into question the authenticity of two kinds of resistance to hegemony: writing and terrorism. *Mao II* shows two echoes of prophecy competing for an audience in post industrial society. One strain, that of equivocal prophecy, he associates with the artist. The artist impinges on the consciousness of people, altering possibilities (of the imagination) and shaping memory and history. Despite this forcefulness, the artist as a prophet figure is a strong sign of absence, sustaining prophecy's

contradictory qualities of absence and presence. Other prophet figures, like Mao, Reverend Moon and the Ayatollah Khomeini deploy unequivocal prophecy that generates a sense of presence, often expressed in crowds. The terrorist, who ostensibly resists established power, is another prophet figure that employs unequivocal prophecy, again favoring presence over absence. This novel not only maps these two strains of prophecy–one exaggerating absence and the other presence–as they act in society, but also follows the transformations and resemblances between them.

The plot of *Mao II* is that a famous writer named Bill Gray, who has lived in mysterious seclusion for decades, agrees to be photographed by Brita Nilson, a woman who is making a photographic record of living writers.[37] When a minor French poet is taken hostage in Beirut by terrorists, Bill's publisher Charlie and the terrorists' suave spokesman George persuade Bill to intervene to save the hostage. Bill leaves behind his assistant Scott and their shared girlfriend Karen, a former "Moonie," and departs for a London press conference about the missing poet. When a bomb diverts the conference, Bill agrees to go secretly to Athens where George persuades him to trade himself for the hostage in Beirut. On the way to Beirut he dies in anonymity from injuries sustained in a car accident in Athens.

The condition in which DeLillo's characters live is shaped by the mass production of images, which combine to overwhelm viewers with a spurious

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[37] The genre classification of DeLillo's Mao II varies. It belongs to the "Paranoid School of Vonnegut, Pynchon and Barth" or in Alan Wilde's term to "midfiction" or in LeCLaire's term to "polarfiction" (Ruppersburg 5; LeClair 98). More widely used is LeClair's classification of DeLillo as a "systems novelist" as suggested in "the first book-length analysis of DeLillo's fiction," *In the Loop: Don DeLillo and the Systems Novel* (Ruppersburg 12).

sense of presence. Bill Gray experiences the onslaught of visual data that ushers the viewer into the glut of images. When he goes to New York, he sees the "rush of things, of shuffled sights . . . the deep stream of reflections, heads floating in windows, towers liquefied on taxi doors" (94). What strikes him about this layered sights and reflections is that they "simply rush at him, massively" without telling him what he is "supposed to think of this" (94). He observes "the removed nature of contemporary experience" and the "contemporary shift in attention from reality to representations of reality" (Ruppersburg 18, 19). Bill describes the profusion of images as one of the conditions of the modern world: "in our world we sleep and eat the image and pray to it and wear it too" (37). DeLillo's depiction of these commercial and everyday images in his novels is no "veneer" of "realism," insists Frank Lentricchia (6). Rather the author's literary images are part of a "historical rigor" and "cultural density" and his characters are "expressions of—and responses to—specific historical processes" that involve these images (6; 3).[38] The superfluity of competing images and the glut of signs in society, such as the Coke II advertisements that Brita sees interspersed with Maoist revolutionary slogans on a wall in Beirut, produce a sense of satiety verging on gluttony. The industrial society that produces these images proliferates and scatters meaning and desire. In Beirut, Brita observes the "image mill" (229). She sees "a human skull," "T-shirts with illustrated skulls," "pictures of skulls," "skull writing," "serial grids of blue skulls," people tattooed

[38] Lentricchia's introduction addresses the negative reviews of *Libra*, particularly by George Will and Jonathon Yardley. These reviews preoccupy many of the essayists in Lentricchia's collection. Ruppersburg points out that these reviews notwithstanding, "it can hardly be said that [DeLillo] has not received sympathetic press from intelligent readers, many of them novelists themselves" (1).

with skulls and graffiti referring to "the Father of the Skulls," "the Skull Maker" and so on (229). Seven or more layers deep, these images proliferate so that, as reviewer Louis Menand summarizes, there is a "voracious transformation of everything into a simulacrum of itself" (Menand 75).

But dissipated as the images are, their sense of presence can be gathered to make an apocalyptic impact. Autocratic figures such as the Ayatollah Khomeini, Chairman Mao, Reverend Moon, and terrorist leader Abu Rashid attract belief by making themselves a ubiquitous presence through the repetition of images. Brita sees young terrorists-in-training wearing hoods on their heads and Rashid's picture on their shirts. She learns that the hoods (which the captive poet also wondered about) obliterate their features and make way for Rashid's: "the image of Rashid is their identity" (233). All of these boys are "one man," and that man is the leader. These figures magnify and repeat (the same) image and sign so that their own pictures dominate all others: building-sized portraits intensify the aura of a single image so that it diminishes the others. The importance of this dominating image is recognized by enemies of Rashid: "a pair of local militias are firing at portraits of each other's leader" (227).

The anonymity of the boys in the hoods resembles the anonymity of the thousands of couples being married by Reverend Moon in Yankee Stadium. Among them is Karen, who so transparent to the glut of images that she can predict them as they appear on television. Like the boys in training, the brides and grooms are "immunized against the language of self" (8). Karen thus "fades into the thousands, the columned mass" (10). The "Master," like Rashid,

enlarges himself to overcome the glut of images: "he stands in the room with them when his three dimensional body is thousands of miles away" (9). The grids of brides and grooms, all dedicated to the Master and to the promulgation of his teaching, all "dream[ing] about him" and seeing "him in visions," are the means of magnifying the Master and reproducing his image (9). They also unite to magnify him through "following Master's chant word for word" (10). These rituals are a means to overcome the absence of the Master and to project his presence.

The image mill can be "millennial" when the images are focused and repeated in the hands of an autocratic leader like Rashid (229). The terrorist Rashid claims to change the course of history with his apocalyptic acts of violence. Through terror he "do[es] history in the morning and change[s] it after lunch" (235). The history that people "used to . . . [achieve] through work" and that was gathered in "the human memory" lacks the solid reality of his manufactured apocalyptic events as well as the meaning offered by his statements about "the new future" (235). His "men live in history as never before," their actions suffused with a reality not accessible through ordinary speech or work. Like Lilburne in *Brother to Dragons* and Tavleen in *The Satanic Verses*, Rashid and his followers gain a sense of reality through violent acts, a sense that is heightened by a prophetic imagining of the meaning of their acts. Terrorism is the manufacturing of apocalypse, both in the sense of a violent event and in the sense that terrorism tries deterministically to manifest an end that it predicts.

The terrorist utilizes the fascination of the news media, observing the motto "the worse, the better." Via the news media, society absorbs the terrorists' prophetic gestures through images. The narrator discusses the "emergence of news as an apocalyptic force" whereby each image must be worse than the last. Apocalyptic images of destruction on the news mesmerize Karen. The desire to view apocalyptic events on the television is something that comes up in *White Noise* as well. Like Karen, the Gladney family watches disasters and yet "wish for something bigger, grander, more sweeping" (DeLillo quoted in Aaron 70). The explanation offered by Jack's friends is that "disasters focus our attention. We need them and depend on them as long as they occur elsewhere" (Aaron 70). The news media is the means of the delivery of fear and paranoia into the everyday lives (and bloodstreams) of people like Karen and Brita. Scott speaks of "the emergence of news as an apocalyptic force" (72). The news "provides an unremitting mood of catastrophe" (72). This catastrophe is something people desire, offering an "emotional experience not available elsewhere" (72).

But what is the need for this emotional experience and this focus of attention? In part, catastrophe provides meaning by producing an ending. The desire for apocalypse is summed up in George's explanation of how terrorist events protrude on ordinary life. "Who" he asks "do we take seriously?" (157) The answer is "only the lethal believer, the person who kills and dies for faith:" the person who embraces endings (157). Karen has apocalyptic visions as a response to the evil of indifference she sees in the tent city of homeless people. Thus "she began to form pictures of people falling in the street . . . all bloodied

up" (149). She amplifies the apocalyptic statements that she hears and desires to "bring hurry-up time to all man" (146). The "world-shattering rapture" that she chants for during her wedding ceremony is another instance of apocalypse. There is a certain desire for apocalyptic events not only on the part of the terrorists who are willing to manufacture them, as with Karen and her fellow disciples. This "chant" is efficacious: it "brings the End Time closer" and becomes "the End Time" (16). The Master is a locus of apocalypse—the ultimate meaningful time "when names are lost" (16). This summit of meaning "past religion and history" clears away the clutter of worldwide banal ordinary life in which "people sit at desks and stare at office walls . . . smell their shirts . . . [and] bind themselves into numbered seats and fly across time zones . . . knowing there is something they've forgotten to do" (16). Apocalypse contrasts the banality of ordinary life and the indifference to evil.

Similarly, in the prisoner's life "there [is] no sequence or narrative or one day that leads to another" (109). His life has no meaningful beginning or ending: he asks "in the beginning, what?" (112) This absence of organizing principles from which to fill out meaning and identity distresses the prisoner. When his jailer stops coming, "the last sense making thing, the times for meals and beatings, [is] in danger of collapse" (110). In his solitude "there was no one to remind him who he was" (111). The prisoner almost wishes for the return of his jailer so that he can retrieve time and identity. He imagines two cures for the absence of beginnings and endings. These two cures are "a woman wearing stockings who might whisper the word 'stockings'" and "paper and something to write with"

(110). The woman with stockings could moor language back into a referent and thus rescue his rationality. The paper, on the other hand, would give him "some way to sustain a thought, place it in the world" (110). In the absence of these things, with only his "junior fantasies" to sustain him, he "fell to mumbling" sounds without meaning (111). Language, then, has the potential to cure distress caused by the lack of an ending.

Apocalypse is the cure employed by authoritarian figures–Moon, Khomeini, Mao, Rashid–but not by DeLillo. Mark Osteen argues that DeLillo writes "a nuclear novel that is not apocalyptic," but instead "hopeful" (quoted in Ruppersburg 16). The experiences of terror and cataclysm in this novel differ from that of *Nineteen Eighty-Four*. Glenn Scott Allen argues that DeLillo's treatment of apocalyptic themes differs from the more classical paranoia of Thomas Pynchon and George Orwell and that DeLillo rejects the "paranoid strategy for postmodern survival as formulated in Pynchon" (117). This persistent sense of apocalypse is the fearful condition of the postmodern subject: "if terrorists have truly become 'players' in the contemporary social narrative, then . . . they contribute as much to the formation of *our* identity as to their own, and their acts of seemingly random and 'meaningless' violence have become an integral component of what being a modern individual *means*" (Allen 119). The sense of impending apocalypse that pervades society is specifically manifested in fear of terrorist attacks. Brita carefully editing the belongings she travels with so that she does not offend anyone dangerous. Glenn Scott Allen claims that terrorism is one of the historical processes which "in Don DeLillo's work . . . have

seeped into the very texture of contemporary life" (116). The fear that Marvin Lundy in *Underworld* says is in "the bloodstream" is only partly due to the possibility of terrorist attacks organized by people like Rashid (Knight 286). The other part of it is pervasive observation by the state. The resulting psychological condition of the masses is one of paranoia, which is a much-discussed theme among critics of DeLillo. "Postmodern terrorism" is a continuation of the social experience of "*intra* state terrorism" of the Cold War (Allen 121). This Cold War climate of fear was not just the product of nuclear threat. Rather, it was caused by internal scrutiny. For Pynchon, Allen explains, a state of "international and domestic tension" came about through "the development of complex and interconnected domestic and international networks of surveillance that depend upon the acquisition and circulation of vast quantities of information" (121). This obsessive scrutiny produced the same anxiety, fear and paranoia and consequently "sacrifed[ed]" the "civilian as any sort of independent 'subject'" (121).

Nineteen Eighty-Four, of course, plays out the obsessive surveillance of citizens by their own government. But Orwell's response to the climate of obsessive surveillance is different than DeLillo's. DeLillo offers something different than the apocalypticism which is Orwell's response to the social conditions of his time. Perhaps the difference lies in what Peter Knight calls a "secure paranoia" versus an insecure paranoia. *Underworld*'s Klara Sax describes the secure paranoia as belonging to an age when "power . . . was stable" and "focused" during the Cold War (Knight 286). The insecure paranoia

that is part of living in post cold war society haunts DeLillo's characters and only in the presence of apocalyptic images can this paranoia be focused and the subject be at rest. In Greece, Bill observes a mood of relish in the war, seeing "women wearing skull jewelry and . . . young bravos in camouflage sunglasses and pieces of militia gear" (211). He discovers in them a "shared awareness that they did not want to escape the war, that the war was pulling them into it and they were here to join hands and death-dance willingly past the looted hotels" (211). The visiting tourists even participate in this desire for death, asking "the driver to improvise a verse for Kataklysmos, an important local feast in memory of the flood" (210). "Get me annihilation," the chant of a homeless woman Karen encounters, might answer their needs: they want a "cataclysmic verse" to focus their scattered, insecure fear (181; 211). Daniel Aaron lists "catastrophe" as one of the persistent themes in DeLillo's novels and calls DeLillo "a sociologist of crisis, pondering the ways in which the raw facts of natural and man-made disasters are processed into theory and insinuated in the public mind" (70). Collective fears are DeLillo's material.

But if contemporary paranoia is insecure instead of secure, how does DeLillo propose that people cope with it? Allen maintains that in DeLillo's work the "only hope for redemption from a self-perpetuating cycle of terrorism, repression, and paranoia is in moving away from constructions of the self that work to deny or subvert classical conceptions of the individual as the primary site of responsibility and authority" (117). In identifying a need for the return of the romantic individual, Allen departs from other readers in this analysis: David

Cowart, for instance, recognizes in *Americana* "the gathering recognition—backed up by post-Freudian psychology—that the old stable ego has become permanently unmoored" (83). However, in the calculus of prophecy that DeLillo employs the prophet figure who addresses the problems of social paranoia must balance individuality and anonymity, message and dialogue and presence and absence.

The novel contrasts two ways to resist incorporation into the glut of images generated by industrial society: creating absolute presence and deploying signs of absence. Bill hints at this age-old competition when he points out that "in a mosque" there are "no images" (37). Like a magnet, one of these polar opposites (presence) attracts and the other (absence) repels belief. When a profusion of images is controlled by an authoritarian figure like Rashid and directed to a single meaning, the images can sustain a sense of presence that precludes absence or ambiguity. This absolute presence in turn supports the power and authority of the leader figure.

Instead of the absolute presence of authoritarian figures, absence distinguishes Bill's career as he hides from fans and interviewers in seclusion and anonymity. When he decides to emerge from hiding by allowing Brita to photograph him, he explains that "when a writer doesn't show his face, he becomes a local symptom of God's famous reluctance to appear" (36). A prophetic message must *always* suggest this reluctance to appear since by its nature the prophecy is a message carried on behalf of someone who will not speak directly. In withdrawing from society in the wake of his successful book,

Bill becomes a sign of absence. By hiding his face he "is encroaching on holy turf" and "playing God's own trick" (37). He stands in for God as a sign of absence. But, while Bill calls it a trick, his absence is actually consonant with his work, which exposes him to "doubt" and "loss of faith" (38). In another advocacy of absence, Bill offers the principle that "the withheld work of art is the only eloquence left" (67). Art is powerful only insofar as it is absent. Bill's stance makes him representative in the novel of the whole notion of absence.[39]

The photographs of Bill do not end his program of absence. Rather, they mark his death and further absence. After Bill's departure Scott recognizes that he "had his picture taken not because he wanted to come out of hiding but because he wanted to hide more deeply, he wanted to revise the terms of his seclusion, he needed the crisis of exposure to give him a powerful reason to intensify his concealment" (140). In the instance of this writer, death becomes another form of absence, powerful because it accompanies the legends of his sightings, established through many years of seclusion, and the rumor of his withheld novel. Scott recalls the "stories that Bill was dead, Bill was in Manitoba, Bill was living under another name, Bill would never write another word" (140). Scott diagnoses these rumors as "people's need to make mysteries and legends" (141). His absence, even through death, magnifies his influence. His death is something he foresees during his photo shoot with Brita. He insists that he is acting before the camera, "playing the idea of death" (42). Death is implicit in the

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[39] There is a significant resemblance to Salman Rushdie in the situation of writers in this novel. Bill regards himself as a hunted man. Margaret Scanlan describes this novel as a response to the Rushdie affair which, some say, accounts for its pessimism.

portrait photograph, he says, because "a portrait doesn't begin to mean anything until the subject is dead" (42). Thus, he feels like he is attending his "own wake" (42). In a sense this is true, because no one examines the developed photos until after he dies on the boat to Beirut. Instead of contributing to the meaningless (or perhaps overly meaningful) glut of images, Brita's portraits of Bill become a transformative means to absence via death; due to the message Brita carries from Charlie during the photo shoot, Bill embarks on his journey to London, Greece, and Beirut. When he disappears on this journey, Scott reasons that "Bill was hiding from his photograph" (143).

While hiding from his photograph, Bill converses with George. George, as Rashid's representative, advocates a radical sense of presence over and against absence. He explains that Rashid intends to be like "Chairman Mao," "a figure of absolute being" (158). Absolute being is absolute and unequivocal presence with no room for absence, ambiguity or uncertainty. Troubled societies, George claims, need "Total politics, total authority, total being" (158). Bill adds to the list "total destruction and total order" (158). George wants absolute being and his goal is unequivocal meaning as over and against the glut of images and the accompanying indifference to the "downtrodden, the spat-upon" (158). Bill, on the other hand, offers equivocalness: the writer provides "ambiguities, contradictions, whispers, hints" (159). These ambiguities combine presence with absence. The hints and whispers are precisely *not* "something enormous and commanding" (158). Bill's hiding achieves something different from what terrorism, as described by George, tries to achieve. On a continuum, though, Bill

would be in the middle with the terrorists aligned with absolute being on one end and the nihilism of commercial society on the other end. While Karen's tendency is toward absolute belief, Scott has occupied the nihilist end of the spectrum. His pursuit of Bill Gray was "the story of his journey out of nonbeing" (57).

While Bill serves as a prophet figure who offers an alternative to the nihilism of the image culture by balancing presence with absence, his prophesying is not invulnerable to error. Both strains of prophecy can seem to serve the homogenizing image mill of simulacra that the prophets ostensibly fight. One kind can seemingly transform into another. The transformation of one kind of prophetic work into another generates conversations among Bill, George, Brita and Scott about the resemblances (symbiotic relationships) between terrorists and novelists: "what terrorists gain, novelists lose" (157). George posits that their work is the same, a suggestion that Bill disputes. Rashid and Bill are "two underground figures" and thus "men of the same measure in a way" (156). George says that "it's the novelist who understands the secret life, the rage that underlies all obscurity and neglect," but Bill responds that this is pure myth," the notion of "the terrorist as solitary outlaw" (158). Instead of disruption, the terrorist groups seek "order" (158). George claims that "only the terrorist stands outside" those "societies [that are] reduced to blur and glut" (157). Terrorists, George insists, are the only figures "the culture hasn't figured out how to assimilate" (157). The writer, claims George, "knows in his soul what the terrorist thinks and feels" because "through history it's the novelist who has felt affinity for the violent man who lives in the dark" (130). Invoking a tradition of the novel as social

critique, George insists that Bill's sympathies cannot be with "the colonial police, the occupier, the rich landlord, the corrupt government, [or] the militaristic state," but must be with "the terrorist" (130). In a separate conversation, Bill also speaks of the "curious knot that binds novelists and terrorists" (41).[40] The terrorist, he opines, has taken on the role of the novelist in making "raids on human consciousness" and "alter[ing] the inner life of the culture" (41). Allen interprets the comment that "terrorists have usurped the role in the public consciousness that novelists once held" as "referring to the fact that terrorist acts must be circulated to attain identity, and that such acts compete for the public's limited attention span with other circulating 'texts'" (117).

Ostensibly, the novelist and the terrorist are similar because they shatter apathy and rebuke entrenched indifference to social problems. In this novel the writer and the terrorist engage in prophetic kinds of work in order to address the same problem of the loss of social focus due to the superfluity of commercial images. As noted in the *Satanic Verses* chapter, the figure of the terrorist is self-consciously prophetic.[41] Like Tavleen, Rashid is an impatient prophet, claiming to offer the true vision of society, and manifesting his predictions with apocalyptic gestures. Another of his prophetic affectations is to claim that he stands outside of society, which becomes a basis for comparison with the novelist. Nonetheless, Bill decides through his conversations with George that the claims

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[40] Allen follows DeLillo's link between terrorism and writing in *Libra*, so this theme goes beyond Mao II: "for DeLillo terrorism and writing are integrally linked" (129).

[41] More specifically, they resemble those Hebrew professional prophets who engaged in dramatic public acts of frenzy and self-mutilation to demonstrate to a fascinated audience their faith and commitment.

to subversion are false and that the terrorists are "totalitarian" (158).

Bill intends his disappearance to be transformative or redemptive. According to the terms of George's offer, Bill is to replace the anonymous poet-hostage with himself as hostage. The terrorist group hopes to gain a higher-profile hostage and thus greater recognition and notoriety, but Bill also has hopes too. While freeing the hostage, his imprisonment will manifest the condition of the novelist as hunted man and the power of the writer to "absorb . . . terror" (140). Thus he intensifies the role of the novelist, contradicts it to the role of the terrorist, which competes with that of the novelist in its prophetic gestures. This freeing of the hostage (which never happens) would be a redemptive action. It differs from the Christian pattern of redemption in that in the trinity of Bill, Scott and Karen where Karen, like the Holy Spirit in the theology of the trinity, is a shared love, it is the father figure and not the son who sacrifices himself. It is George who entices Bill to redeem the poet. George makes it clear that if Bill does not go to Beirut and put himself into the hands of Rashid—that is, if Bill gets "on a plane . . . and go[es] home," Rashid's group will "kill the hostage" (164). Alluding to the world of layered cataclysmic images, Bill adds "and [they will] photograph *his* corpse" (164). George's response is "it's better than nothing" (164). Struggling out of non-being, his group is happy to use a simulacrum. Bill also understands that a hostage heralds genocide: "the hostage is the miniaturized form. The first tentative rehearsal for mass terror" (163). In a passage that might be paraphrased from Hannah Arendt's *Origins of Totalitarianism*, Bill explains "the setup:" "You predict many dead if your vision of

the truth isn't realized. Then you kill them" (163). The hostage, then, is a stand-in for thousands or millions of terrorized people. He is a predictive sign for a mass of victims. Bill agrees to be a stand-in for the hostage. Thus Bill comes to represent millions. From a recluse who is absolutely separate and private, Bill goes to a stand-in for the whole world, doing something "for the good of mankind" (159). He is enlarged and universalized. For Bill as a prophet there is no interior truth to bring out of a cave as a sybil would: instead, there are only enlargements and repetitions—the manipulations applicable to images.

At the same time that absolute presence is critiqued, the quality of absence as employed by Chairman Mao and even Bill is described as something of a cheap trick. As Charlie proposes that "one missing writer read the work of another" the suggestion of commercial advantage hovers in the background. His remark on "how beautifully balanced" this event would be is really about how the event would appear on the news. Absence, too, can be co-opted into the depthless glut of images. It can be a tool of terrorists like Rashid, opportunistic businessmen like Charlie, media tycoons, and totalitarian leaders like Moon and Mau. Scott regards Bill's practice of hiding as a way of making him more real, and the hiding makes him "think of great leaders who regenerate their power by dropping out of sight and then staging messianic returns" (141). Mao Zedong is one of his examples, and the novel's title suggests that Bill might be another Mao, another messianic figure staging a return

While the terrorists try to achieve absolute presence and the novelist utilizes absence, these elements become mixed in the affair of the hostage.

When Charlie invites Bill to read the poems of the "young man held hostage in Beirut" by a terrorist group, he explains that the group is obscure and that "the hostage is the only proof they exist" (98). Needing to put themselves on the political map, the group requires the attention of the media, which they hope to gain by the abduction of the poet. Ironically, the absence or disappearance of this poet is their means to presence and acknowledgement in society. The French poet is absent: therefore the terrorist group is undeniably present.

This system of trading absence and presence is organized around the news media, an almost monolithic force which presents images to the presumably passive masses of the public. The interchange here amounts to a monologue delivered by the speaking authority to the silent audience. The monologue of the news is impersonal, obscuring the audience. Where the dialogue might be cued to the specifics of the people involved as personalities, the monologue simply needs someone to stand in as the audience, which is recipient of the message rather than observer. Bill notices the impersonal and even exploitative flavor of this exchange. In the discussion of the hostage incident, Bill reacts to Charlie's proposal as "pretty fucking fishy" (98). Charlie's "high-minded committee on free expression" gets "press," the terrorist's "new group gets press, the young man is sprung from his basement room, the journalists get a story, so what's the harm" (98). Charlie's deal is a trade-off with mutual gain that echoes the deal struck in Machiavelli's *Mandragola*, in which an aging and sterile husband gets an heir, his wife gets a young lover, the young man gets the pretty girl, and the procurer of this ending gets paid.

The harm is that the hostage as a person is forgotten. Both his captors and his rescuers conspire to bury him alive in the glut of images. The hostage poet realizes at a certain point that he has been forgotten, or at least transformed into an image: "he was a digital mosaic in the processing grid, lines of ghostly type on microfilm" (112). Intelligence workers and "military men" were "putting him together, storing his data in starfish satellites, bouncing his image off the moon" and in this impersonal process "he was lost in the wavebands, one more code for the computer mesh, for the memory of crimes too pointless to be solved" (112). If the crime had a point, that is a narrative with a beginning and a recognizable ending with an audience to acknowledge it, then the prisoner wouldn't be forgotten. Critic Silvia Bizzini points out that "the real tragedy described in the novel, then, is that the captured poet is used by everybody—nobody is interested in him as a human being" (253). In his final disappearance, the poet becomes lost even to the narrator as he is completely commoditized. Brita asks Rashid "what happened to the hostage" and he explains that hostages are "like drugs, like weapons, like jewelry, like a Rolex or a BMW" (235). The outcome is that Rashid "sold him to the fundamentalists" (235). Brita, in her reluctance to get involved and "end up all confused and disgraced and maimed," makes one last quiet inquiry: "'and they are keeping him,' she says" (232; 235). In a response that critic Silvia Caporale Bizzini calls "blood-curdling," Rashid answers that "they are doing whatever they are doing" (Bizzini 255; DeLillo 235).

Even for Bill the hostage becomes a cipher and not a person: "Bill, in his own way," thinks of him "as a means to obtain something for [his] cause" (253).

His "interest is thus directed not towards the prisoner, but towards an idea in danger, the idea of the writer as intellectual and thinking being" (Bizzini 253). Bizzini cites Bill's evaluation of the kidnaping as "something serenely pure," and an effort to "destroy the mind that makes words and sentences" (DeLillo 161). Ultimately Bill endures this same dehumanizing abstraction: "at the end of his life . . . Bill Gray is transformed into the thing that he had wanted to avoid: a silent image with a writer's name" (Bizzini 254). For Bizzini, this absence is not salutary or redemptive. It does not successfully fight the evil of indifference or the glut of images and the processes of commoditization.

But other salutary transformations are possible. Glenn Scott Allen discusses Ralph Dowling's theory that the terrorist message can depart from the way that message is read: "it is . . . essentially impossible for most 'First World' Western civilians to 'read' the terrorist text, to see in it any expression worth interpreting" (119). Instead of meaningless noise, the terrorist acts, are texts in which terrorists " 'speak' themselves," and these " 'seemingly senseless killings . . . serve the same function for terrorist society that wars and punishment of criminals and dissidents perform for mainstream society'" (Dowling quoted in Allen 119). This doubling of the message is useful in terms of an analysis of terrorism as prophetic. The terrorist "speaks" according to a prophetic model, whereby his acts fulfill and determine reality in a deterministic way. But for victims, terror is a sign of the randomness of life. The terrorist speaks determinism and the potential victims hear contingency.

Depressed over the ruined condition of terrorist-torn Beirut, Brita stands

on the balcony of her hotel and looks out over the destruction. Watching the approach of a military tank, she thinks that another battle is about to start. Instead, she sees a bridal couple parading down the street bringing a party with them. The apocalypse of destruction that has hit Beirut is not a permanent ending. Rather, in the midst of a persistent and immanent apocalypse, people continue the rituals of living. The destruction does not nullify the bridal ritual because the bridal couple incorporates and transforms the machinery of destruction. This appropriation thrills Brita, who abandons her ironic and wounded reserve, her anger over injustice and her skepticism of any zealous and dangerous hopes. She jubilates, emerging from her room to "toast the newlyweds" (241). Her multilingual repetitions of "'Bonne chance . . . 'Bonheur' and 'Good luck' and 'Salam' and 'Skal'" are another instance of depthless layering," like the building walls covered with repeated images (241). These wishes for "luck," or favorable contingency, also express a hope that is not tied to a deterministic ending like an apocalypse.

In the absence of a single tyrannizing belief like George's "absolute being" or Reverend Mao's "total being," hope—and a relinquishment of fear—is still possible. The wedding scene in Beirut at the end in which "the dead city [is] photographed one more time" contrasts with the wedding scene at the beginning in Yankee Stadium. While in New York, the narrator succumbs to a pessimistic and Orwellian view that "the future belongs to crowds," Brita is able to overcome this kind of deterministic and apocalyptic outlook (16). Oddly, the scene in the "dead city" of Beirut is less apocalyptic and more open to possibility than the

living city of New York.

Like Brita, Bill Gray emphasizes distances himself and the novelist in general from any "absolute authority" as well as from any sense of inevitability or destiny (159). While George pushes the notion that the novelist is analogous to a terrorist or to a totalitarian authority, Bill tries to disseminate the authority and singularity of the author: the novel, he insists, is "a democratic shout. Anybody can write a great novel, one great novel, almost any amateur off the street" (159). This "nameless drudge" or "some desperado with barely a nurtured dream can sit down and find his voice and luck out and do it" (159). Note that this work is not predestined or determined: rather, it is a matter of "luck" (159). At first, Bill takes seriously the notion that the novelist is a terrorist, but he then pushes the two concepts in separate directions. Instead of a maverick and "solitary outlaw," the terrorist is a "perfect little totalitarian state" (158). The author is more truly a "solitary outlaw" than the terrorist: Bill distances the author from any flavor of monolithic presence. The monolithic figures of presence in this novel—Reverend Moon, the Ayatollah Khomeini, Chairman Mao and Rashid—are oppressive authorities. They are also prophet figures practicing a particular model of prophecy: they favor presence over absence and transmit truth instead of participating in a dialogue. Unequivocal prophecy is one of the targets of critique in this novel.

Like Ngugi's *Devil on the Cross*, this novel departs from the model of prophecy as an in-and-out movement between appearance and reality, experience and truth and employs instead a back-and-forth movement between

images that compete for an audience. The circumstance of a society glutted with images makes in-and-out movement impossible, for in a world covered with illusions, interior and exterior seem to be delusory ideas. For Scott, Bill Gray's writing captures the conditions of living in the image-glutted world: "he caught the back-and-forthness. The way things fit almost anywhere and nothing gets completely forgotten" (51).

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Conclusion

Doom, Violence and Big Brother: Prophecy as a Political Art in the Changes of Discourse

Prophecy is an equivocal speech because it balances contradictory qualities: it is word and deed; it is the transmission of a message through an appointed messenger, yet it is also a dialogue between the messenger and the divine source; prophecy has a quality of suddenness, produced by anticipatory diction and the suggestion of imminent endings, yet it is also has a timeless quality in that the same prophecy can become imminent again and in that it lays claim to eternal truth; more so than any other kind of speech, the prophetic word claims to be immediate, yet it is also mediated by the prophet; the prophetic word is a sign of presence and also a sign of absence.

Prophetic speech is the transmission of a message, but it is also a dialogue. Because the prophet speaks for another, he lacks autonomy and can be seen as the victim of tyranny. Insofar as the truth conveyed by the prophet is a message, it is subject to the errors and uncertainties of its messenger. The prophet is problematic for all these authors, for while prophecy is a political art, the prophet is suspect and so are his politics. The theme of scandal enters here, exemplified of course by *The Satanic Verses*, the most scandalous of these novels in which the immediacy of prophecy is questioned and its faulty mediation uncovered. Absence is the greatest scandal to the impatient prophet, who tries—like Gibreel—to cover up the fact that prophecy, though it manifests divine presence, always also suggests absence. Ngugi also makes use of the theme of

scandal, deploying it in his title *Devil on the Cross* which upends the colonizer's hierarchy of virtues. While tremendous authority accompanies prophetic speech by virtue of its claim to divine authorship, equally tremendous scandal can emerge from it.

In all of the novels studied which utilize prophecy, the author addresses and even instigates classic accusations against prophecy. The fraud (like DeLillo's Reverend Moon), the crank (like old Tarwater), and the maniac (like Lilburne and Tavleen) all haunt prophecy in literature. All of these novels are peopled by ghosts of other prophets insofar as they all address inimical prophet figures; while the evil and controlling prophet is one of the preoccupations of *Nineteen Eighty-Four*, and the maniacal prophet is a preoccupation of *Brother to Dragons* and *The Satanic Verses*, it is *The Violent Bear it Away* that best addresses the ridiculous prophet: Tarwater's old great uncle is something of an absurdity—anachronistic, back-woods and unselfconscious. Prophesying exposes the prophet to ridicule, which is a risk that Tarwater does not savor taking. He resembles Jonah, made a fool by the mercy of God, who lacks compassion and magnifies rage. Another problem that all these novels address is that of the bad prophet: the prophet whose predictions do not come true.[42]

Partly because prophetic speech is a dialogue and not simply a monologue, the prophet is a vulnerable figure. For all the ties to immediacy and timelessness and efficacious acts, the prophet is a human figure—liable to revert

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[42] The ghost of Plato's *Euthyphro* haunts all these endeavors. Claiming that his predictions, which cause such laughter in the Athenian assemblies, all come true, Euthyphro pompously touts his wisdom and piety and declares his superiority to the crowds as axiomatic. The prediction he offers Socrates is that Socrates' trial for corrupting the youth will come to nothing.

to flaws and succumb to vanity at any time. There is something about the prophet figure that cannot maintain snobberies like the suppositions of the proles' false consciousness, the rage of old man Tarwater, or the pride of Gibreel. The prophet, while elevated by the calling, is also humbled by it. Winston submits his will to political rehabilitation, the old man's predictions fail, and Gibreel's lightening bolts never come. The prophet figure thus collapses under his own weight if he becomes too self-important. The dialogic nature of prophetic speech, while it can undermine the prophet's dignity and authority, is important for the usefulness of prophecy as a political art. Prophecy can be a nation's dialogue with itself, and if the dialogue becomes one-sided, the auditors will suffer, like Jefferson, under the fierce logic of their own presumptions.

The contradictory qualities of word and deed seem perpetually to baffle literature's prophet figures. Tavleen's sacrifice of Jilandri is her impatient attempt at manifesting the word as deed. Similarly, Tarwater's sacrifice of Bishop coincides with his carrying out his prophetic calling of baptism. He acts as a prophet—speaking the word as deed—but insofar as he is committed to his society, which always wants a sacrifice (through violence) he commits also the "efficacious" or "dynamistic" act of slaughtering Bishop. In the religions deriving from Abraham (Judaism, Christianity and Islam) the prophet word is the deed that substitutes for sacrifice, which is an act of violence demanded by society as a symbol that is also efficacious and dynamistic. Really, prophetic speech can be a substitute for sacrifice. However, the impatient prophet often uses sacrifice

to mimic prophecy's quality of suddenness. Immediate violence seems, to these figures, more effective than mere anticipatory diction.

While prophetic speech is equivocal because it balances contradictory qualities, it is also equivocal because it moves between spaces. In these novels—*Nineteen Eighty-Four, Brother to Dragons, The Violent Bear it Away, The Satanic Verses, The Devil on the Cross* and *Mao II*—prophetic speech engages in different patterns of movement: in and out, up and down, back and forth. Rushdie's opening epigraph from Daniel Defoe's *History of the Devil* relates the notion that "Satan" in his "wandering, unsettled condition" has a "kind of empire in the liquid waste or air . . . without any fixed place, or space . . . to rest the sole of his foot upon." Rootless, he occupies neither interior nor exterior. The title of Rushdie's novel suggests that the verses of the narrative belong to a devil that inhabits no fixed place. But the prophet figure as well as the devil figure must not settle, but instead must transverse distances between interior and exterior, high and low, and hidden-ness and visibility.

The suspension of judgment is possible in the in-between spaces that *Brother to Dragons* and *Satanic Verses* occupy. *Devil on the Cross* also pleads for suspension of judgment against Wariinga. While prophecy is political, it does not concern itself with forensic judgment. Memory and how the details of events are held in memory are important: the narrator insists on telling out Wariinga's story instead of giving the composite picture of the modern young Kenyan woman, the generic Kareendi as he first attempted. Warren's assembled cast also must remember and confide details but not for the purpose of

condemnation. It is only Tavleen and other false prophet figures that use a flattened, unequivocal, imbalanced prophecy who seek judgment, punishment and execution.

To say that prophecy is a political art in these novels is to say that they use prophecy to address the condition of the subject or individual in society, while destabilizing the discourses that create that condition. The authors of these prophetic novels try to intervene in the discourses that translate world politics into "the bloodstream," as DeLillo's Marvin Lundy puts it. Conditions change and new discourses develop: as Orwell addresses the opening of the Cold War and Warren the American struggle for civil rights, so do DeLillo and Rushdie address the condition of fear and paranoia in the post Cold War period.

Nineteen Eighty Four sets a standard of expectations for prophecy in novels of the Cold War era. Discussion of prophecy as a political art in literature has seemed to be limited to the apocalyptic tone and dystopian vision used by authors like Orwell, whose phrase about the imminent approach of immanent government, "BIG BROTHER IS WATCHING YOU," is almost as famous as his title (5). The political uses of prophecy, however, are not so limited, as the subsequent genre of the post dystopian novel testifies.

National destiny intersects with personal accountability on *Brother to Dragons*. "Doom is always domestic" is the catchphrase here that describes the place of prophecy in society (Warren 8). In this verse play, macrocosmic ideals and microcosmic failings meet in the character of Jefferson, whose personal life betrays the values of the nation he founds. Prophecy manifests this connection,

whether it be the brutal and blind extispicy of Lilburne, who spells out with an axe the master's division of the slave, or whether it is the light-bearing prophecy of Aunt Cat.

The very title of O'Connor's *The Violent Bear it Away*, chosen from a Biblical passage that addresses society's expectations of the prophet,[43] indicates that violence is a question for the heralds of the kingdom of heaven. The imagined society that only the prophet can envision and foretell is the province only of those who shatter the boundaries of society. That civilization may itself be uncivil: take Rayber's views on the advisability of exterminating the mentally handicapped. The passage following Matthew 11:12 from which O'Connor chose her title addresses satiety of conscience and the way that especially cities where "mighty works" have been done refuse to repent (Mtt 11:20). The drama of signs can just as well be a quiet one, even if the dignity of the prophet suffers. But in either case, the limits of society will be tested and the prophet burdened. Prophecy is not safe for the prophet or for the society that receives it.

The exemplary comment for the post dystopian condition in *The Satanic Verses* is made by Allie Cone's mother, and it goes "bombs are destiny." This phrase comments on both the condition of the subject in society who is a potential victim of terrorist bombings, and thus lives under a strain that is all the more consistent because the risk is unpredictable, and on the position of the terrorist who ignites the bomb. The terrorist who ignites the bomb is using it to

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[43] "For John came neither eating nor drinking, and they say, 'He has a demon'; the Son of man came eating and drinking, and they say, 'Behold a glutton and a drunkard, a friend of tax collectors and sinners!" (Mtt 11:18).

convey his sense of determinism. Conversely, it is his sense of determinism that makes him dangerous. One of the questions that the novel puts is whether the whole idea of destiny is itself a hazard for political life, a bomb waiting to explode. To clarify, the question is whether all forms of prophecy (and by extension, religions that proceed from prophecies, not to mention ideas of nationhood and citizenship that proceed from prophecies like Manifest Destiny and the Promised Land) are dangerous and destructive.

The Devil on the Cross fights a hard fight to retrieve from the colonizer prophecy as a political art. With the motto "the voice of the people is the voice of God" it reopens the possibilities of prophecy as a means of resistance (Ngugi 8). The authoritative voice, insists Ngugi's Prophet of Justice, belongs to the lowly. Resistance and not hegemony becomes the true thing. *Mao II*'s Brita reverses the mantra of *Brother to Dragons* that "doom is always domestic" with her cries of "Bonne Chance" directed at the wedding couple (DeLillo 240). Observing the military tank that dignifies their procession, she seizes on contingency as if to say that the domestic need not be shaped by political doom.

The overall trajectory of these novels, which are arranged chronologically, is away from imminence and toward immanence, increasingly rejecting apocalypticism and other such dramas that might prevent the social self-scrutiny that is necessary. The prophet themes and tropes in these novels try to engage the authority and resistance of prophecy without partaking of its dark potential. Where a false and unequivocal prophecy is used to enforce hegemony and entrench oppressive power, the work of resistance is all the more important.

These authors have in common a disinclination to turn the political art of prophecy over to the tyrannical. The advantages of the word as deed are that it can reset the terms of discourse in a way that, irony, that other means of resistance and critique, does not.

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