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LEAVES OF GRASSROOTS POLITICS: DEMOCRACY, THE SWARM, AND THE LITERATURES OF THE AMERICAS

presented by

SCOTT HENKEL

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LEAVES OF

LEAVES OF GRASSROOTS POLITICS: DEMOCRACY, THE SWARM, AND THE LITERATURES OF THE AMERICAS

By

Scott Henkel

A DISSERTATION

Submitted to
Michigan State University
in partial fulfillment of the requirements
for the degree of

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

Department of English

2007

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ABSTRACT

LEAVES OF GRASSROOTS POLITICS: DEMOCRACY, THE SWARM, AND THE LITERATURES OF THE AMERICAS

By

Scott Henkel

When the phrase "grassroots politics" is used in the literature and scholarship of the Americas, it is meant to imply a division between a class of people "above" other people who are "at the grassroots level." At best, this division implies a hierarchy, and at worst, it reinforces the idea that people "at the grassroots level" are powerless compared to the people "above" them. This project challenges this traditional interpretation of grassroots politics. Because to be concerned with the root or the roots is to be radical, I argue that grassroots politics should be reinterpreted as a synonym for radical democracy.

This reinterpretation helps to unpack the problems and possibilities of deeper, more meaningful ideas of democracy--ideas that have motivated many writers in the Americas. Walt Whitman writes in *Democratic Vistas* that "democracy is a word the real gist of which still sleeps, quite unawaken'd [...]. It is a great word, whose history, I suppose, remains unwritten, because that history has yet to be enacted." In response to how Thomas Carlyle mocks the idea that the electoral franchise should be expanded to

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include what Carlyle calls "the swarm," Whitman argues for "democracy in all public and private life, and in the army and the navy." What would the democratization of "all public and private life" entail? What would it mean to democratize schools, the workplace, and the community? What political movements would it take to realize such a proposal? Perhaps most importantly, how can literary study contribute to these problems? This project considers some of these problems, such as questions of free speech in Herbert Biberman's suppressed film *Salt of the Earth*, questions of free association in B. Traven's six novels of the Mexican Revolution, and questions about how the literature of the contemporary Zapatista movement in Mexico can help to imagine new democratic vistas.

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ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

This project would not have been possible without the encouragement, advice, and generosity of many mentors and friends. I would especially like to thank my director, Scott Michaelsen, and the members of my committee, Ellen McCallum, Salah Hassan, and Zarena Aslami. I would also like to thank the members of my writing group, Connie Mick, Anna Boyagoda, and Diane Persin. I owe a special debt of gratitude to Kelly Kinney for her candor, patience, and insight.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Introduction

This project is about grassroots politics and the literatures of the Americas. It is also about conflict between narratives, like the conflict exposed by competing interpretations of the phrase "grassroots politics," and like the challenge posed by counternarratives to dominant ideas. Because to be concerned with the root or the roots is to be radical, grassroots politics should be interpreted as a radical, horizontal politics. Whenever we see this phrase in the literatures of the Americas—or in the pages of the *New York Times*, on anti-immigration websites, in the titles of corporations, or in the literature of "astroturf" groups—a hierarchical interpretation attempts to appropriate the phrase and to stunt its radicalism.[1] Likewise, the phrase is often used in this traditional, hierarchical way by a wide range of thinkers who would otherwise be hostile to hierarchy—the best example of whom, as we will see shortly, is Malcolm X. In these cases, the language such thinkers use undermines the otherwise

[1] See, respectively, Creswell, "Mortgage Fraud Is Up, but Not in Their Backyards"; the "Grassroots Granny"; Grassroots Media, Inc., of South Bend, Indiana; and former United States House of Representatives majority leader Tom DeLay's "Grassroots Action/Information Network," which seeks to oppose "radical leftist agendas wherever they may be found in the United States" (par. 2). As its name implies, "astroturf" groups are front groups that give the false impression that their members are common, ordinary people.

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The promise of deeper, more meaningful ideas of democracy has fascinated many writers in the Americas. In each chapter of the project, we will meet protagonists who are in the shadow cast by hierarchy and who, in their various ways, try to step out of it. These protagonists and their narratives form a literary history organized by two research questions: first, how have the literatures of the Americas articulated ideas about grassroots politics, and second, how might the literatures of the Americas imagine new democratic vistas? These questions combine inquiry with advocacy: with the first, I hope to discover the trajectory of this literary history, and with the second, I suggest ways that the literatures of the Americas can help to cultivate grassroots politics and the ways ideas about

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In this Introduction, I argue for a new interpretation of the phrase grassroots politics. In order to do so, I will show the deficiencies in how the phrase has traditionally been used by thinkers such as Malcolm X, Manning Marable, Carlos Villas, and Michael Kazin, and then build a case for why grassroots politics should be interpreted as a synonym for radical democracy. Although I offer a new interpretation, the last section of this Introduction charts the contours of an intellectual history into which this new interpretation of grassroots politics can be placed, an intellectual history that includes thinkers such as Cherríe Moraga, Gloria Anzaldúa, Marina Sitrin, Noam Chomsky, and Jacques Derrida. In the balance of the project, I will mobilize the complexities of the phrase to dig into the problems and possibilities of grassroots politics as they are found in the debate about democracy between Thomas Carlyle and Walt Whitman in the pages of "Shooting Niagara… And After?" and *Democratic Vistas*; in Herbert Biberman's suppressed film *Salt of the Earth*; in B. Traven's Jungle Novels; and in "Durito IV: Neoliberalism and the Party-State System," one of the key texts of the contemporary Zapatista movement. My readings

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of each of these texts are efforts to reinterpret grassroots politics as a synonym for radical democracy and to discover how the literatures of the Americas can help to imagine new democratic vistas and horizons.

Some people who use the phrase grassroots politics intend it to communicate a hierarchical idea, and this use should be challenged when it happens. The greater problem arises, perhaps, when the phrase is used in its traditional interpretation by thinkers who would be uncomfortable with its hierarchical implications. One of Malcolm X's most famous speeches, for example, is his "Message *to* the Grassroots" (emphasis mine), where he speaks to and attempts to construct an agenda for "our people at the grassroots level" (par. 31). As his title suggests, Malcolm X considers his audience to be "the grassroots"; he begins his speech by saying that "during the last few moments that we have left, we want to have just an off-the-cuff chat between you and me—us" (par. 1). Although Malcolm X tries to include himself in that address, he is the agent in the situation: he is the speaker, he is the addresser, he is the one who is conveying his message "to the grassroots." While claiming the role of a speaker is a form of power,

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A problem arises, however, when Malcolm X uses "grassroots" in a way that reinforces a hierarchy that separates him from his audience; this hierarchical language undercuts the solidarity he hopes to cultivate with them. This use is unfortunate because it is clearly Malcolm X's intent to communicate a liberatory message, a message about "plotting a course that will make [his audience] appear intelligent, instead of unintelligent" (par. 1). His language belies his liberatory intent, however—when Malcolm X observes that "our people at the grassroots level" had been "controlled" by "Other Negro civil-rights leaders of so-called national stature" (par. 31), he introduces a distinction between the agency that his audience members have and the power that these leaders—who are not "at the grassroots level"—have over his audience. He introduces, but does not challenge, the idea of control, the idea that "our people at the grassroots level" need to be controlled. Malcolm X suggests that leaders "of so-called national stature" are inadequate, but that other, better leaders are needed to control "our people." Whether such control is necessary is far from certain.

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Manning Marable builds upon how Malcolm X uses the phrase in his book *From the Grassroots: Essays Toward Afro-American Liberation*. Marable writes that his text draws its "inspiration from Malcolm X's critical search for a grassroots agenda for black people in 1964 and early 1965" (1), and this inspiration is palpable throughout. Marable's agenda-setting is a form of power, an expression of intellectual labor done for people "at" the grassroots. Such is the case, for example, when he analyzes the possibilities of a Black Political Party (41-50), or when he considers the "problems and prospects" of "Black Education/Black Struggle" (185-200). While it is interesting that, as his title suggests, Marable metaphorically adopts the identity of "the grassroots" and responds to Malcolm X's call, he likewise undercuts the liberatory goals of his project and reinforces the separation between himself and the people for whom he sets an agenda.

There are many other examples of the phrase used in this traditional way. Carlos Villas, when searching for alternatives to neoliberal economic policies in "Forward Back: Capitalist Restructuring, the State, and the Working Class in Latin America," writes that "social movements stress self-training not just as a way to get things done

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but also as a method of self-training and grassroots empowerment and of strengthening people's identities" (*Whither Marxism?* 140). Villas links the idea of grassroots politics directly together with the identity of its participants, placing his conversation about grassroots politics in the language of personal growth: "grassroots empowerment and… strengthening people's identities" seem to be the greatest benefits of his criticisms of neoliberal economic perils.

When Robert Penn Warren's Huey Long-inspired character Governor Willie Stark addresses his audience in *All the King's Men* from the courthouse steps, Warren places Stark's audience "on the grassroots" (11). The divide could not be more pronounced: Stark, one-man political machine and benevolent dictator of Louisiana politics, stands on the concrete symbol of juridical and institutional power, while he looks down upon and speaks to the country folk who are standing "on the grassroots."

In a context not unlike Warren's, Michael Kazin uses the phrase repeatedly in *The Populist Persuasion: An American History*, referring to "grassroots activists" (20, 54), "grassroots reformers" (31, 38, 81, 223), "grassroots dissidents" (72), the "grassroots idiom" (228), and, like Malcolm X, referring to "African-Americans at the

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grassroots" (200). Kazin's use of "grassroots" as an adjective modifying "activists," "reformers," and "dissidents" makes it clear that he is referring to a type of people when he uses the phrase. As this and the rest of the examples above suggest, "grassroots politics" usually refers to the *demos*- part of democracy, focusing on questions of who participates, rather than how they participate. This *demos* is usually defined quite loosely, but most often it is meant to include "ordinary people," the "folk" who participate in immediate, local forms of politics; this, quite clearly, is what Malcolm X means by "our people at the grassroots level" (par. 31). It is also meant to exclude people in positions of institutional power like elected officials, party bureaucrats, corporate officers, or the like.[2]

One could say that this traditional definition of grassroots politics could also hold for the protagonists we will meet in these pages—a poet who is one of the "roughs," miners and their spouses, peasants and *campesinos*,

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[2] For other uses of the phrase in this traditional way, see Tom Adams, *Grassroots: How Ordinary People are Changing America*, Gustavo Esteva and Madhu Suri Prakash, *Grassroots Post-Modernism: Remaking the Soil of Cultures*, Charles David Kleymeyer, ed. *Cultural Expression and Grassroots Development: Cases from Latin America and the Caribbean*, C. George Benello, *From the Ground Up: Essays on Grassroots and Workplace Democracy*, Jeremy Brecher and Tim Costello, eds. *Buidling Bridges: The Emerging Grassroots Coalition of Labor and Community*, Michael Kaufman and Haroldo Dilla Alfonso, *Community Power and Grassroots Democracy: The Transformation of Social Life*, and Linda Stout, *Bridging the Class Divide and Other Lessons for Grassroots Organizing*.

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fictional beetles and guerrilla soldiers—but this traditional interpretation is not sufficient. In fact, such a use would repeat the mistake of the traditional interpretation, a mistake in which the language we use reinforces a hierarchy we seek to dismantle. Instead of repeating this mistake, I will now begin to reinterpret the phrase grassroots politics so that, in the balance of the project, it can be mobilized to consider the problems of a radical democratic movement.

As Temma Kaplan writes in *Crazy for Democracy: Women in Grassroots Movements*, "[t]hough widely used, the term *grassroots* does not have a commonly recognized meaning." The phrase suggests, she continues, "being outside the control of any state, church, union, or political party, […] being responsible to no authority except [one's] own group" (1-2, emphasis in original). Harry M. Cleaver, Jr. sounds similar notes in his essay "The Zapatista Effect: The Internet and the Rise of an Alternative Political Fabric." Cleaver writes that

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> often includes independent NGOs [non-governmental organizations], but is more broadly inclusive of various informal networks of activists and community organizations. The grassroots movements catalyzed by the Zapatistas include a variety of actors, including human rights advocates, environmental NGOs, local community governments, and loose networks of political, media, and labor activists who have linked their movements to those of the Zapatistas. (623)

Kaplan and Cleaver's definitions also focus on people outside institutional positions of power, those who are "responsible to no authority except their own group," and who are "autonomous of either the state or corporate sectors." Cleaver prominently mentions the "actors" in grassroots movements and identifies various kinds of activists who make up these movements. While Kaplan and Cleaver's efforts to give intellectual rigor to the phrase are important—Kaplan's connection between grassroots politics and democracy is especially significant—what is needed is to break from the traditional interpretation of grassroots politics, to step out of the hierarchical shadow that it casts.

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An initial step toward a reinterpretation of grassroots politics is to pay attention to the phrase's grammar: "grassroots" is an adjective modifying a noun "politics"; the phrase, then, should primarily refer to a type of politics, not a type of people. Beyond the grammatical rationale, however, there are two reasons why it is necessary to reinterpret the phrase. First, the traditional interpretation implies essentialist categorization, a problem that is bound to restate the representation problems that come with defining a group of people. Who are the people "at the grassroots level"? "The people"? "The *demos*"? "The proletariat"? Why should we expect them to act cohesively (or to act at all)? Why are they bound together by a set of characteristics? What are those characteristics? While questions of identity are vital to my argument, the traditional interpretation of grassroots politics leads either to a codification of identity or to a caricature, neither of which is helpful here. What I reject is the way that the categorization of people "at the grassroots level" keeps those people in suffocatingly described roles, and also the idea that struggle against racism could be subordinated to struggle against sexism or classism, or any combination thereof. Therefore, when I collectively refer to characters I either

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use the terms used in their texts, or I refer to them as protagonists, a term that suggests a sense of agency and autonomy.

The second reason why it is necessary to reinterpret this traditional definition of grassroots politics is because it reinforces a hierarchy. Even if we concede that the identities of people "at the grassroots level" could be understood in non-essentialist ways, if we define a group of people "at the grassroots level," we logically have to assume that there will be people who are "above" them. If we continue to think, like Malcolm X, Manning Marable, Carlos Villas, and Michael Kazin, that people "at the grassroots level" are those who are outside positions of power, then we will, at best, lend legitimacy to this hierarchy or, at worst, concede the idea that such a hierarchy is necessary. Either way, this traditional definition reinforces a profound misconception: that the people "at the grassroots" need people "above" them to speak for them. Because hierarchical approaches to political movements are so pervasive, and because challenging such hierarchies is vital to a reinterpretation of grassroots politics, I will unpack these ideas now in several examples and demonstrate why they should be challenged.

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We can see these hierarchical ideas clearly, for example, in *The Populist Persuasion*. Kazin's Introduction is subtitled "Speaking *for* the People" (1, emphasis mine), where he writes that his book is about "images of conflict between the powerful and the powerless" (1). Indeed, Kazin's definition of populist language is a language that is used by "those who claim to speak *for* the vast majority of Americans who work hard and love their country" (1, emphasis mine). These two ideas, of course, are intertwined: if we assume that there are people who are "powerless," then the "powerful" will *need* to speak for them, operating somewhere between *nobless oblige* and political paternalism.

This is an old assumption, and it is, in part, what motivates Plato to tell a "noble lie" in *The Republic*, which is a "convenient story" that justifies why leaders lead and others follow (412a-415d). In *The Republic*, the noble lie that Plato's Socrates tells is the "myth of the metals." This myth holds that while all people are "brothers," the Rulers have gold in their bodies and the farmers and workers have iron and bronze in theirs (415a-c). This noble lie of biological difference is a vital political tool for Plato's Rulers—it is a fiction made up to justify a hierarchical social order. It would take "a

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lot of persuasion to get people to believe" this "convenient story," but the broader good of the state would be served, Plato's Socrates suggests, by having a strict social order in which people are confined to their positions (415c). With almost irresistible logic, Plato argues that "those who govern must be the best of them," just like "the best farmers are those who have the greatest skill at farming" (412c). For a moment, I will put aside why this logic is, ultimately, resistible, in favor of a more immediate observation: regardless of Plato's famous hostility to poets and the stories they tell, Plato's noble lie underscores the power of narrative.[3] This "noble lie," this "convenient story" has the power to structure a whole society; it is the primary weapon that Plato's followers use to wield power over the people whom Plato believes should be mislead for their own good.

As Daniel Dombrowski points out, the noble lie has "always been one of the most controversial passages in [Plato's] corpus" (566). The Greek phrase "*gennaion pseudomenous*" has been variously translated as "lordly lie" by Karl Popper, "pious lie [or] fiction" by Warner Fite,

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[3] I consider and challenge the logic of "the best"—articulated by Plato's epigones in B. Traven's Jungle Novels—at length in Chapter Three. For an interesting exploration of Plato's relationship to censorship and how that censorship paradoxically results in more literary production, see Ramona A. Naddaff, *Exiling the Poets: The Production of Censorship in Plato's* Republic.

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"well-bred lie" by Sissela Bok, and "magnificent myth" by Desmond Lee, just to name a few examples. These various translations are important, and they all influence the ways in which we read *The Republic*. Furthermore, Dombrowski reminds us of what Richard Rorty finds so compelling about Plato, namely that it is difficult to know "which passages of the dialogues are jokes" (qtd. in Dombrowski, 570). Regardless of any joking, however, my emphasis is on the uses that Plato's epigones have found for the noble lie—uses which, too frequently, have been wielded like weapons in order to govern a population. As we will see, Plato's many epigones have given up on the myth of the metals as the preferred version of the noble lie, but similar stories persist. In their many permutations, these convenient stories have become master narratives—not in the sense that Frederic Jameson and others have used that phrase—but rather in a sense that suggests a method of domination. As I use the phrase here, a master narrative is a narrative told by a master in order to reinforce a particular hierarchical order.

Over the course of these pages, we will see these master narratives told repeatedly. The ideas they express have been so seductive to people in institutional positions of power that versions of them proliferate in the most

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diverse set of contexts. In each chapter of the project, I challenge one master narrative and provide a counternarrative. In this Introduction, the master narrative to challenge is the traditional, hierarchical interpretation of grassroots politics. In Chapter One, the master narrative is Thomas Carlyle's belief that what he mockingly calls "the swarm" does not possess the capacity for autonomy that democracy requires. In Chapter Two, it is the idea that the metaphor of the marketplace promises the greatest degree of free speech; in Chapter Three, it is the idea that without a hierarchical organization and a centralized, directing authority figure—a master—no political or social organization is possible. In the Conclusion, the master narrative to be challenged is the idea that change can only occur through a hegemonic struggle that results in replacing one hierarchy with a better hierarchy. The border between master narrative and counternarrative is often unstable, but each of these master narratives is in some way opposed to the idea of a radical democracy, and they should not go unchallenged. Therefore, to paraphrase Nietzsche, this project is a narrative against something that is also narrative: it is a counternarrative meant to challenge the "noble lies" that Plato's epigones tell.

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These master narratives have been compelling for many political thinkers, but too frequently the problems involved have ultimately been fences too high to climb. Antonio Gramsci, for example, tries to subvert the need for such master narratives, hoping that the abolition of class society will make hierarchy unnecessary. Until such conditions are abolished, however, he argues in his *Prison Notebooks* that the "first element [of politics] is that there really do exist rulers and ruled, leaders and led. The entire science and art of politics are based on this primordial, and (given certain general conditions) irreducible fact" (Gramsci 144).[4] Gramsci does not hold this position alone. An inability (or unwillingness) to move past hierarchical ideas brings together what are otherwise improbable groupings of thinkers. Hierarchical ideas bind José Enrique Rodó—who denigrated the "caprices of the masses" (58) and argued that "democracy always includes an indispensable element of aristocracy" (67)—together with Che Guevera, who argued that the guerrilla fighter is "a person conscious of the role of the vanguard of the people," a person who "must have a moral conduct that shows him to be a true priest of the reform to which he aspires" (39). It also binds James Madison together with Cornel

[4] The "general conditions" Gramsci refers to here, as the footnote to his text points out, are the conditions of "class society" (144).

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West. Madison argues in *The Federalist Papers* that it "may well happen that the public voice, pronounced by the representatives of the people, will be more consonant to the public good than if pronounced by the people themselves, convened for the purpose" (42). In *The American Evasion of Philosophy: A Genealogy of Pragmatism*, West similarly asserts that "the pragmatists' preoccupation with power, provocation, and personality—in contrast, say, to grounding knowledge, regulating instruction, and promoting tradition—signifies an intellectual calling to administer to a confused populace caught in the whirlwinds of societal crisis, the cross fires of ideological polemics, and the storms of class, racial, and gender conflicts" (5). The differences between these thinkers are not small, but for their various reasons, they all have decided that hierarchy is either necessary or unavoidable, at least for the present, and they have dedicated their efforts to organizing hierarchical systems in ways that suit their various purposes. To what end, however, does such thinking inevitably lead?

An answer to this question might be found in the arguments made by Vladimir Ilyich Lenin, who was perhaps the most vocal advocate for such hierarchical approaches to politics. Lenin's advocacy of a revolutionary vanguard was

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predicated on the assumption that a relatively small, educated, and skilled set of activists was required to lead and speak for the population. Specifically, Lenin argues in *What is to be Done?* that

> Class political consciousness can be brought to the workers *only from without*, that is, only from outside the economic struggle, from outside the sphere of relations between workers and employers. […] We must "go among all classes of the population" as theoreticians, as propagandists, as agitators, and as organizers. […] For it is not enough to call ourselves the "vanguard," the advanced contingent; we must act in such a way that all the other contingents recognize and are obliged to admit that we are marching in the vanguard. (par. 28, emphasis in original)

The process of education, agitation, and organization—the process of revolution—Lenin asserts, can only take place when a small group of trained revolutionaries speaks for the population at large. Lenin seeks to "bring political knowledge to the workers" (par. 28) as if these workers have no existing political knowledge at all, as if they were a blank slate upon which Lenin can write his theories.

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Lenin's project is intended to be a gift granted from a benevolent revolutionary to a lucky worker, but it is more like a consolation prize.

As John Holloway writes, the idea of a vanguard is like "a saviour, a *deus ex machina*." The vanguard party is "a group of people who by virtue of their theoretical and practical experience can see beyond the confines of existing society and who, for that reason, can lead the masses in a revolutionary break" (186). As Holloway points out, however, there are several problems with this idea. The idea that a representative or a revolutionary vanguard can or should *speak for* or *act on the behalf of* the rest of the population is dubious. Especially if we follow the logic of Lenin's vanguardism into his revolution, the repression of the Kronstadt sailors, the production of the Soviet bureaucracy, and into the subsequent atrocities—actions all done under the pretense of speaking for the Russian people—it does not become too difficult to see how what Gilles Deleuze calls "the indignity of speaking for others" can slip into the domination of those others (qtd. in May, 97).[5] Like Alexander spoke for the people of Rome,

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[5] For an alternative view of the Russian Revolution and its inherent authoritarianism, see Daniel Guérin's *Anarchism: From Theory to Practice*, especially the chapter "Anarchism in the Russian Revolution." For an excellent exploration, in a different context, of how authoritarian atrocities have been committed in the name of "the people," see Andrzej Wajda's film *Danton*, which focuses on the Reign of Terror in post-revolutionary France, and the struggle between Georges

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Cleopatra for the people of Egypt, Captain Ahab for his mariners, renegades, and castaways, and Governor Willy Stark for the poor people of Louisiana, we can collect a long line of literary and historical figures who have adopted the violence of speaking for others, especially for the people they claim to represent.

As these examples suggest, the idea that there must be people "above" those "at the grassroots"—even if this hierarchy is only necessary until some objective is reached—is shared so widely that it might be possible to believe that without some centralized authority to direct or represent the larger community, no politics is possible. The problem with this idea is that it not only requires a hierarchy, but that it also requires a transfer of power from the people "at the grassroots level" to those "above" them. It is a master narrative that is very beneficial to the masters, but for those from whom power is transferred, it can be crippling—even in cases such as Gramsci suggested, where such master narratives would be told until they were no longer necessary.

Danton and Maximilien Robspierre, two of the central figures of the French Revolution. In *Danton*, Robespierre, as a member of the Committee for Public Safety, part of the new revolutionary government, argues that mass executions and other acts of state terrorism need to be carried out in the name of national security, and for the sake of maintaining the French Revolution.

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Is such a transfer of power necessary, however, even for temporary periods? Anyone who has been involved in political movements would probably concede that when a group grows to a certain size, the logistics of delegating tasks or organizing effective discussions, for example, at times require that the group transfer a certain degree of power into an individual or smaller governing body, but it does not follow that this transfer needs to be a fundamental assumption, built into a movement's orientation *a priori*, nor does it follow that such a transfer of power need to be done on anything but a temporary basis, and with the understanding that the transfer of power could be revoked at any time. Beyond these contingencies, however, why would a radical theorist choose to sketch out a new hierarchy if the goal is to abolish such hierarchies? Instead of putting a veneer over a concept of leadership, organic or otherwise, why not devote one's efforts toward theorizing a radical politics that does not require a hierarchy?

These are difficult questions, ones that require new thinking. As Holloway asks, "if the notion of a vanguard," to which we can add notions of political representation and the idea that people "at the grassroots level" need people "above" them, "is discarded, and with it the notion of a

revolutionary programme, which depends on the existence of such a vanguard, then what are we left with?" (186). Todd May gives a tentative answer: "in order for liberation to occur, individuals and groups must retain their power; they cannot cede it without risking the loss of the goal for which all political struggles occur: empowerment" (48). Holloway's question is important, and it allows others to proliferate: to paraphrase Nietzsche once more, isn't it time for literary study to renounce the faith in representatives, vanguards, and the lot of Plato's epigones? I argue that it is, and I intend this project to be a challenge to such hierarchical ideologies. What we are left with after a critique of representation and vanguardism, I argue, is the opportunity to reinterpret grassroots politics. This opportunity, however, raises another question: if grassroots politics should refer to a type of politics, if the phrase should be reinterpreted without its hierarchical implications, what kind of politics is under consideration?

Much like how Cherríe Moraga and Gloria Anzaldúa notice the etymology of the word in *This Bridge Called My Back: Writings by Radical Women of Color* (xxiv), I argue that to be concerned with the root or the roots is to be

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radical, and therefore, grassroots politics should be interpreted as a synonym for a radical, horizontal democracy. As Marina Sitrin suggests in *Horizontalism: Voices of Popular Power in Argentina*, new political movements need new vocabularies and new interpretations of familiar words. One such word is "horizontalism," which "does not imply just a flat plane for organizing," Sitrin argues,

> or non-hierarchical relationships in which people no longer make decisions for others. It is a positive word that implies the use of direct democracy and the striving for consensus, processes in which everyone is heard and new relationships are created. [...] As its name suggests, *horizontalidad* implies democratic communication on a level plane and involves—or at least intentionally strives towards—non-hierarchical and anti-authoritarian creation rather than reaction. (vi, 3)

Rather than a dichotomy between those "at the grassroots level" and those "above" them, my reading builds upon Moraga, Anzaldúa, and Sitrin's vocabularies and suggests a new interpretation of grassroots politics: a network, like similar, but separate green spaces in an urban landscape,

the overlapping, intersecting grasses in the wild; in ort, an interpretation of grassroots politics as a nonym for radical democracy. This interpretation does not *priori* require a transfer of power from the represented a representative, from the rearguard to the vanguard, t is, rather, one that is more direct, and therefore more aningful to more people. This grassroots politics is not mited beneath capitol domes or by capital's control over onomic relations, but is instead a type of democracy that as common and diverse as leaves of grass.

While this is a new interpretation, my reading of assroots politics can be placed into an intellectual story. For reasons that will become evident in Chapter e, Walt Whitman inspires my use of the phrase grassroots litics; in a similar fashion, Noam Chomsky helps to ticulate the type of democracy under consideration. "If e present wave of repression can be beaten back," Chomsky ites,

> if the Left can overcome its more suicidal tendencies and build upon what has been accomplished [...], then the problem of how to organize industrial society on truly democratic lines, with democratic control in the work place and in the community, should become a dominant

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> intellectual issue for those who are alive to the problems of contemporary society, and, as a mass movement for libertarian socialism develops, speculation should proceed to action. (*For Reasons of State* 382)

As I will explore in the chapters below, this "dominant intellectual issue" suggests, at minimum, two facets: first, a critique of various master narratives and second, the articulation of counternarratives. There are many complexities involved here; simple terms in these narratives quickly become inadequate. Democracy, as Whitman reminds us, is a word that can be defined only contentiously (984). The commonplace words that make up these narratives—words like grassroots politics, democracy, and freedom are used in varying contexts in wildly different, often contradictory ways. The complexity of our interpretation of democracy is thankfully slippery, but its understanding requires care because, as Jacques Derrida reminds us in *Rogues*, enemies of democracy often cannot help but pretend to be democrats: "the *alternative to* democracy," Derrida writes, "can always be *represented* as a democratic *alternation*" (30-1, emphasis in original). A similar idea prompts Murray Bookchin to observe that

> [s]eldom have socially important words been subject to more confusion, or been divested of their historic meaning, than they are at present. Two centuries ago, *democracy* was depreciated by monarchists and republicans alike as "mob rule." Today, democracy is hailed, but only in the sense of "representative democracy," an oxymoronic phrase that refers to little more than a republican oligarchy of the chosen few who ostensibly speak for the powerless many. (143)

There are many such examples of Bookchin's observation, and among the most significant is Samuel Huntington's argument in *The Crisis of Democracy*. Because of the global upheavals of the 1960s and 1970s, Huntington advocates for a return to the time when "[President Harry] Truman had been able to govern the country with the cooperation of a relatively small number of Wall Street lawyers and bankers" (98). Huntington argues that "some of the problems of governance in the United States today stem from an excess of democracy," an excess that directly challenged various forms of authority and hierarchy. What is "[n]eeded, instead," Huntington suggests, "is a greater degree of moderation in democracy," which "usually requires some measure of apathy and noninvolvement on the part of

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some individuals and groups" (Crozier et al. 113, 114). The problem that Huntington sees is, in Chomsky's words, "the usual one: the rabble were trying to arrange their own affairs, gaining control over their communities and entering the political arena to press their demands. There were organizing efforts among young people, ethnic minorities, women, social activists, and others, encouraged by the struggles of benighted masses elsewhere for freedom and independence" ("Containing" 164).

As Huntington's argument suggests, there are uses of "socially important words" that bend the interpretation of those words past the breaking point, uses which evoke an Orwellian understanding. In her introduction to Chomsky's book *For Reasons of State*, Arundhati Roy writes that she admires Chomsky's work because he

> shows us how phrases like "free speech," the "free market" and the "free world" have little, if anything to do with freedom. He shows us that, among the myriad freedoms claimed by the U.S. government are the freedom to murder, annihilate, and dominate other people. The freedom to finance and sponsor despots and dictators around the world. The freedom to train, arm, and shelter terrorists. The freedom to topple democratically

> elected governments. The freedom to amass and use weapons of mass destruction—chemical, biological, and nuclear. The freedom to go to war against any country whose government it disagrees with. And, most terrible of all, the freedom to commit these crimes against humanity in the name of "justice," in the name of "righteousness," in the name of "freedom." (x)

We could also add "in the name of 'democracy'" to the end of Roy's quote, and that addition would give us a good idea of the stakes of this debate, and also the rationale for spending time reinterpreting democracy and grinding down the gears of the traditional definition of grassroots politics. While an amount of plasticity is welcome in the understanding of any "socially important word," this plasticity is what motivates Jacques Derrida to argue that "the stakes have never been higher in the world today, and they are new stakes, calling for a new philosophical reflection on what democracy, and I insist on this, the *democracy to come*, might mean and be" (*Negotiations* 340).

Additionally, Derrida writes in *Specters of Marx* that

> at stake here is the very concept of democracy as concept of a promise… That is why we always propose to speak of a democracy *to come*, not of a

> *future* democracy in the future present, not even of a regulating idea, in the Kantian sense, or of a utopia—at least to the extent that their inaccessibility would still retain the temporal form of a *future present*, of a future modality of the *living present*. (64-5, emphasis in original)

It is not constitutional procedure that interests me or Derrida, nor is it the process of social organization that Jean-Luc Nancy calls "order and administration" (xxxvi). Rather, this promise that interests me is the promise of something impossible to achieve, something that is not a utopia or an ideal republic that we can define and then work towards, but rather something that is always "to come." Rather than aiming for a *telos*, an end goal for which to strive, we can think of grassroots politics as an organic, constantly evolving political movement. As Derrida tells us, in this sense,

> democracy is not just a mode of government, social organization, or regime among others. Let's just say that there is an idea of democracy with respect to which all of the determinations that there have been of it since the Enlightenment, the American and French

> Revolutions, different types of democracy have all been inadequate. (*Negotiations* 179)

Like Derrida, many writers in the Americas have told stories about new democratic vistas. In keeping with the plasticity of "socially important words" like grassroots politics and democracy, I have chosen to frame the debate of the project around a tension between those who interpret democracy along hierarchical lines and those who favor a radical, horizontal reinterpretation of democracy. This tension is evident both in the narratives people tell and the uses to which those narratives are put. It is also evident in the impact these narratives have on how we view political movements, how democracy is interpreted, and in the degree to which protagonists believe that change is possible.

Thinkers like Huntington might argue that my reinterpretation of grassroots politics as a synonym for radical democracy would render democracy unmanageable—and they are correct. I would argue in response that Huntington's interpretation of democracy shrinks its scope to a degree that would render it much less meaningful, more of a euphemism than a liberatory philosophy. This project, therefore, is an attack on hierarchical interpretations of democracy and an attempt to think about the ways the "non-

authoritarian foundations of democracy" can be imagined and interpreted in the literatures of the Americas (Wagner and Moreira 190).

The first chapter of the project frames the debate to a more substantial degree by exploring this friction over the interpretation of democracy as we find it in Thomas Carlyle's essay "Shooting Niagara… And After?" and in Walt Whitman's response to Carlyle, *Democratic Vistas*. While the friction between hierarchy and horizontalism does not originate with Carlyle and Whitman, it is explicit in their texts. I will use an analysis of their texts, therefore, to begin my intervention and to illustrate the broad points of the debate of the project. Carlyle's master narrative denigrates the political activity of what he calls "the swarm," those people who are "cutting asunder [the] straps and ties […] of old regulations, fetters, and restrictions" (9). Whitman's counternarrative in *Democratic Vistas*, though flawed, points to the ways in which a grassroots political project might be imagined. Furthermore, I use *Democratic Vistas* because it is among the most significant texts in the Americas to consider how the study of literature and the use of literary tools can contribute to imagining deeper, more meaningful ideas of democracy.

Democratic Vistas is the text that Roberto Mangabiera Unger and Cornel West call "the secular bible of democracy," (11), and it is, therefore, the text that I will use to produce questions for the broader project.

Chapters Two and Three focus on two of the most significant problems of a grassroots political project: problems of free speech and problems of free association. Marx and Engels write that capital is "vampire-like" and it "must nestle everywhere, settle everywhere, establish connections everywhere" (*Capital* 233; *Manifesto* 12). The master narrative about the marketplace of ideas, with its commodification of language itself, is just one more effort to put those sharp fangs wherever a vein can be found. In Chapter Two, therefore, I consider problems of free speech and sharpen a counternarrative of wooden stakes for this vampire. Through a reading of Herbert Biberman's suppressed film *Salt of the Earth*, I consider how the marketplace of ideas—the dominant metaphor used to describe the space in which speech is shared—is itself a limitation on the freedom of speech, and how *Salt of the Earth* suggests the commons as an alternative metaphor.

Chapter Three considers problems of free association in B. Traven's Jungle Novels, a six-book narrative about the emergence of a rebel swarm during the Mexican

Revolution. The Jungle Novels are a challenge to the master narrative that suggests that without a hierarchical organization and a directing authority figure, no social or political organization is possible. In contrast to how Carlyle represents the swarm as dangerous and unthinking, Traven's narrator reinterprets the identity of the swarm and explores the limits of more horizontal models of organization. The Jungle Novels end on a profoundly ambivalent note, however, and perhaps for that reason, Bill Weinberg begins his book *Homage to Chiapas: The New Indigenous Struggles in Mexico*, by drawing a parallel between the Jungle Novels and the story of the current Zapatista rebels. Weinberg writes that the "Indians in [*General from the Jungle*, the last of Traven's novels], isolated in the jungle, didn't know that the Revolution was already over and the dictator overthrown; the peasant army which emerged from that jungle in 1994 claims that the Revolution has been betrayed and dictatorship restored" (15).

In the Conclusion, I argue that the contemporary Zapatista movement in Mexico reinterprets the radical democratic project of the swarm in their texts. I use the Zapatista literature to challenge one final master narrative, the idea that the only options for political

struggle are variations on master narratives themselves, that significant change can only come through hegemonic struggle, the object of which is to replace one hierarchy with a better hierarchy, one master with a new master. Through a reading of "Durito IV: Neoliberalism and the Party-State System," one of the key Zapatista communiqués, I explore how this movement uses its stories to imagine new democratic horizons, and I pose questions about further research on grassroots politics and the literatures of the Americas.

Chapter One

A Swarm on the Horizon: Whitman, Carlyle, and the Imagination of Democratic Vistas

"Democracy," Walt Whitman writes, "is a word the real of which still sleeps, quite unawaken'd, ithstanding the resonance and the many angry tempests of which its syllables have come, from pen or tongue. is a great word, whose history, I suppose, remains ritten, because that history has yet to be enacted" (*PW* 93).[1] Whitman wrote these words in 1871 in his essay *ocratic Vistas*, the text that Stephen John Mack calls itman's "most profound and sustained meditation on nocratic life" (137). As the metaphor of the title makes ear, Whitman is not interested in writing democracy's story; rather, he is interested in using his text to nagine new democratic vistas. More specifically, Whitman s interested in rebutting what is perhaps the most renchant criticism of democracy, the master narrative that ells us that common people—whom Whitman calls "the nnamed, unknown, rank and file" (*PW* 2:377)—do not have the

[1] All citations from Whitman's works are from Floyd Stovall, ed., *Walt Whitman: Prose Works 1892*, volumes I and II (New York: New York University Press, 1964), hereafter cited as *PW*. Citations will be given in the text, volume number followed by page number.

acity for autonomy that democracy requires. "The purpose democracy," Whitman writes, is to cultivate the "highest edom" (966) so that "the unnamed, unknown, rank and e" can "become a law, and a series of laws unto" emselves (966). *Democratic Vistas* poetically expresses itman's complicated belief in autonomy; it is a text ant to counter a master narrative about a supposed lack autonomy, and it is the text I will use to begin my tervention into the problems of grassroots politics in e literatures of the Americas, as well as to frame the ebate of the project.

Whitman wrote *Democratic Vistas* in response to Shooting Niagara: And After?" a master narrative told in 867 by Thomas Carlyle, the Scottish essayist and istorian. Because of Carlyle's status as one of the reeminent literary figures of the Victorian period and ecause of his vocal belief in the need for masters and the arratives they tell, Whitman was fairly frequently concerned with Carlyle's writing. In the essay "Carlyle from American Points of View," for example, Whitman writes that "Carlyle's grim fate was cast to live and dwell in, and largely embody, the parturition agony and qualms of the old order, amid crowded accumulations of ghastly morbidity, giving birth to the new" (*PW* 1:254). Whitman recognized in

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rlyle something quite useful: a voice for this "old der," an order against which Whitman could imagine his mocratic vistas.

According to Thomas F. Haddox, "although specifically response to [Benjamin] Disraeli's Reform Bill, which was out to enfranchise most working class men in Britain, hooting Niagara' is more generally a condemnation of mocratic government as such" (11).[2] Haddox is correct, to degree. Carlyle was no partisan of representative mocracy, but his greater interest—and object of greater orn—was what he called "the swarm": those people who were utting asunder [the] straps and ties [...] of old egulations, fetters, and restrictions" (9). In Carlyle's nd, further democratization would not be wise: he argued at once allowed to rule itself, a task he sarcastically alled "improvement," the "swarm" was "likely to be mproved off the face of the earth within a generation or vo" (7-8). For Carlyle, to take the "Niagara leap of ompleted democracy" is to tempt fate in foolish ways (3). nitman, on the other hand, writes that

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In addition to the texts considered in this chapter, see, for example, e treatment that the Carlyle/Whitman debate is given in David Brooks, What Whitman Knew," *The Atlantic Monthly*, 291.4 (2003): 32-3; Robert eisbuch, *Atlantic Double-Cross: American Literature and British nfluence in the Age of Emerson* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press: 986); Edward F. Grier, "Walt Whitman, the Galaxy, and *Democratic istas," American Literature*, 23:3 (1951); and Robert J. Scholnick, 'Culture' or Democracy: Whitman, Eugene Benson, and *The Galaxy," Walt hitman Quarterly Review* 13:4 (1996).

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> Anything worthy to be call'd statesmanship in the Old World, I should say, among the advanced students, adepts, or men of any brains, does not debate to-day whether to hold on, attempting to lean back and monarchize, or to look forward and democratize—but how, and in what degree and part, most prudently to democratize. (*PW* 2:383)

n the debate between Carlyle and Whitman in the pages of Shooting Niagara" and *Democratic Vistas*, we can find no ess than a broad conversation about the theoretical caffolding, and therefore the viability, of democracy tself. While I am reminded of what Kenneth M. Price calls hitman's "signature expression"—"Be radical—be radical—be ot too damned radical!" (126)—I will argue here that we an find in *Democratic Vistas* the seeds of a political roject that I will call grassroots politics: Whitman's roposal for the radical democratization of "all public and rivate life" (389). Like Whitman believed that America in e 19th century needed a new conception of democracy to fferentiate it from the "old order," so do we need a 21st entury reinterpretation of democracy, one that can otivate a grassroots political movement. The debate etween Carlyle and Whitman provides an opportunity to ame just such a project.

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The friction between Carlyle and Whitman is about the nterpretation of democracy: Carlyle's interpretation avors less democracy—much less; Whitman's favors more emocracy—much more. Carlyle sees himself as grasping, rying to conserve an "old order" which he believes to be ood and deserving; Whitman believes that such activity is n attempt to "lean back," a regression, an unwillingness o look into the democratic vistas. Whereas Carlyle mocks he idea that the democratic franchise should be extended o the "swarm," Whitman argues for "democracy in all public nd private life, and in the army and the navy" (*PW* 2:389).

Carlyle and Whitman's argument is over the degree to hich they believe that common people—whom Carlyle calls the swarm" and Whitman calls "the unnamed, unknown, rank nd file" (*PW* 2:377)—possess the capacity for autonomy that emocracy requires. Carlyle and Whitman agree that this apacity is the theoretical scaffolding of democracy, but arlyle has great skepticism that the "swarm" has such a apacity. The master narrative that Carlyle tells holds hat democracy is a fool's hope because it requires from ommon people the ability to rule themselves autonomously, o direct their own affairs without guidance from a master. hitman addresses this skepticism directly, and although he dmits that his "mood" had been much like Carlyle's (*PW*

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:375), it is "[t]o him or her within whose thought rages he battle, advancing, retreating, between democracy's onvictions, aspirations, and the people's crudeness, vice, aprices, I mainly write this essay" (*PW* 2:363).

The autonomy of "the unnamed, unknown, rank and file" s important to Carlyle and Whitman because they reason hat the metric used to determine if the people could rule n a democracy is the degree to which the average people an rule themselves. Much depends on this facet of the ebate: if one believes in what C. L. R. James calls "the reative power of freedom and the capacity of the ordinary an to govern," (par. 43) as Whitman does, then democracy tself rests on a sure foundation. The question for Whitman ecame, then, "how, and in what degree and part, most rudently" to prepare "the unnamed, unknown, rank and file" or democracy in "all public and private life"? Such a orizontal interpretation of democracy, as we will see, tands in stark contrast to the hierarchy that Carlyle avors.

Much of the scholarship on *Democratic Vistas* has given he Carlyle/Whitman debate only a brief treatment and has, herefore, not sufficiently unpacked the point that Whitman hought was the task of "statesmen," "advanced students," nd "men of any brains": to argue for "a wider

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emocratizing of institutions" and to think about "how, and n what degree and part, most prudently to democratize" (*PW* :383). Haddox, in particular, writes that "Whitman can ffer no political program in *Democratic Vistas*, merely a rofession of faith and a call for others to see" (14). ven though Stephen John Mack writes in *The Pragmatic hitman: Reimagining American Democracy* that "*Democratic istas* is a blueprint for a kind of literary criticism esigned to promote social change" (142), Mack, too, bridges his analysis and, furthermore, attempts to import hitman's political views, unaltered, into the present. exts such as Betsy Erkkila's *Whitman the Political Poet* ravel a good distance when they observe that in *Democratic istas* Whitman offers "a proposal for a radical econstruction of literature as it had been traditionally nderstood" (90), but even though texts such as these offer ubstantial and lasting contributions to our understanding f Whitman's political views, there does not yet exist a ork of scholarship that considers the debate between arlyle and Whitman with sufficient depth, nor is there a scholarly study that sufficiently explicates Whitman's radical democratic vistas. This chapter is, in part, one effort to advance the scholarship on these points. This chapter will also use the argument between Carlyle and

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ıitman to frame the debate of the project, a debate ɔtivated by a friction over competing interpretations of emocracy.

I begin my intervention with these texts because this ebate features two major literary figures whose ideas both refigure and continue to shape our ideas about democracy. ırthermore, although Whitman advocates many ideas that are etter left to history, *Democratic Vistas* is among the most rofound examples of a text that uses literary tools to ıltivate a democracy to come. Whitman writes that "there re opposite sides to the great question of democracy, as ɔ every great question" (*PW* 2:363). In this chapter, I ıll unpack these "opposite sides" of the "great question f democracy" in order to examine Carlyle's arguments for ıterpreting democracy in a way that will shrink its scope ıd Whitman's arguments for a radical reinterpretation of emocracy. I will then provide a critique of one recent fort to use Whitman's ideas about democracy as a ntemporary political tool—Stephen John Mack's book *The agmatic Whitman: Reimagining American Democracy*—and bilize that critique to suggest ways that Whitman might lp us to imagine further democratic vistas.

ooing the Swarm; or, One of Plato's Epigones

"Shooting Niagara… And After?" appeared anonymously in *Macmillan's Magazine* in April 1867, and was edited and expanded soon thereafter into a pamphlet.[3] As James Anthony Froude writes, "Shooting Niagara"

> was Carlyle's last public utterance on English politics. He thought but little of it, and was aware how useless it would prove. In [Carlyle's] Journal, August 3 [1867], he says:— "An article for Masson and *Macmillan's Magazine* took up a good deal of time. It came out mostly from accident, little by volition, and is very fierce, exaggerative, ragged, unkempt, and defective. Nevertheless I am secretly rather glad than otherwise that it is out, that the howling doggeries (dead ditto and other) should have my last word on their affairs and them, since it was to be had." (352-3)

Carlyle knew that his "last word" would be met with strong resistance. The appeal for electoral reform at the time was widespread, with support from the Reform League and Reform Union, as well as the British labor movement. Subsequently,

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[3] The full version of "Shooting Niagara" was republished in microform by the Lost Cause Press of Louisville, Kentucky, in 1974. Abridged versions of Carlyle's text can be found in several places, including in William E. Buckler, ed., *Prose of the Victorian Period* (Boston: Houghton, 1958), from which Mack cites.

the British parliament passed the Reform Act of 1867, known as the Second Reform Act, mostly in an effort to stem the popular uprising. The Second Reform Act was intended to enfranchise sober, skilled men, and it had the effect of enfranchising much of the male working class.[4]

The argument of Carlyle's essay is rather straightforward: Carlyle mocks these efforts because he believes that the "swarm" does not have the capacity for autonomy that democracy requires. The "And After?" of his title speaks volumes: if the democratic franchise were to be expanded too widely, Carlyle argued, society as a whole would suffer. He begins his argument by resisting what was coming to be a forgone conclusion. Namely, Carlyle was waiting for

> Democracy to complete itself; to go the full length of its course, towards the Bottomless or into it, no power now extant to prevent it or even considerably retard it,—till we have seen where it will lead us to, and whether there will then be any return possible, or none. Complete "liberty" to all persons; Count of Heads to be the Divine Court of Appeal on every question and interest of mankind; Count of Heads to choose a

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[4] See Erkkila, 247. For a fuller discussion of the British Reform Acts, see Eric J. Evans, *Parliamentary Reform in Britain, c. 1770-1918*.

> Parliament according to its own heart at last, and sit with Penny Newspapers zealously watching the same said Parliament, so chosen and so watched, to do what trifle of legislating and administering may still be needed in such an England, with its hundred and fifty millions "free" more and more to follow each his own nose, by way of guide-post in this intricate world. (1-2)

Why underscore "liberty" as Carlyle does? Why would Carlyle be so vocal in his skepticism of the "Penny Newspapers," those popular forces of commentary that would "watch" the Parliament? Carlyle evokes the anxiety of one who is about to be scrutinized in a certain way: by those members of the "swarm," those whom Carlyle feels are beneath this Parliament. Liberty to all persons, voting on issues, scrutiny of officials, freedom to autonomously determine one's life's direction—these are democracy's faults in Carlyle's eyes.

In one of many interesting rhetorical constructions, Carlyle writes that "Count of Heads [will] be the Divine Court of Appeal on every question and interest of mankind; Count of Heads to choose a Parliament according to its own heart at last" (1). Whereas a construction such as "the

counting of heads…" would simply imply majoritarian rule, by writing "Count of Heads," capitalized and acting as the noun in his sentence, Carlyle is able to personify the franchise with an aristocratic title. This particular personification illustrates Carlyle's conservative impulse: even the object of his critique is rendered in the language of the "old order."

"Shooting Niagara" is a master narrative in the strict sense that I use the phrase in this project: it is a story told by a self-identified master in order to reinforce a particular hierarchy. A more ideal republic, Carlyle argues, would be a hierarchical system where governing should be the sole purview of the educated and expert, who presumably have the most skill at the task, and who need not be "interfered with":

> Supposing the Commonwealth established, and Democracy rampant, as in America, or in France by fits for 70 odd years past, — it is a favourable fact that our Aristocracy—in their essential height of position, and capability (or possibility) of doing good, are not at once likely to be interfered with that they will be continued farther on their trial, and only the question somewhat more stringently put to them,

> "What are you good for, then? Show us, show us, or else disappear!" (17)

Whitman is correct when he writes that Carlyle is the voice of the "old order" (*PW* 1:254): Carlyle writes to defend hierarchical institutions like the "Aristocracy," which, in their "essential height of position" are jeopardized by democratization. Carlyle fears that once democratization begins, one day the traditions that he holds dear will eventually come under such scrutiny that they will be forced to either justify their existence, or "else disappear!" Carlyle believes that the members of this "Aristocracy" are benevolent masters, and he rightly notices that they are threatened by "rampant" democracy.

In Carlyle's mind, he is making an ethical argument, because he believes that people who lack the autonomy required for democracy must be governed by others. Furthermore, Carlyle argues that those who have the most skill at governing should govern, and those who do not have this skill should not be in the conversation. To put what Carlyle calls "the swarm" in control would be, in his mind, against the best interests of "the swarm" itself:

> In our own country, too, Swarmery has played a great part for many years past; and especially is now playing, in these very days and months. […]

> Ask yourself about "Liberty," for example; what you do really mean by it, what in any just and rational soul is that Divine quality of liberty? That a good man be "free," as we call it, be permitted to unfold himself in works of goodness and nobleness, is surely a blessing to him, immense and indispensable;—to him and to those about him. But that a bad man be "free,"—permitted to unfold himself in his particular way, is contrariwise, the fatallest curse you could inflict on him; curse and nothing else, to him and all his neighbours. Him the very Heavens call upon you to persuade, to urge, induce, compel, into something of well-doing; if you absolutely cannot, if he will continue in ill-doing, — then for him (I can assure you, though you will be shocked to hear it), the one "blessing" left is the speediest gallows you can lead him to. (8-9)

Carlyle's rhetorical style is verbose, but his point is understood: he opposes democratization because, in his mind, it is not in his nation's best interests. Liberty for the "bad man" is neither good for him nor for his community. Liberty for "bad men"—let alone for women, a

proposal that Carlyle does not broach—is in no one's best interests, Carlyle argues, because if suffrage is extended to "bad" men, these "bad" men, given this liberty, will not only continue to "unfold themselves" in "bad" ways, but after enfranchisement, they will also do bad things with the vote. Who are these "bad" men? What characteristics identify them? Carlyle does not specify, so we are left to assume, as in other areas of his ideal republic, that such judgments are to be left to the "aristocracy." The punishment for being "bad," however, is not in doubt: the "speediest gallows."

When he argues that "there is nothing but vulgarity in our People's expectations" (22), Carlyle casts a deep shadow of hierarchy, racism, and classism. Carlyle's skepticism of the autonomy of the average person is amplified in his continued comments about "the swarm." "By far the notablest result of Swarmery, in these times," Carlyle argues,

> is that of the late American [Civil] War, with Settlement of the Nigger Question for result. Essentially the Nigger Question was one of the smallest; and in itself did not much concern mankind in the present time of struggles and hurries. One always rather likes the Nigger;

> evidently a poor blockhead with good dispositions, with affections, attachments, — with a turn for Nigger Melodies, and the like: — he is the only Savage of all the coloured races that doesn't die out on sight of the White Man; but can actually live beside him, and work and increase and be merry. The Almighty Maker has appointed him to be a Servant. (5)

Carlyle's unabashed racism is matched only by his unabashed classism:

> Certain it is, there is nothing but vulgarity in our People's expectations, resolutions or desires, in this Epoch. It is all a peaceable mouldering or tumbling down from mere rottenness and decay; whether slowly mouldering or rapidly tumbling, there will be nothing found of real or true in the rubbish-heap, but a most true desire of making money easily, and of eating it pleasantly. (22)

While Carlyle also has biting comments for "the vulgar millionaire," who he believes to be a "bloated specimen" (35), Carlyle's comments about the "Trades Union, in quest of its '4 eights,' with assassin pistol in its hand" (35-6) are delivered with far more hostility. These "4 eights," a

reference to the labor movement's demand for "eight hours to work, eight hours to play, eight hours to sleep, and eight shillings a day" (35), are indicative of the demands that the swarm is placing on those at the top of the British hierarchy.

To stem this democratization, and to end this "cutting asunder of straps and ties," (9) Carlyle advocates "military drill" for the swarm:

> [O]ne often wishes the entire Population could be thoroughly drilled; into co-operative movement, into individual behaviour, correct, precise, and at once habitual and orderly as mathematics, in all or in very many points, — and ultimately in the point of actual Military Service, should such be required of it! […] This of outwardly combined and plainly consociated Discipline, in simultaneous movement and action, which may be practical, symbolical, artistic, mechanical in all degrees and modes, — is one of the noblest capabilities of man (most sadly undervalued hitherto); and one he takes the greatest pleasure in exercising and unfolding, not to mention at all the invaluable benefit it would afford him if unfolded. From correct marching in line, to

> rhythmic dancing in cotillon or minuet, — and to infinitely higher degrees. […] In man's heaven-born Docility, or power of being Educated, it is estimable as perhaps the deepest and richest element. (46, 48)

Carlyle argues that "the entire Population" should learn "Discipline"—ostensibly so that they can be obedient to the aristocracy—and that they should learn this discipline through military methods. Because he believes that the "swarm" does not have the capacity for autonomy required by democracy, the question for Carlyle about what to do with the people becomes one of proper "military drill." With no capacity to rule themselves, Carlyle sees it as the responsibility of the "Aristocracy" to school the people with methods that cultivate a "behavior" that is "correct, precise, and at once habitual and orderly." This form of education, in Carlyle's mind, would ultimately be most beneficial to its students not only because they would take "the greatest pleasure" in it, but also because drills, marching in line, and rhythmic dancing are the "deepest and richest element" of education, exercises from which people would derive "invaluable benefit." Nowhere in Carlyle's educational philosophy do we find any value placed on cultivating the autonomy needed for democracy. Rather,

"discipline," "order," and "docility" are the main values of Carlyle's proposal. Clearly, this form of education is an effort by a self-described "Aristocrat" to reinforce a hierarchy: the backhand side of Carlyle's *nobless oblige* is domination disguised as doing "good" works.[5]

Carlyle is no determinist, however: he does not believe that one's position at birth damns one to continuous membership in the "swarm." Carlyle makes exceptions for those rare cases he calls "heroes"—individuals who can rise above the "swarm" by virtue of their exceptional nature:

> [The] Industrial hero, here and there recognisable, and known to me, as developing himself, and as an opulent and dignified kind of man, is already almost an Aristocrat by class. [...] He cannot do better than unite with this naturally noble kind of Aristocrat by title; the Industrial noble and this one are brothers—born; called and impelled to co-operate and go together. Their united result is what we want from both. And the Noble of the Future,—if there

[5] We will see an example of these educational methods in Chapter III. In *Government*, the first of B. Traven's novels of the Mexican Revolution, the local *jefe politico* takes it upon himself to educate the local children. His educational method is rote memorization, and the phrases he makes the children memorize are patriotic slogans about the greatness of General Porfirio Díaz, the dictator the revolution would depose.

> be any such, as I believe there must;—will have grown out of both. (34-5)

Carlyle's ideal republic would be guided by a meritocratic representative system. This is not a representative democracy, certainly. Even a representative democracy—what Carlyle oxymoronically calls an "anarchic Parliament" (49)—would go too far in its "Count of Heads" (1). A system of representatives in which the "industrial hero" and the "naturally noble kind of Aristocrat" govern and speak for the swarm would be ideal. While his criteria for this stratification is meritocratic, that makes it no less problematic.

Carlyle echoes an old idea, similar to the idea that motivated Plato's "noble lie" in *The Republic*. We can place what Betsy Erkkila describes as "Carlyle's call for an authoritarian state" (254) into an intellectual history, but this history is not past. As C. L. R. James argues, those who tell master narratives have always been hostile to the idea that "every cook can govern." As James writes,

> we make a colossal mistake if we believe that [these ideas] are past history. For Plato's best known book, *The Republic*, is his description of an ideal society to replace the democracy, and it is a perfect example of a totalitarian state,

> governed by an elite. And what is worse, Plato started and brilliantly expounded a practice which has lasted to this day among intellectuals—a constant speculation about different and possible methods of government, all based on a refusal to accept the fact that the common man can actually govern. (par. 51)

As James suggests, it is not difficult to find the tellers of master narratives, one of whom is Carlyle, and another of whom is Samuel P. Huntington, the Albert J. Weatherhead III University Professor in the Department of Government at Harvard University. In his section of *The Crisis of Democracy*, Huntington argues that "the vigor of democracy in the United States in the 1960s […] contributed to a democratic distemper, involving the expansion of governmental activity, on the one hand, and the reduction of governmental authority, on the other" (102). What is "[n]eeded," Huntington continues, "is a greater degree of moderation in democracy" (113). Huntington echoes Plato's argument from *The Republic* about an ideal society where "those who govern must be the best" (412c), when he suggests that

> democracy is only one way of constituting authority, and it is not necessarily a

> universally applicable one. In many situations the claims of expertise, seniority, experience, and special talents may override the claims of democracy as a way of constituting authority. […] [T]he effective operation of a democratic political system usually requires some measure of apathy and noninvolvement on the part of some individuals and groups. […] Marginal social groups, as in the case of the blacks, are now becoming full participants in the political system. Yet the danger of overloading the political system with demands which extend its functions and undermine its authority still remains. Less marginality on the part of some groups thus needs to be replaced by more self-restraint on the part of all groups. (113-4)

One can hear the echoes of "Shooting Niagara": too much enfranchisement leads to "overloading"; democratic claims to autonomy should be subordinated to authority. The language Huntington uses in his argument is different than the language that Carlyle uses in his, and, likewise, Plato uses in his, but the goal is hauntingly similar—they all favor a restriction of democracy because to reinforce a hierarchy is to keep the "swarm" subordinated to the

"aristocracy" and "marginal groups" subordinated to "authority." As Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri point out in *Multitude: War and Democracy in the Age of Empire*, Huntington's text is an "antidemocratic gospel that preaches the defense of sovereignty against the threats of all social forces and social movements" (33). As Hardt and Negri might argue, and we would agree, intelligence is not a vice, technical knowledge is not inherently bad, and the progress due to intellectual advances is vital. When Plato's epigones cross a bright line, however, is when they use that intelligence as a tool to restrict democracy. When what Huntington calls "expertise, seniority, experience and special talents"—all positive characteristics in their own right—are used as a tools of domination, the power of the intellect ceases to be liberatory, and serves to reinforce a hierarchy. In various forms, proposals like Huntington's can be traced through intellectual history to Carlyle, and before that, to Plato, and these proposals continue to shape the interpretations of democracy.

Perhaps because of his rabid racism and classism, most scholars who have studied Whitman's *Democratic Vistas* have treated Carlyle with little credibility. Carlyle is no straw dog, however. He is a major figure in 19th century literature, he was Ralph Waldo Emerson's close friend (in

fact, Carlyle's book *On Heroes, Hero-Worship, and the Heroic in History* and Emerson's book *Representative Men* could be volumes in a set), and most importantly, he expresses ideas that are still in operation today. Whitman and Emerson took Carlyle seriously, and so will we here. While much of Carlyle's argument is shocking to a contemporary reader, as we can see from the parallel with Huntington, that reader can still find Carlyle's assumptions manifested in contemporary arguments about democracy. Carlyle's main objection to further democratization is that he believes that the "swarm" lacks the autonomy required by democracy. Therefore, Carlyle believes that further democratization would be like the Niagara plunge: one chooses to take it, but it rarely has good results.

The Democratization of "All Public and Private Life"

In Whitman's mind, "Shooting Niagara" is a return to the past, a regression to an older, inferior form of politics. In contrast, then, Whitman set out to write about things yet to come, to help to enact democracy's future (*PW* 2:392-3). Whitman believed that democracy was in its "embryo condition" (*PW* 2:392), and therefore, he

"presume[d] to write, as it were, upon things that exist not, and travel by maps yet unmade, and a blank" (*PW* 2:391). Because "Whitman worked from the premise that his duty as the national bard was to put democratic theory, the cultural lifeblood of nineteenth-century America, to verse" (Mack 160), Carlyle's essay must have seemed like an attack on the principles that Whitman had spent most of his life defending. Nevertheless, Whitman displays an immense capacity to empathize with the arguments that Carlyle makes. Whitman writes that Carlyle, an "eminent and venerable person abroad" (*PW* 2:375) wrote an essay called

> "SHOOTING NIAGARA."—I was at first roused to much anger and abuse by this essay from Mr. Carlyle, so insulting to the theory of America—but happening to think afterwards how I had more than once been in the like mood, during which his essay was evidently cast, and seen persons and things in the same light, (indeed some might say there are signs of the same feeling in these Vistas)—I have since read it again, not only as a study, expressing as it does certain judgments from the highest feudal point of view, but have read it with respect as coming from an earnest soul, and as contributing certain sharp-cutting

> metallic grains, which, if not gold or silver, may be good hard, honest iron. (*PW* 2:375-6)

Whitman recognizes that Carlyle's arguments are not to be dismissed quickly, but he wants his readers to know that Carlyle writes from "the highest feudal point of view": Carlyle's argument could be laudable, perhaps, if one can see the value in defending what Whitman calls "feudalism." Whitman's "anger and abuse" abated when he realized exactly what Carlyle was defending. Although the word "feudalism" never appears in Carlyle's essay—"aristocracy" is Carlyle's favored word—Whitman chooses this word to define the set of ideas that Carlyle espouses.[6]

Erkkila writes that while *Democratic Vistas* "originated in an effort to 'counterblast' Carlyle's attack, Whitman quickly realized that he shared Carlyle's diagnosis of the diseases of democracy" (247). We may be tempted to think that Whitman is conceding to Carlyle when Whitman writes that he has "seen persons and things in the same light" as Carlyle did, but like Erkkila does, we need to deal in shades of nuance to recognize that Whitman's empathy for Carlyle's argument does not equal agreement

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[6] Carlyle and Whitman do not agree on the terms of the debate. What Carlyle calls "aristocracy," Whitman calls "feudalism." Carlyle's term evokes his heroic intentions, and Whitman's term evokes his belief that Carlyle is defending an "old order." Neither of these terms are developed at length in either "Shooting Niagara" or *Democratic Vistas*, however. The varying vocabularies underscore the wildly disparate interpretations each author brings to this debate.

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with Carlyle's argument. Whitman writes that Carlyle, "the eminent person just mention'd, sneeringly asks whether we expect to elevate and improve a nation's politics by absorbing such morbid collections and qualities therein. The point is a formidable one, and there will doubtless always be numbers of solid and reflective citizens who will never get over it" (*PW* 2:379). Whitman, however, is not one of those citizens.

To Whitman, Carlyle's master narrative is just about the best argument one can make in defending "feudalism," but this does not mean that arguments defending "feudalism" are very persuasive to democrats. Whitman ultimately points out that, though earnestly written, Carlyle's essay contains "certain sharp-cutting metallic grains, which, if not gold or silver, may be good, hard, honest iron." The "if not" is important here—"if not gold or silver" implies that these are the metals that are most precious. "[G]ood, hard, honest iron" is not worthless, however, especially if one considers the period in which these essays were written. With the Industrial Revolution underway and gaining steam, "good, hard, honest iron" has no small value. In pointing out that Carlyle's arguments are more like "good, hard, honest iron" than like "gold or silver," Whitman acknowledges the earnestness of Carlyle's argument,

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but ultimately, Whitman is pointing out that although iron is a valuable metal, democratic arguments, not "feudal" arguments, set the gold standard.

Whitman quickly confronts Carlyle's criticism of the autonomy of what he calls "the unnamed, unknown, rank and file." Having analyzed "the full conception of these facts and points, and all that they infer, pro and con—with yet unshaken faith in the elements of the American masses, the composites, of both sexes, and even consider'd as individuals" (*PW* 2:372-3) in the opening paragraphs of *Democratic Vistas*, Whitman proceeds to plant the seeds of his grassroots political project. While Whitman recognizes that people can be "crude," he does not think that this crudeness is a sufficient basis for their continued disenfranchisement. Whitman's comments about idiocracy—which he spells "idiocrasy"—most clearly separate Whitman's point of view from Carlyle's. Idiocracy, which literally means personal-rule or government, is a loose synonym for autonomy. Many have missed the connection between idiocracy and autonomy, a connection which is underscored by the reference Whitman makes to "John Stuart Mill's profound essay on Liberty in the future" (*PW* 2:362).[7] Whitman is of course referring to Mill's "On Liberty," an essay in which

[7] A good example of this is George Kateb's chapter "Walt Whitman and the Culture of Democracy," *Political Theory* 18:4 (Nov. 1990), 545-71. Kateb only mentions Mill briefly.

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Mill examines the tensions between authority and liberty, ultimately arguing for a dramatically expanded conception of liberty. Whitman, of course, would agree with Mill; Carlyle would not.

One concrete example of Whitman's belief in autonomy is his support for women's suffrage. Approximately fifty years before women won the right to vote in the 19th Amendment, Whitman expressed his support for the suffrage movement:

> Democracy, in silence, biding its time, ponders its own ideals, not of literature and art only—not of men only, but of women. The idea of the women of America, (extricated from this daze, this fossil and unhealthy air which hangs about the word lady,) develop'd, raised to become the robust equals, workers, and, it may be, even practical and political deciders with the men. [...] Then there are mutterings, (we will not now stop to heed them here, but they must be heeded,) of something more revolutionary. The day is coming when the deep questions of woman's entrance amid the arenas of practical life, politics, the suffrage, &c., will not only be

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> argued all around us, but may be put to decision, and real experiment. (*PW* 2:389, 401)

Whitman may not be a feminist by 21st century standards, but for his time, these comments and others he makes regarding women's suffrage are evidence that he tries to imagine a more horizontal interpretation of democracy. Simply put, whereas Carlyle argues that the "swarm" does not have the capacity for autonomy required by democracy, and this justified a hierarchy, Whitman disagreed, and therefore, he argued for a radical reinterpretation of democracy.

Many scholars have noticed that Whitman favors further democratic enfranchisement, but we have yet to fully explore the leaves of grassroots politics that Whitman proposes in *Democratic Vistas*. Haddox, for example, claims that Whitman offers no project whatsoever in *Democratic Vistas* (14) and Mack argues that Whitman advocated for a project that Mack calls "organic democracy" (160). Although Haddox's essay contains several useful insights into *Democratic Vistas*, and Mack's book does recognize that Whitman has a project in mind, the limits of their scholarship present opportunities for further research. While much of *Democratic Vistas* is a response to "Shooting Niagara," and Whitman does include statements like the one

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advocating for suffrage above, Whitman does not limit himself to a discussion of representative democracy. My concern is Whitman's efforts to imagine more radical democratic vistas.

In response to "Shooting Niagara," Whitman proposed a grassroots political project, a radical reinterpretation of democracy that would expand it beyond issues of governing and elections. Whitman's radicalism has less to do with being outside mainstream political opinion, and has more to do with critiquing the roots of "all public and private life"—the assumptions upon which democratic institutions are founded. Mack's book *The Pragmatic Whitman* comes quite close to understanding Whitman's project when it cites the first sentences of the following quote, but the sentences contain a meaning that has yet to be unpacked. Whitman's proposal in *Democratic Vistas* is for the radical democratization of civil society—of literature, churches, schools, and even the armed forces:

> Did you, too, O friend, suppose democracy was only for elections, for politics, and for a party name? I say democracy is only of use there that it may pass on and come to its flower and fruits in manners, in the highest forms of interaction between men, and their beliefs—in religion,

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> literature, colleges, and schools—democracy in all public and private life, and in the army and navy. (*PW* 2:389)

The radicalism of Whitman's proposal is palpable: he wants to democratize even the armed forces, the institutions that one might think would be most hostile to democratic rule. We would not know of the extent of this project by reading Mack's book, however. Mack abridges the quote after "their beliefs," deleting the spheres and spaces that Whitman proposes be brought under democratic control. The deleted text is vital to advancing the scholarship on *Democratic Vistas*, however. Whitman's radical idea is to democratize "all public and private life," an idea that is far-reaching in its implications, and has not yet been satisfactorily explored.

To abridge the quote is also problematic because Whitman underscores the proposal to democratize "religion, literature, colleges, [...] schools, [...] all public and private live, and [...] the army and the navy." A proposal for the democratization of the armed services may seem well beyond the pale, but Whitman chooses this example purposefully, and confronts it directly:

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> and the spirit and letter of their trebly-aristocratic rules and regulations, is a monstrous exotic, a nuisance and revolt, and belong here just as much as orders of nobility, or the Pope's council of cardinals. I say if the present theory of our army and navy is sensible and true, then the rest of America is an unmitigated fraud. (*PW* 2:389-90)

The problem Whitman saw was that the various institutions of American civil society were founded upon non-democratic assumptions. "The spirit and letter" of the rules that govern the military, like other institutions in American civil society, are "aristocratic," and are therefore "exotic": they are not autochthonic, not rooted in America's grass, but rather are borrowed from a country with "feudal" foundations. Whitman's proposal to democratize "all public and private life" would seem to Carlyle to be unwise, impractical, or impossible, but, again, this is because, in Whitman's opinion, Carlyle writes from "the highest feudal point of view" (*PW* 2:375). Carlyle simply operates with a different frame of reference, one that has been shaped by a civil society and a government that had been built upon a non-democratic foundation. Whitman felt that a democratic frame of

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reference and a democratic ideology would be needed to reinterpret all aspects of American civil society, and that this democratization was a test to America itself: either democracy would take root in "all public and private life" or America would be "an unmitigated fraud" (*PW* 2:390).

As we can see, Haddox's claim that "Whitman can offer no political program in *Democratic Vistas*, merely a profession of faith and a call for others to see" (14) is not correct.[8] While we might wish that Whitman's project were more fully developed or savvier, in *Democratic Vistas*, Whitman even goes so far as to speculate on the steps needed for democratization. The first step, Whitman writes, was to lay democratic foundations in guiding texts, the second step was to insure for material stability and to build infrastructure, and the third step, which had yet to be taken, was to democratize "all public and private life." Because much of the scholarship on *Democratic Vistas* has not treated this point, the steps of Whitman's process of democratization are worth quoting at length:

> For the New World, indeed, after two grand stages of preparation-strata, I perceive that now a third stage, being ready for, (and without which

[8] Perhaps Haddox seeks to downplay the importance of *Democratic Vistas* because of recent efforts by conservative thinkers such as David Brooks—whom Haddox mentions in his text—to appropriate *Democratic Vistas* for their political purposes (16).

the other two were useless,) with unmistakable signs appears. The First stage was the planning and putting on record the political foundation rights of immense masses of people—indeed all people—in the organization of republican National, State, and municipal governments, all constructed with reference to each, and each to all. This is the American programme, not for classes, but for universal man, and is embodied in the compacts of the Declaration of Independence, and, as it began and has now grown, with its amendments, the Federal Constitution—and in the State governments, with all their interiors, and with general suffrage; those having the sense not only of what is in themselves, but that their certain several things started, planted, hundreds of others in the same direction duly arise and follow. The Second stage relates to material prosperity, wealth, produce, labor-saving machines, iron, cotton, local, State and continental railways, intercommunication and trade with all lands, steamships, mining, general employment, organization of great cities, cheap appliances for comfort, numberless technical

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> schools, books, newspapers, a currency for money circulation, &c. The Third stage, rising out of the previous ones, to make them and all illustrious, I, now, for one, promulge, announcing a native expression-spirit, getting into form, adult, and through mentality, for these States, self-contain'd, different from others, more expansive, more rich and free, to be evidenced by original authors and poets to come, by American personalities, plenty of them, male and female, traversing the States, none excepted—and by native superber tableaux and growths of language, songs, operas, orations, lectures, architecture—and by a sublime and serious Religious Democracy sternly taking command, *dissolving the old, sloughing off surfaces, and from its own interior and vital principles, reconstructing, democratizing society*. (*PW* 2:409-10, emphasis mine)

Whitman is naïve, overly assuming, and overly simplistic here. Several of the assumptions that he makes—about "general suffrage," equitable infrastructure, and "general employment," all of which having been rendered with the universal male pronoun—display his prejudices and

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limitations. After reading this passage, however, it becomes impossible to argue that Whitman had no project in mind whatsoever. Contrary to Haddox's argument in "Whitman's End of History," Whitman advocated for a grassroots political project of "dissolving the old, sloughing off surfaces, and from its own interior and vital principles, reconstructing, democratizing society" (*PW* 2:410). Because even the "unnamed, unknown, rank and file" (*PW* 2:377) possess the capacity for autonomy, Whitman sees no reason why "all public and private life" should not be brought under democratic control.

In a certain sense, Whitman is espousing a type of deconstruction with this project: he is not just critiquing "public and private life" as it is, but he is also critiquing their ideological foundations: those "interior and vital principles" are the theoretical scaffolding for democracy; if those foundations are antithetical to democracy then, like the army and the navy, American democracy would be an "unmitigated fraud." Whitman looks at American civil society and finds that much of it is founded upon a "feudal" ideology, not a democratic ideology:

> We see the sons and daughters of the New World, ignorant of its genius, not yet inaugurating the native, the universal, and the near, still

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> importing the distant, the partial, and the dead. We see London, Paris, Italy—not original, superb, as where they belong—but second-hand here, where they do not belong. We see the shreds of Hebrews, Romans, Greeks; but where, on her own soil, do we see, in any faithful, highest, proud expression, America herself? I sometimes question whether she has a corner in her own house. (*PW* 2:411)

A democratic nation, in Whitman's mind, cannot remain divided for long between a democratic ideal and a reality of a civil society that is still operating with non-democratic foundations. As Erkkila points out (248), at the time Whitman wrote *Democratic Vistas*, he was influenced by Hegel's philosophy, which would explain Whitman's thinking about the difference between what he calls feudalism and democracy. Whitman is not completely clear on this point, but it does seem as if he thinks that, in Hegelian fashion, a feudal stage of history has been supplanted by a democratic stage of history. This, too, is in keeping with Whitman's characterization of Carlyle's defense of an "old order."

In order to move away from that "old order" and to democratize "all public and private life," Whitman called for a "deeper, higher progress":

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> For America, type of progress, and of essential faith in man, above all his errors and wickedness—few suspect how deep, how deep it really strikes. The world evidently supposes, and we have evidently supposed so too, that the States are merely to achieve the equal franchise, an elective government—to inaugurate the respectability of labor, and become a nation of practical operatives, law-abiding, orderly and well off. Yes, those are indeed parts of the task of America; but they not only do not exhaust the progressive conception, but rather arise, teeming with it, as the mediums of deeper, higher progress. Daughter of a physical revolution—other of the true revolutions, which are of the interior life, and of the arts. For so long as the spirit is not changed, any change of appearance is of no avail. (*PW* 2:410)

Suffrage alone does not "exhaust the progressive conception," in Whitman's words. This, too, for his radical project: voting is not the conclusion of democracy, but is, rather, one of its tools. As Whitman did not, we should not confuse voting rights with democracy. For Whitman, democracy was a more expansive ideal: the "true

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revolutions" belong to the "interior life, and [to] the arts."

Whitman therefore outlines his three-stage plan to democratize American civil society, quoted at length above, the first two stages of which are conveniently completed. Beyond this, *Democratic Vistas* does not include any simple statement about the exact parameters of democratization other than the fact that it will entail an ideological shift: this leads one to believe that in Whitman's mind, democratization entails deconstructing the "feudal" principles of American "public and private life" and reconstructing them on democratic principles. Whitman suggests a debate about "how, and in what degree and part, most prudently to democratize," and I will continue that debate here.

Whitman's "Imposition"

In *The Pragmatic Whitman: Reimagining American Democracy*, Mack writes that "*Democratic Vistas* is a blueprint for a kind of literary criticism designed to promote social change" (142). The idea is a good one, but the metaphor that Mack uses undercuts it—why might we need a "blueprint" for social change? Why should we see Whitman

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as an architect of the social change to come? What designs would Whitman's "blueprint" impose upon us? Mack takes us a good distance in his text, but the conclusion that he reaches illustrates that we still need to look farther into these vistas. Mack does grasp the broad parameters of the debate between Carlyle and Whitman, even though, at just about four pages of text, his treatment of the debate is sparse. Mack treats the debate between Carlyle and Whitman as a critique of and defense of what most people think of as 19th century American democracy: representative, republican, and laissez-faire. Indeed, he places a great deal of importance on laissez faire doctrine. Mack writes that "there is no dispute that in both Jeffersonian and Jacksonian democracy, laissez-faire was economic orthodoxy; indeed, as [Sidney] Fine notes, until the post-Civil War period there was no competing economic doctrine. It would have been quite extraordinary if Whitman had even been able to conceive of a vision of freedom that was not also, in some sense, a laissez-faire vision" (71). This assertion is no doubt correct.

This importance placed on laissez faire doctrine, however, becomes one of the key elements of how Mack understands Whitman's political project because, as Mack

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notes, the residue of laissez faire doctrine is still with us:

> The idea of individual freedom did not die as a political ideal, supplanted by notions of the regulated state. To be sure, both live on as the great antinomies of the American democratic tradition. The particular virtue of Whitman's vision is that it strives to bring these philosophical antagonists into relation […] As Whitman sees it, all public debate in a democratic society is necessarily structured by the opposing ideals of liberty and governance. (xxii)

Mack correctly points out that Whitman is historically situated, and that he would have seen democracy in relation to laissez faire doctrine. While I share Mack's skepticism of the idea that democracy can only exist in the state-form, I would take a different tack with Whitman's ideas. Whitman did agree with Henry David Thoreau when, in *Resistance to Civil Government*, he echoed Thomas Jefferson's line about "[t]hat government is best which governs least" (226). Mack is also correct, for example, when he observes that Whitman "demonstrates an intuitive appreciation for the intricate ways that art and material

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society create each other" (142). Finally, Mack comes close to understanding Whitman's grassroots political project when he writes that *Democratic Vistas* is Whitman's "most profound and sustained meditation on democratic life; it is a comprehensive theory of democratic culture and also an ambitious program [...] for the re-mediation of American culture and the full democratization of American society" (137). Unfortunately, however, even though these statements are correct, they stop short of articulating Whitman's proposal for the democratization of "all public and private life," and this is no surprise, especially when we remember how Mack abridged Whitman's clearest statement about the extent of his radical democratic project. It would have been helpful if Mack had elaborated upon this "ambitious program [...] for the re-mediation of American culture and the full democratization of American society," because it is the aspect of *Democratic Vistas* that begs for further investigation.

Beyond this abridging, Mack's conclusion, "Toward an Organic Democracy," includes a brief interpretation of what he believes Whitman's political project to be—a project that he calls "organic democracy." Mack then uses that interpretation to comment on current issues in American politics. Mack's conception of "organic democracy" is a

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version of presentism in reverse: rather than viewing the 19th century through the eyes of the 21st, as some scholars mistakenly do, Mack makes the equal and opposite mistake when he interprets what he believes Whitman's views on democracy to be and when he "conclud[s] with some observations on its moral and political implications for contemporary America" (xix). Mack's technique is to import Whitman's ideas about democracy, unaltered, into the present. Mack writes that "to understand the scope of the demands that Whitman's vision imposes on us, we should begin by recalling that democracy, for Whitman, is more than the political process" (160). The last part of Mack's comment is correct: Whitman does clearly argue that democracy is not just "for elections, for politics, and for a party name" (*PW* 2:389); the first part of Mack's assertion is problematic, however, and it is on the point of Whitman's supposed "imposition" where we must part ways with Mack. Why must "Whitman's vision" be "impos[ed]" upon us? While we may have a debt to pay to Whitman for raising a voice in this conversation, this debt does not mean that we must import Whitman's ideas, without critique, into the present. This imposing approach treats Whitman as the author of a master narrative. Rather than a radical democracy for protagonists, Mack suggests an organic

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democracy in which we would grow into a mold that Whitman provides. The motivation for Mack's wish to let Whitman supply a blueprint for social change now seems clearer. It is less clear why an organic democracy would need an architect's blueprint, however.

In an example that illustrates the limits of this approach, Mack articulates what he believes Whitman's views on democracy to be and then he chooses an area of public policy to which he applies those views:

> Whitman's organic democracy does [...] place complex demands on the ways we attempt to fashion a meaningful associative life. To cite just one example, consider its implications for the way we approach the problem of economic privation and the distribution of wealth. [...] Paternalistic and dehumanizing policies such as welfare are, however nobly intentioned, almost as odious as official indifference. Just as it would be absurd for a society to offer the ballot as a substitute for food, so, too, would it be unthinkable to design a policy that assists the poor by crippling their capacity for engaged democratic living—by dismantling the psychological equipment a citizen needs for self-government while

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> simultaneously undermining the high value democratic culture places on self-reliance. (164)

Although "organic democracy" is a concept that is underdeveloped—the vast majority of Mack's explanation of the concept comes in a six page conclusion—this quote leads one to believe that Mack advocates a return to the laissez-faire kind of government of the 19th century. Even though Mack refers at one point to "the shackles of a laissez-faire democratic theory" (99), a metaphor that suggests Mack finds little value in laissez-faire doctrine, what details he does give in his explanation of "organic democracy" seem to fit squarely in a laissez faire tradition: the main characteristics of what Mack calls "organic democracy" are the importance of bootstrap-style self-reliance and the absence of "paternalistic and dehumanizing policies such as welfare [that] are, however nobly intentioned, almost as odious as official indifference" (164). Put another way, Mack tries to argue that Whitman would not support welfare. If we were to choose to do so, we could point out that Mack fails to see the value that Whitman placed on equality (*PW* 2:396) and "the great word solidarity" (*PW* 2:382) which, if it were the job of this essay, could mitigate the claims that Mack

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makes about Whitman's supposed opposition to humane federal programs.

It is only speculation, however, to think about which welfare programs Whitman would or would not support. Perhaps if Whitman had lived through the Great Depression rather than the Civil War, he would have recognized the dangers of capitalism, and written poems about President Roosevelt rather than President Lincoln, but we will never know. These speculations can only remain speculations, but more importantly, they are answers to the wrong questions: we cannot say with any certainty whether Whitman would support welfare, but we do know that Whitman's focus was on democratizing "all public and private life" (*PW* 2:389)—a point which he makes explicitly in *Democratic Vistas*, and which is unfortunately abridged in Mack's book. Therefore, rather than imposing Whitman's ideas upon the present, we might ask similar questions to the ones Whitman asked in *Democratic Vistas* and see what our answers might provoke. Rather than imposing architects, in other words, we might hope for radical democrats with green thumbs.[9]

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[9] As his title suggests, Mack attempts to marshal Whitman into the pragmatic tradition, writing that "[o]ne of my intentions in this study is to demonstrate, more thoroughly than other authors have previously tried, how Whitman participates in [the pragmatic] tradition and how the insights of other pragmatist thinkers can help to produce worthwhile readings of his poetry, and, by extension, his democratic poetics" (xix). Whitman can undoubtedly be placed into the pragmatist tradition. Any author who is large and contains multitudes, so to speak, can provide fodder for the pragmatist, the liberal, the

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Much of Whitman's democratic project should remain in the 19th century—for example, his explicit support for Manifest Destiny, his phrases that have a dark nationalistic overtone, and his belief in American exceptionalism—but his proposal to democratize "all public and private life" is an idea that merits further investigation. What is "all public and private life," exactly? The workplace? The community? Whitman does not specify what he means by "all public and private life," other than mentioning religion, literature, colleges, schools, the army, and the navy, nor does he provide much detail about how we might begin this project. We should not import Whitman's grassroots political project, unaltered, into the 21st century, as Mack does, but we might ask questions that are similar to the ones that Whitman asked in *Democratic Vistas*. Like Whitman, we might ask "how, and in what degree and part, most prudently to democratize" (974).

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anarchist, the communist, or the conservative. Mack wants to claim Whitman for the pragmatic tradition, and he finds plenty of evidence; scholars of those other colors could do the same. It should be noted that the wish to appropriate Whitman is not a new phenomenon. Michel Fabre, writing in 1966, pointed out that a "critical reading of *Democratic Vistas* and *Leaves of Grass* reveals that [Whitman's] political views stopped far short of what socialism meant in the [nineteen-] thirties. But it is irrelevant whether radicals had a right to claim him. He had often been claimed, even before his death, by minority groups, political or otherwise, eager to promote their own ideals or interests. At the beginning of the century, Emma Goldman had somewhat popularized him in her lectures; Eugene Debs was a great admirer of his poetry; and throughout the twenties when Whitman's influence was strongest, radicals began to regard him as an apostle of the coming democratic revolution" (88).

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The scope of this project will be wider than the scope of Whitman's project in *Democratic Vistas*, because although Whitman was content staying within the borders of the United States, if we are to reinterpret grassroots politics in the 21st century, we will have to dispense with a nationalistic point of view. Therefore, this dissertation will examine the literatures of the Americas, especially drawing upon the literatures of the United States and Mexico. In addition to changes in scope, there are also changes in purpose between Whitman's project and my own: Whitman consciously wrote *Democratic Vistas* as a contribution to defining a relatively young nation's political and cultural identity; this was an important task in Whitman's mind (indeed, much of the last section of *Democratic Vistas* is preoccupied with this task), but it is not an important task for this project. In fact, the type of radical democracy under consideration here has little, if anything, to do with questions of nation and nationhood.

The broad parameters of the debate between Carlyle and Whitman are only the tip of the iceberg, and we can continue by complicating the questions that Whitman raised and the vistas he imagined. Once framed in this manner, the ambiguities, details and nuances of the argument multiply. Once the decision to reinterpret democracy has been made,

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equally difficult decisions follow: "how, and in what degree and part, most prudently to democratize" are questions that have to be addressed from many perspectives, and answering all the questions will require a great deal more research. How to democratize? How to democratize prudently? How have other writers in the Americas articulated ideas about radical democracy? How might these other literatures help us to imagine and to interpret new democratic vistas?

We can stand upon Whitman's shoulders, looking further into those democratic vistas, but ultimately, even the view from the vantage point of those large shoulders will be too limited, so we must seek further vistas and horizons. This is a point Whitman recognizes—he writes that "while many were supposing things established and completed, really the grandest things remain" (1017). Grand and difficult things do remain: Carlyle's criticisms are a good preview of the counterarguments to a project of radical democracy, but this debate changes in given contexts and historical moments. The tension brought to the surface in the debate between Carlyle and Whitman, however—a friction over the interpretation of democracy itself—has animated many writers in the Americas. This radical democratic project is worthy of further exploration, but, to paraphrase Whitman,

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the full parameters of the project contain too many multitudes for us to consider in a single project. What I propose to do in the following chapters, then, is to dig into some of the problems of grassroots politics in the literatures of the Americas by examining questions of free speech in Herbert Biberman's suppressed film *Salt of the Earth*, questions of free association in B. Traven's Jungle Novels, and questions of how the Zapatista literature might help us to imagine further democratic vistas and horizons.

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Chapter Two

The Embargo on *Salt*: Free Speech and *Salt of the Earth*

It is difficult to imagine either literary study or democracy without a clear fidelity to the freedom of speech. Because the freedom of speech undergirds many of the vital functions of literary study and democracy—reading and writing, debating, making free choices among alternatives, dissenting, protesting, finding common ground, and the like—it is necessary for a project that seeks to reinterpret grassroots politics as a synonym for radical democracy to search for ways to expand the freedom of speech. In this chapter, I will continue to dig into some of the problems of grassroots politics. Here I consider questions about free speech; in the chapter that follows, I consider questions of free association.

Few would deny that a commitment to free speech is a basic requirement of democracy, but it would not be correct to assume that this commitment has never been challenged. Among the best examples of such a challenge is the 1954 film *Salt of the Earth*, directed by Herbert Biberman, one of the infamous "Hollywood Ten" blacklistees. In June 1951, Chicano miners on strike in New Mexico were served with a Taft-Hartley injunction, a legal tactic by the mine owners

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aimed at ending the strike, which at that point had been in process for eight months.[1] This injunction forced a crisis: either the miners could end the strike, or they could continue to picket and be arrested. Either way, the strike seemed lost. What happened next is a remarkable episode in labor history: the spouses and sisters of the miners took over the strike, eventually seeing it to a successful conclusion. These Chicanas challenged the sexism of their time and their community, and they eventually became the protagonists in Biberman's fictionalized retelling of these events. *Salt of the Earth* unapologetically portrays a radical message of horizontalism along gender, race, and class lines, narrated by its main character, Esperanza Quintero. As Deborah Silverton Rosenfelt writes in her commentary on the film's screenplay, *Salt* shows a "rarity, a female hero who not only struggles and suffers but grows and wins" (93).

Rosenfelt also writes that "the making of *Salt of the Earth* was a deliberate act of resistance against the repressive climate of the era, or at least an act of determination not to succumb to it" (97). This deliberate

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[1] The strike lasted from 17 October 1950 to 24 January 1952 (Rosenfelt 117). The Taft-Hartley injunction takes its name from the 1947 Taft-Hartley Act, which modified the 1935 Wagner Act, the basis for much of United States labor law. The Taft-Hartley Act was widely seen as a regression for labor rights, a view that is reinforced by the events in *Salt of the Earth*.

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act of resistance was met with a prodigious effort to suppress the film. James J. Lorence writes in *The Suppression of* Salt of the Earth*: How Hollywood, Big Labor, and Politicians Blacklisted a Movie in Cold War America*, that

> when Bayard (New Mexico) Local 890 of the International Union of Mine, Mill, and Smelter Workers […] challenged the Empire Zinc Corporation over wages and working conditions—and, beyond that, over the distribution of power in the postwar corporate state—it wrote the first page in a saga that was to test severely the freedom of expression guaranteed by the Bill of Rights. (1)

This chapter seeks to add some pages to that saga. While the making of *Salt of the Earth* was a deliberate act of resistance, its making is not the only such act we can find in conversations about the film. As Biberman wrote in his book *Salt of the Earth: The Story of a Film*, "it appeared to me that we were fighting for the civil liberties of free enterprise—a free market for every American, and without exception" (237). It is not surprising that Biberman would adopt the language of the marketplace to defend his film. Choosing an economic metaphor might buffer him from critics

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who charge that his film is hostile to capitalism, but beyond that, the metaphor of the marketplace of ideas has such a wide currency in conversations about the freedom of speech that it might be possible to believe that a different metaphor does not exist. To what degree, however, is the marketplace metaphor adequate to understand the problems of free speech in *Salt of the Earth*? What if the marketplace of ideas—the dominant metaphor used to describe the space in which speech is shared—is itself a limitation on the freedom of speech? It would, first, be necessary to show that this is the case, that the metaphor is in fact a limitation. Second, it would be necessary to construct a counternarrative that suggests an alternative metaphor.

A master narrative is frequently told which holds that the marketplace is the metaphor best suited to describe the ideal space in which speech is shared freely. This narrative also tells us that the market is free, and, by extension, that the market is liberatory—free markets lead to free people, as the rusty cliché goes. Furthermore, this master narrative pushes us to believe that, as Nietzsche writes in *The Twilight of the Idols*, "nothing great or beautiful could ever be common property" (189). In this, Nietzsche was right, but in the wrong way: ideas, art, and literature are not comparable to property or commodities.

Perhaps nothing great could be a commodity, but many great things can be common, and can be held in common. As this chapter will demonstrate, the logic of the marketplace metaphor limits the freedom of speech by attempting to commodify it and by allowing "embargoes" on both "pure speech"—verbal communication—and non-verbal speech like picketing and protesting. Furthermore, I will argue that *Salt of the Earth* provides both a critique of and an alternative to the marketplace. An interpretation of the story of the film—both context and content—shows acts of resistance to the master narrative of the marketplace, as well as a counternarrative, a "new way," that provides an alternative metaphor for the space in which speech can be freely shared: the commons.

Embargoes on the Marketplace of Ideas

There may be instances where limitations on the freedom of speech are justified—moments when physical harm is the direct result of speech, for example. As Stanley Fish notes in "There's No Such Thing As Free Speech, and It's a Good Thing, Too," "the question of whether or not to regulate [speech] will always be a local one, and we cannot rely on abstractions that are either empty of content or

filled with the content of some partisan agenda to generate a 'principled' answer" (111). Fish is right to notice that speech cannot be disconnected from its content—the limitations on speech we find on and in *Salt of the Earth* cannot be separated from the content of Esperanza's speech, for example, or from the fact that Cold War hysteria and entrenched racist and sexist attitudes were the motivating factors for those limitations—but Fish frames his inquiry in such a way that lays the theoretical groundwork for restrictions on speech.[2] This mistaken orientation evolves from the premise with which Fish begins his essay, namely that because the concept of free speech has "been appropriated by the forces of neoconservatism," those of us who identify with leftist politics should challenge whether free speech exists in order to deny these neoconservatives their claim to it (102).

Unlike Fish, I see no reason to cede the right to free speech in a forfeit. An unwillingness to claim and defend an idea of free speech seems like a writerly way to dismantle the tools that could dismantle the masters' house. It escapes me, as it escaped Orwell, why a writer

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[2] Fish would contest this observation. He writes that the "truth is not that the freedom of speech should be abridged, but that freedom of speech is a conceptual impossibility because the condition of speech's being free is in the first place unrealizable" (115). I am not persuaded by this caveat, however: the space Fish devotes in his essay to laying the theoretical groundwork for restrictions on speech belies his assertion, or, at least, it points the way to such restrictions.

would argue against the idea of free speech *as such*. Orwell wrote that anyone "can demonstrate with the greatest of ease that 'bourgeois' liberty of thought is an illusion. But when he has finished his demonstration there remains the psychological *fact* that without this 'bourgeois' liberty the creative powers wither away" (*Essays* 239, emphasis in original). Orwell puts the word "bourgeois" in quotes to challenge the idea that free speech exclusively belongs to that group—or any other, for that matter. The better questions for the analysis of *Salt* and for our understanding of free speech, therefore, are not the ones Fish asked, but rather about recognizing unjust limitations on speech so that they can be resisted. More specifically, I intend to argue that the marketplace metaphor is itself a limitation on speech. How can this specific limitation be challenged and overcome?

The marketplace metaphor was famously articulated by United States Supreme Court Justice Oliver Wendell Holmes, Jr. during the first Red Scare, an era when radical ideas and the people who held them were actively persecuted.[3] Even

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[3] For more information on the first Red Scare repression of free speech, see David M. Rabban, *Free Speech in its Forgotten Years, 1870-1920* and William Preston, Jr., *Aliens and Dissenters: Federal Suppression of Radicals, 1903-1933*. See also two texts written by Theodore Schroeder, the administrator of and scholar for the Free Speech League, *Free Speech for Radicals* and *The Fight for Free Speech: A Supplement to "Law-Breaking by the Police"* as well as the essays and lectures by Schroeder's most famous associate, Emma Goldman, who was repeatedly arrested during this period for speaking and writing, and who was

though the freedom of speech figures prominently in United States jurisprudence, this prominence meant relatively little in the face of state suppression in the form of the 1798 Alien and Sedition Acts, the 1918 Sedition Act and the 1917 Espionage Act, which, for example, made it illegal during wartime for anyone to

> willfully utter, print, write, or publish […] any disloyal… scurrilous, or abusive language about the form of government of the United States, […] or] any language intended to incite, provoke, or encourage resistance to the United States [… or] willfully by utterance, writing, printing, publication… urge, incite, or advocate any curtailment of production in this country of any thing or things, product or products, […] ordnance and ammunition necessary or essential to the prosecution of the war in which the United States may be engaged […], *with intent* by such curtailment *to cripple or hinder the United*

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eventually deported for violating the Alien Act. Goldman's essays and speeches can be found in several places, including the collection edited by Alix Kates Schulman, *Red Emma Speaks*, and the volumes edited by Candace Falk, including *Emma Goldman: A Documentary History of the American Years*, vol. two, *Making Speech Free, 1902-1909*.

> *States in the prosecution of the war.* (Chafee 113-4, italics and insertions in original)[4]

Such overbroad language resulted in tangible chilling effects, but it also resulted in vigorous fights about the scope of free speech. Zechariah Chafee, a professor in the Harvard University Law School at the time, writes that "the Espionage Act must have been more frequently violated in Wall Street than in Harlem" (115), but it was not the Wall Street violators who were prosecuted.

In *Abrams v. United States* (250 U.S. 616 [1919]), the Supreme Court considered whether five "rebels, revolutionists, [and] anarchists" had violated the Espionage Act by writing and distributing two sets of leaflets that urged a general strike in response to President Woodrow Wilson's decision to send the military to Russia. These leaflets are excellent examples of sedition: speech that criticizes authority or seeks to incite rebellion—in this case, against the state itself, and President Wilson specifically. The second set of leaflets, titled "Workers—Wake Up," argued that

> America and her Allies have betrayed (the workers). Their robberish aims are clear to all

[4] The 1918 Sedition Act updated the 1917 Espionage Act, which was itself separately updated in 1918. Abrams and his associates were tried under the Conspiracy section of the updated Espionage Act. For more information, see Chafee, Chapter Three.

> men. The destruction of the Russian Revolution, that is the politics of the march to Russia. Workers, our reply to the barbaric intervention has to be a general strike! An open challenge only will let the government know that not only the Russian Worker fights for Freedom, but also here in America lives the spirit of revolution. […] Woe unto those who will be in the way of progress. Let solidarity live!" (Chafee 111)

The majority on the court found that the seditious speech of the five defendants was a violation of the Espionage Act, and the defendants were sentenced to twenty years in prison. In a dissenting opinion, Holmes defends the speech in these leaflets and in doing so, famously articulates the marketplace metaphor. Holmes writes,

> [i]n this case sentences of twenty years imprisonment have been imposed for the publishing of two leaflets that I believe the defendants had as much right to publish as the Government has to publish the Constitution of the United States now vainly invoked by them. […] Persecution for the expression of opinions seems to me perfectly logical. If you have no doubt of your premises or your power and want a certain result with all

> your heart you naturally express your wishes in law and sweep away all opposition. To allow opposition by speech seems to indicate that you think the speech impotent, as when a man says that he has squared the circle, or that you do not care whole heartedly for the result, or that you doubt either your power or your premises. But when men have realized that time has upset many fighting faiths, they may come to believe even more than they believe the very foundations of their own conduct that the ultimate good desired is better reached by free trade in ideas—that the best test of truth is the power of the thought to get itself accepted in the competition of the market, and that truth is the only ground upon which their wishes safely can be carried out. (*Abrams*)

As one writer of a recent unsigned note in the *Harvard Law Review* put it, the "conception of a marketplace where ideas compete for dominance and acceptance by the American public resonates throughout Supreme Court jurisprudence to this day. It is almost impossible to overstate the importance of Justice Holmes' dissent in shaping American law and

society" (1314).[5] There is much to be discussed in Holmes' dissent, but in order to challenge the dominance of his metaphor and to engage the problems of free speech in *Salt of the Earth*, it is necessary to unpack the metaphor's logic.

Holmes' intent is to foster a certain kind of space where the freedom of speech can thrive because he believes that this "free trade in ideas" serves "the ultimate good." As the author of the *Harvard Law Review* unsigned note points out, in United States jurisprudence this idea approaches the level of a truism: few would debate the idea that it is in the best interests of any democratic community to have as free a space as possible for sharing speech, because without this space, democracy cannot fully function. This is Holmes' basic idea: this space should be fostered because the freest exchange of ideas is a

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[5] See "The Impermeable Life: Unsolicited Communications in the Marketplace of Ideas" *Harvard Law Review* (118) 1314-1338. In addition to this unsigned note, two valuable sources for understanding the context and details of the *Abrams* case are Zechariah Chafee, Jr., *Free Speech in the United States* and Richard Polenberg, *Fighting Faiths: The Abrams Case, the Supreme Court, and Free Speech*. Chafee's text is important because the debates that he had with Justice Holmes shaped Holmes' views on free speech to a great degree. Polenberg's text is important because it draws on a significant amount of primary source material, notably from the personal papers of the defendants in *Abrams*. It is quite difficult to overstate the importance of the marketplace metaphor, a difficulty that is underscored by citing even a brief list of scholars who make use of the phrase, such as Stanley Fish in the essay cited above and Fredric Jameson in *The Political Unconscious: Narrative as a Socially Symbolic Act*. For more information, see Louis Menand, *The Marketplace of Ideas*, Richard Delgado and Jean Stefancic, *Must We Defend Nazis? Hate Speech, Pornography, and the New First Amendment*, and Douglas M. Fraleigh and Joseph S. Truman, *Freedom of Speech in the Marketplace of Ideas*.

prerequisite for progress. Without a metaphorical space for a wide discussion of problems, there can be little hope for finding solutions to those problems.

Holmes believes that the marketplace is the metaphor that most adequately describes this space, and he intends it to be all-encompassing, free to enter, and where all are free to speak, listen, and debate. Holmes would argue that we may find some speech to be offensive or dangerous, but it is in the best interest of a democracy to allow that speech into the marketplace.[6] Because many "fighting faiths" have been upset by the free trade of ideas over time, it is in the pursuit of the "ultimate good" to ensure that there are as few limits as possible to the freedom of speech. In this way, Holmes argues, the best ideas will win out in an open competition.

On its surface, the marketplace seems to be adequate to the task of describing the metaphorical space in which speech is shared freely: a marketplace is where commodities are bought and sold, where people meet and interact—sometimes in relationships that are similar in terms of advantage or power, sometimes not. The marketplace can

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[6] Holmes would agree that the marketplace of ideas is not unlimited however. Evidence of this can be found in *Schenck v. United States*, the Supreme Court case about free speech that immediately preceded *Abrams*, in which Holmes argued that if a "clear and present danger" to national security is present, that danger could be used to justify a limit on speech. See *Schenck v. United States*, 249 U.S. 47 (1919).

either refer to the exchanges at a cooperative farmer's market or to the competition between Wal-Mart and a small downtown merchant; to an open, noisy bazaar or to an isolated, quiet shop. Also, anyone with an idea to sell or the willingness to buy might be free to enter the market. The interpretation of the metaphor is quite elastic: it can be stretched to cover a wide variety of people who make exchanges and a wide variety of instances where those commodities are exchanged.

The marketplace metaphor also implies a logical comparison: the goods that are exchanged in this marketplace are ideas; the direct comparison, then, is between speech and commodities. The comparison between speech and commodities is an interesting one, and it is on this point that the metaphor needs to be examined further. If the metaphor is a good one, it would hold that speech is similar to a commodity—speech could be bought and sold. These ideas constitute the allure of the metaphor: the marketplace tries to commodify speech, to make it tangible; it promises not just freedom, but also equal opportunity; it hints at the allure of an ideal space without gates or borders, where anyone with an idea to sell or a willingness to buy is accepted.

This allure leads to shady places, however. The "competition of the market" is explicitly hierarchical: in such a competition, some win, some lose; some ideas end up on top, and some on the bottom. Such is the way of the literal marketplace, too, through the machinery of which a few feast and a great many starve. It is no surprise to see Holmes, speaking from a position of institutional power, use an economic metaphor to describe speech. By framing his metaphor in this way, Holmes insulates himself from charges that a defense of the seditious speech in Abrams' leaflets is no different than defending Abrams' thesis, but he also affirms Marx's comment about the continual need for capitalist expansion: by forcing an economic metaphor into a conversation about free speech, Holmes opens up a vein for the vampire's fangs, a vein from which many others still suck.

Fish makes an important initial point when he cites the "entry" problem with the marketplace of ideas: it is not a "protected forum of public discourse" (118). The "workings of the marketplace," Fish writes, "will not be free in the sense required, that is be uninflected by governmental action" or, I should add, by capitalist practices (118-9). Arundhati Roy puts a finer point on the idea when she writes that "while, legally and

constitutionally, speech may be free, the space in which that freedom can be exercised has been snatched from us and auctioned to the highest bidders. […] [P]hrases like *free speech*, the *free market*, and the *free world* have little, if anything to do with freedom" (vii, x, emphasis in original). Roy's comments are underscored if we extend the analogy above just a bit further: if speech is a commodity, then censorship or suppression of speech is an embargo. An embargo on speech works much like an actual embargo: it stops certain commodities from entering the marketplace.

Even though the presence of censorship undercuts the so-called freedom of the marketplace, the possibility of embargoed speech does not, in any way, contradict the logic of the metaphor: embargoes fit quite easily into this economic framework. In fact, because the logic of the metaphor can be expanded to cover the reality of censorship, it proves to be an apt description.[7] The question, then, is about the degree to which the marketplace metaphor is adequate. Do we want a metaphorical space in which some commodities are welcome and others are

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[7] One can only imagine that the irony of this situation did not escape Holmes. Even though his metaphor eventually came to enjoy wide popularity, Holmes' argument was also a minority, dissenting opinion. His argument in *Abrams* certainly was allowed into the marketplace of ideas that was the Supreme Court, but his idea was rejected by all but one other member of that particular marketplace—only Justice Louis Brandeis joined Holmes' dissent. And because Holmes' argument was rejected, the embargo on the type of speech in Abrams' leaflets was continued.

not, where some speech is welcome and other speech is not? Furthermore, should we compare speech to a commodity? Do we want what Noam Chomsky calls a "well-functioning capitalist society, [where] everything becomes a commodity, including freedom" (*Necessary Illusions* 349)?

Even if the answer to Chomsky's question were affirmative, is the commodification of ideas possible—can speech be bought and sold? One could argue that when a book is sold, the ideas it contains are sold as well. One could also argue that when a book is sold, the price pays for the intellectual and physical labor involved in its production, and likewise the paper, ink, and glue used to manufacture the book. Is there a difference between the book and the ideas it contains? If so, what price could be put on the ideas themselves? If those same ideas were delivered as a lecture, would the admission price be the same as the book's price? What about two members of that lecture's audience, one of whom can remember most of the ideas from the lecture and one of whom can only remember a few ideas—should the admission charged to these people differ? More to the point, can ideas be owned?

Ideas cannot be owned—speech and ideas are not analogous to commodities unless put into some tangible form (a book, a CD, etc.). The phrase Holmes uses is a

marketplace of ideas, however, not of books. While the commodification of books is theoretically possible, the commodification of ideas and speech is not. The crucial difference between the commodification of books and of speech is between what Lawrence Lessig, a professor of Law at Stanford University and director of the Center for Internet and Society, calls rivalrous and nonrivalrous resources (20). As he argues in *The Future of Ideas: The Fate of the Commons in a Connected World*, a rivalrous resource can be exhausted; a nonrivalrous resource cannot. As in his lecture "The Comedy of the Commons," the anecdote that Lessig uses to illustrate this point is about apples: apples are rivalrous resources because if a person eats an apple, one less apple is available for someone else to eat. The same does not hold with ideas: if a person possesses an idea, it does not restrict whether others can possess that same idea.[8] As Lessig writes, "[t]he Boston Commons is a

[8] The legal effort to commodify the tangible speech of books, films, or other media is through copyright law, the "distinctive feature" of which, Lessig writes, "is its almost limitless bloating—its expansion both in scope and duration" (106). At its best, copyright serves to protect intellectual innovation; at its worst, it is used to maximize profit at the expense of a wide sharing of ideas. At its inception, for example, American copyright lasted fourteen years, renewable once, after which the work went into the public domain to be free for all to use, revise, and build upon. Current copyright law protects a work for seventy years after an author's death (Lessig 107). In the United States, where corporations have the same legal rights as persons, this means that the Walt Disney Corporation, for example, can take a story like Cinderella from the public domain, produce a film about it, and then claim copyright over that film—theoretically, at least—indefinitely.

commons, though its resource is rivalrous (my use of it competes with your use of it). Language is a commons, though its resource is nonrivalrous (my use of it does not inhibit yours)" (*The Future of Ideas* 21). To illustrate the point, Lessig quotes Thomas Jefferson, who writes that "[h]e who received an idea from me, receives instruction himself without lessening mine; as he who lites his taper at mine, receives light without darkening me" (94). We will see the same idea in *Salt of the Earth*: when Esperanza, the film's narrator and protagonist, breaks the embargo on her speech, that does not mean that Ramón, her spouse, has any less of a right to speak. Because speech is nonrivalrous, it cannot be compared—it should not be compared—to a commodity.

In response to efforts by a diverse range of authors and entities—from Mark Twain to the Walt Disney Corporation—to control certain kinds of speech in perpetuity, a movement for "copyleft" has developed. The proponents of copyleft, such as the developers of the Creative Commons license, argue that copyleft is "a non-profit alternative to copyright." For more information, see <http://creativecommons.org/>.

While I wish that *Salt of the Earth* had enjoyed an initial period of success that would have allowed Biberman to make additional films, the copyright on *Salt of the Earth* has lapsed, and its current use is a model for how a robust public domain could operate. The film is available as a free download at the Internet Archive <http://www.archive.org/details/salt_of_the_earth>. Because it is in the public domain, anyone can download it, view it, remix it, and make derivative works from it, enabling a great degree of freedom and opportunities for the use of the film.

Lessig's lecture "The Comedy of the Commons" is available at <http://www.itconversations.com/shows/detail349.html> for free download. Lessig begins his argument by critiquing Garret Hardin's essay "The Tragedy of the Commons." Hardin's essay, while explicitly about problems of overpopulation, has been widely cited as evidence for the privatization of rivalrous resources.

Even if we were to reach past the point of believability and suggest that nonrivalrous resources could be commodified, it would still be a bad idea: speech should be free, both in terms of liberty and in terms of cost. The logic of the marketplace itself constitutes an unjust limitation on free speech. Dispensing with the marketplace metaphor, therefore, would expand the freedom of speech and contribute significantly to a reinterpretation of grassroots politics. The task, then, is to illustrate these flaws and to articulate a better metaphor.

Recent scholarship has begun to imagine an alternative to the marketplace. The metaphor of the commons has been suggested by Lessig and by Naomi Klein, who writes that much recent activism has been organized around the resistance to "what might broadly be described as the privatization of every aspect of life, and the transformation of every activity and value into a commodity" (82). Klein helps us to understand why the commons is an attractive alternative when she writes that what the various forms of opposition to commodification share

> is a radical reclaiming of the commons. As our communal spaces—town squares, streets, schools,

> farms, plants—are displaced by the ballooning marketplace, a spirit of resistance is taking hold around the world. People are reclaiming bits of nature and of culture, and saying "this is going to be public space." […] [This fight] has morphed into a struggle against corporatization and, for some, against capitalism itself. It has also become a fight for democracy. (82, 83)

This reclamation of space—both literal and metaphorical—has its limitations and possibilities, and its problems should motivate further research. Could "roadblocks," for example, be placed on the routes to the commons? Certainly, but even though the metaphor of the commons has faults, it is superior to the metaphor of the marketplace. Its main advantage, the one that I am most interested in here, is that the commons is a democratic, not an economic metaphor, and therefore, using the metaphor of the commons dispenses with the comparison between speech and commodities. The item shared in the metaphorical commons is speech itself—there is no need for an analogy, especially one that requires that speech be commodified in the process. The commons is also a more horizontal metaphor because it relies on cooperation rather than competition, on what we share rather than how we dominate others.

But the marketplace metaphor will not go away just because we wish it to do so. As Lessig writes in *The Future of Ideas*, "in a free society, the burden of justification should fall on him who would defend systems of control" (14). Would that such a free society exists, however. Systems of control, like the ones we find in *Salt of the Earth*, frequently rely on institutional force to sustain their embargoes. When unjustified limits are placed upon speech, as is the case with *Salt of the Earth*, the speaker often must resort to various other acts of resistance.

I now turn to an analysis of how *Salt of the Earth* represents just such an act of resistance to the marketplace metaphor, its embargoes, and its attempted commodification of speech. In the story of *Salt of the Earth*, we find three embargoes on speech: the embargo on the film itself, the Taft-Hartley injunction's embargo on the miners' protesting and picketing, and those miners' embargo on the speech of their spouses and sisters. *Salt of the Earth* shows why I argue that the metaphor of the commons is an alternative to the metaphor of the marketplace.

The Embargo on *Salt*

The effort to suppress *Salt of the Earth* was complicated. The people who worked to suppress the film did not have a command and control center, nor did they form a named organization, but nevertheless, the effort to suppress the film was very effective. The scholarship by Rosenfelt and Lorence delves into the film's context, but a brief synopsis is necessary here. Even the main points of this story paint a chilling picture.

Much has been written about the context of the 1950s Red Scare,[9] but in order to understand how *Salt* was embargoed from the marketplace of ideas, one text is particularly insightful. During the height of the McCarthy period, Ayn Rand wrote a pamphlet titled "Screen Guide for Americans" which was produced for the Motion Picture Alliance for the Preservation of American Ideals. After a brief introduction, the pamphlet lists thirteen injunctions for filmmakers, including "Don't Take Politics Lightly" (1), "Don't Smear the Free Enterprise System" (2), "Don't Smear the Profit Motive" (4), and "Don't Glorify the Collective" (8). After the list of thirteen prohibitions is finished, Rand closes by writing

> a word of warning about the question of free speech. The principle of free speech requires

[9] For example, see Ellen Schrecker's scholarship, especially *Many Are the Crimes: McCarthyism in America*.

> that we do not use **police force** to forbid the Communists the expression of their ideas—which means that we do not **pass laws** forbidding them to speak. But the principle of free speech **does not** require that we furnish the Communists with the means to preach their ideas, and **does not** imply that we owe them jobs and support to advocate our own destruction at our own expense. The Constitutional guaranty of free speech reads: "Congress shall pass no laws—" It does not require employers to be suckers. (12, bold in the original)

Rand implies that filmmakers simply should not cooperate with "Communists." A careful examination of terms brings clarity to Rand's argument: she implies that the First Amendment protects against government censorship (which, as we have seen from *Abrams*, is a debatable claim), but noncooperation, she argues, is different. Censorship implies that a government or other institutional authority actively outlaws a text's production or distribution. No law was passed condemning or outlawing *Salt of the Earth*, nor was any law passed that forbade any theater owner from showing the film; technically speaking, then, the film was not censored. Passive noncooperation is not what caused

Salt's difficulties, however. The film's suppression was caused by affirmative acts—actions of politicians, film industry operatives, and union officials who were determined to stop its production and distribution.

When he was called in front of the House Un-American Activities Committee, Biberman considered pleading the First Amendment, rather than the Fifth, but was counseled otherwise, and he was subsequently jailed for six months (Biberman 9-10, 14-15). After being released from prison but not from the Hollywood blacklist, he, Paul Jarrico, and Michael Wilson formed the Independent Picture Corporation in order to make work for blacklistees (Biberman 31). Biberman writes that when shooting began on *Salt of the Earth*, "a neighborly, democratic way of life began to shine through a community of many cultures, races, classes and conditions of living. The community was moving toward peace and security. It was actually on the verge of becoming a community. And for that sin it was punished!" (83).

Punishment began on 24 February 1953, when Congressman Donald L. Jackson gave a speech on the floor of the House of Representatives about "a picture now being made under Communist auspices in Silver City, New Mexico" (1371). As Rosenfelt writes in her commentary on the film's screenplay, Congressman Jackson's "fury can be understood

only if one recognizes how unprecedented it was for manual workers and cultural workers of our country to collaborate, and what promise for a more truly democratic future such a collaboration holds" (172). Though Jackson conceded that "the name of this picture [was] unknown to [him] at [that] time" (1371), implying that he had little knowledge of the film's content, he denounced it and pledged that he would "do everything in [his] power to prevent the showing of this Communist-made film in the theaters of America" (1372). He closed his speech by saying that he was "confident that millions of Americans [would] join in that effort" (1372).[10]

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[10] In general, a weakness of arguments advocating limits on speech is that the people who make such arguments are often unwilling to read or view the texts they demand to be censored or suppressed. In a recent example, a parent in Texas called for the censorship of Ray Bradbury's *Fahrenheit 451*—a book about burning books—in his daughter's school during the American Library Association's Banned Books Week. "'It's just all kinds of filth,' said [the parent], adding that he had not read *Fahrenheit 451*" (Micek).

In his book about *Salt of the Earth*, Biberman narrates a similar episode. "At the beginning of the second week of the run," Biberman writes, "a man called Mr. [Philip] Steinberg [one of few theater owners who agreed to show *Salt*] on the telephone. He had believed Mr. Steinberg to be a fine, patriotic citizen, he said. But now he had to change his opinion. If 'that picture' were not canceled; if that 'subversive, un-American propaganda' were not thrown out of his theater, picketing would begin at once by the American Legion and the Catholic War Veterans. Mr. Steinberg asked the man if he had seen the film. He said he didn't have to see the film. Mr. Steinberg agreed—he certainly did not have to see it—unless he wished to speak about it in the way he had to Mr. Steinberg! Then he *did* have to see it, or keep quiet. Would the gentleman come to the theater that evening as his guest? If he wanted to say just what he had said, *after* he had seen the film, Mr. Steinberg would listen to him with respect and attention. At the conclusion of the first evening show a gentleman walked into Philip Steinberg's office. He sat down. He spoke: 'I want you to know that I have just had a very good time. They told me this picture was anti-church. I have never seen the church treated more respectfully. They told me it was Socialistic and Communistic. The only "istic" I found in

Jackson's confidence was well-founded. Local radio stations repeatedly broadcast his speech, and the local newspapers reprinted it (Lorence 80-82, 84). People living in the area took Jackson's speech to heart: vigilante action against the film's set and crew began soon after the speech was broadcast and printed. The film's cast and crew endured attacks on their physical safety. Vigilantes burned the union hall during the film's production (Biberman 129), "assaulted [Mine-Mill organizer Clifton] Jencks and union officer Floyd Bostick[,] and warned the [Independent Production Company] staff and crew to leave town 'or be carried out in black boxes'" (Lorence 84). When the shooting of the film was almost finished, Rosaura Revueltas, who played Esperanza, was deported to Mexico (Lorence 83-4).

Once the crew had finished shooting the film, the suppression effort changed its character, but not its intensity. In a letter in which he responds to an inquiry from Jackson, Howard Hughes provides a plan to stop the remaining work on the film. Hughes writes,

> Dear Congressman Jackson: In your telegram you asked the question, "Is there any action that industry and labor in motion picture field can

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the film was "feministic." And I never heard that was against the law. After all, what is this film? It's a story of poor people trying to solve their problems, and solving them, in America'" (173-4).

> take to stop completion and release of picture and to prevent showing of film here and abroad?" My answer is "Yes." There is action which the industry can take to stop completion of this motion picture in the United States. And if the Government will act immediately to prevent the export of the film to some other country where it can be completed, then this picture will not be completed and disseminated throughout the world where the United States will be judged by its content. (Lorence 205)

Hughes' letter details the phases that films must go through in order to be completed, all of which require technical skills that Biberman and his associates did not possess. If these technicians could be made to refuse their participation in the film's production, Hughes writes, the film could not be completed. Most of these jobs were controlled by the International Alliance of Theatrical and Stage Employees (IATSE), whose international president, Roy Brewer, was famous for his role in establishing and enforcing the blacklist. As Biberman writes, "To oppose the [IATSE] union brass, in a union not celebrated for its democracy, was at least as difficult for a rank and file union member as it was for the heads of departments of the

government of the United States to oppose [Senator Joseph] McCarthy. To oppose either was tantamount, in their eyes, to supporting a subversion" (152). Brewer vigorously saw that his decree to stop the film's production was carried out. Union technicians were ordered not to work on the film, and even those technicians who were inclined to help Biberman were scared to be found out, for fear that they, too, would be put on a blacklist and therefore be put out of work (Biberman 132).

It was equally difficult to find a theater owner who was willing to show the finished film. The stigma of the film was so pervasive that few theater owners would even talk to Biberman, and those who did were under tremendous pressure to push him away. The few theaters that did show the film were threatened with picketing by groups like the American Legion (Lorence 125-7). Even in the theaters whose owners did agree to show the film, the workers who projected the film were, in most cases, IATSE union members, and, much like the technicians, they were told not to show the film, or else risk being put on the blacklist (Biberman 113). Though *Salt* did eventually play in overseas theaters, Congressman Jackson communicated with the Treasury and State Departments in an effort to block the film from being exported (Biberman 122-6). In short, the

film was not embargoed by any law; it was, rather, embargoed by state and public coercion. The film was branded as "Communist" by a loud chorus of politicians, film industry operatives, union officials, and their allies.[11] This brand was the mark of a tainted commodity, and it was how the gatekeepers of the marketplace knew to embargo the film. The Communist brand was sufficient to hold the embargo: by the time Biberman and his associates quit trying to get the film shown, it had played on a total of thirteen movie screens (Lorence 168).

The story of *Salt of the Earth* did not die on those thirteen screens, however. The suppression of speech often, but not always, proves futile because this suppression must articulate the speech it wants suppressed. Judith Butler calls this the "paradoxical production of speech by censorship," by which she means that censorship "*states what it does not want stated* [and therefore] thwarts its own desire" (130).[12] We now turn to the ways that the film

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[11] The film's makers were aware that this branding iron was pointed at them. In the film, during the height of the strike, the company representatives drive up to the picket line. The strikers take notice, and Ramón asks them, "now why don't you let these gentlemen pass? Don't you know who's in that car?" and Antonio responds, "It's the paymaster from Moscow—with our gold" (Wilson 32).

[12] We can extend this idea and wonder if this chapter would have been written if *Salt of the Earth* had not faced such severe suppression. A case that illustrates Butler's paradox to an extreme degree is Mark Twain's *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*: when the Concord, Massachusetts public library banned the book, Twain wrote to his publisher, Charles L. Webster, that "those idiots" "have given us a rattling tip-top puff which will go into every paper in the country. That will sell 25,000 copies for us sure" (Whitfield 357).

actively thwarts efforts to commodify speech and suggests an alternative metaphor for the space in which speech could be freely shared.

Resistance in Common

From its start, *Salt of the Earth* registers its resistance to commodification. The film begins with Esperanza, the main character and narrator, asking "how shall I begin my story that has no beginning?" (Wilson 2). After she introduces herself, she introduces the setting: "This is our home. The house is not ours. But the flowers… the flowers are ours. […] This is my village. When I was a child, it was called San Marcos. […] The Anglos changed the name to Zinc Town. Zinc Town, New Mexico, U.S.A." (Wilson 2). Zinc Town is a company town: the Delaware Zinc company owns everything—the land, the homes, the grocery, and of course the mine and the zinc that comes out of it. From the outset, Esperanza underscores the idea that her community has been almost entirely commodified. Only the flowers are hers, and the company probably has a legal claim to those, too. This commodification is so thorough that the identity of the town itself no longer reflects its patron saint, but rather its material resources.

Because Esperanza is both its main protagonist and narrator, her voice resonates throughout the film. She narrates the film in the past tense, and as she puts it, the point where she begins her narration is "the beginning of an end" (Wilson 3). As we will see, her struggle in the events she narrates gives her the voice needed for that narration; her struggle is what overcomes the embargo on her speech. Through the events she narrates, she finds the validity of what John Stuart Mill argues, namely, that "[h]istory teems with instances of truth put down by persecution. […] Persecution has always succeeded, save when the heretics were too strong a party to be effectually persecuted" (31). "The truth"—however one chooses to define it—does not always win out just because it has a claim on being the truth. Mill's idea, unfortunate though it is, aptly describes the problems of free speech in *Salt of the Earth*.

What Esperanza will discover is that the suppression of speech, as Mill suggests, must be actively resisted. As Noam Chomsky suggests,

> [f]reedom of speech is an interesting case […], where popular struggles over hundreds of years have finally managed to expand a domain of freedom to the point where it's pretty good […].

> But it didn't just happen: it happened through the struggles of the labor movement, and the Civil Rights Movement, and the women's movement, and everything else. It's the popular movements which expanded the domain of freedom of speech until it began to be meaningful—if those popular movements hadn't taken place, we'd still be where we were, say, in 1920, when there wasn't even a *theoretical* right of freedom of speech. The history of this is remarkable; it's not very well known. (*Understanding Power* 268-9, italics in original)

Chomsky's range of dates points back to the era in which Holmes ineffectually defended Abrams' seditious speech, but his idea points forward to the struggle that we find in *Salt of the Earth*. It is what we call grassroots politics—the Chicana's agitation for a more radical democracy—that overcomes the embargo on their speech.

The events that Esperanza narrates detail the beginning of the end of two intertwined speech embargoes in the film's content. From the start of *Salt of the Earth*, it is as clear that the voices of the Chicano workers never reach the eardrums of their bosses as it is that the voices

of the miners' spouses never reach the eardrums of their husbands. While inequalities on the job are evident in the film, so are inequalities in the home. As Esperanza delivers her opening narration, she is doing chores: laundry, chopping wood, taking care of her children. A similar scene is repeated not long after. The second time Esperanza is shown doing chores, other women approach her and start a conversation about their living and working conditions, and what their spouses' union might do to improve them. One of them says to Esperanza, "the Anglo miners have bathrooms and hot running water […] why shouldn't we?" Esperanza responds by saying, "I know, I spoke to Ramón [Quintero, her spouse] about it—only a week ago."

> RUTH. And what did he say?
>
> ESPERANZA. They dropped it from their demands.
>
> CONSUELO. (sighs) *Es lo de siempre*. [It's the same as always.]
>
> TERESA. (the militant) We got to make them understand—make the men face up to it. (To Ruth) Show her the sign. ([…] Ruth lifts up a placard, hitherto unseen, which she has been holding at her side. It reads: WE WANT SANITATION NOT DISCRIMINATION)

CONSUELO. We'll make a lot of signs like this. Then we'll get all the wives together and go right up to the mine.

ESPERANZA. To the mine?

TERESA. Sure. Where they're negotiating. In the company office. We'll go up there and picket the place.

CONSUELO. Then both sides will see we mean business.

ESPERANZA. (thunderstruck) A picket line? Of… of ladies?

RUTH. Sure. Why not? (Luz flings a pair of damp pants on the clothes line without hanging them up.)

LUZ. You can count me in.

ESPERANZA. (scandalized) Luz!

LUZ. Listen, we ought to be in the wood choppers' union. Chop wood for breakfast. Chop wood to wash his clothes. Chop wood, heat the iron. Chop wood, scrub the floor. Chop wood, cook his dinner. And you know what he'll say when he gets home… (Mimics Antonio) "What you been doing all day? Reading the funny papers?" (Wilson 16-7)

This must not be the first time that Esperanza is aware of the sexism that embargoes her rights to speak and to protest, but it is the first moment in the film where she is challenged to resist. A long legacy of sexist hierarchy causes Esperanza to be "thunderstruck" by the suggestion that she join a picket line. At this point, the idea is very far outside her realm of possibility. This moment hints at the struggle to come, however: rather than a petition to spouses, it is an invitation to resistance, a proposal for struggling in common. These plans to picket are sidetracked, however, after a series of explosions in the mine cause the men to strike spontaneously. As the men begin the strike, the women appear on a hilltop, placards in hand, looking down on the men, "silent and grave. The women's skirts billow in the wind, like unfurled flags, like the tattered banners of a guerilla band that has come to offer its services to the regular army" (Wilson 23).

At a subsequent union meeting where a vote reaffirms the strike, the full range of grievances comes to the forefront. The audience learns that there are several mines in the area owned by the Delaware Zinc Corporation, some of which employ Anglo miners at higher wages. In addition to pay and housing inequality, the audience also learns of another significant inequality between the Anglo miners and

the Chicano miners: the Anglo miners always work in pairs to insure their safety, whereas the Chicano miners are forced to work alone. "[W]e have many complaints, brothers, and many demands," union miner Charley Vidal argues, "but they all add up to one word: Equality!" (Wilson 24). The irony, of course, is that inequality can be defined in multiple ways. It is easy for the men to see the embargoes that are placed on them, but it is difficult for them to see the embargoes that they have placed on their spouses and sisters.

In the meeting, the men sit in the chairs in the hall, full participants in the work of the union, while several women sit quietly along the wall. Near the conclusion of the meeting, eager to struggle alongside the men, the women propose a motion to form a Ladies Auxiliary. As Consuelo Ruís "haltingly" makes this suggestion, some men "appear resentful of the women's intrusion; others seem amused" (Wilson 25). In a moment that shows how a gender hierarchy embargos the women's speech, the men quickly dismiss the suggestion.

The women eventually form an auxiliary despite the way the men mock the idea, however, and this auxiliary will have an important role to play in resisting these embargos.

Rosenfelt's comment about this moment is instructive. She writes that the

> phrase "ladies' auxiliary" today conjures up images of women subordinate to their wage-earning husbands, gathering to extend in harmless sociable ways the home's domestic functions and women's supportive roles. There is some truth in the image. Like most auxiliaries, Bayard No. 209 first emerged as a support group for the men. Still, the auxiliary meant that for the first time the women had an organization that was theirs, a time and a place for meeting, and a structure for participating in an organized way in issues and struggles of concern to the community as a whole. (137)

There is more than some truth to the image—the Chicanas' speech has been embargoed so forcefully that even the idea of forming a "harmless" auxiliary so that they can struggle in common is beyond the realm of possibility to their husbands and brothers. Rosenfelt is correct, however: the Auxiliary does provide an organization of their own which the Chicanas use in significant ways.[13] After the Taft-

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[13] For two important studies about analogous forms of organization, see Temma Kaplan, *Taking Back the Streets: Women, Youth, and Direct Democracy* and Martha Ackelsberg, *Free Women of Spain: Anarchism and the Struggle for the Emancipation of Women*.

Hartley injunction is served, it becomes quite fortuitous that the Auxiliary exists because this body will become the committee that runs the strike.

In a subsequent meeting called to discuss the Taft-Hartley injunction, Frank Barnes, the representative from the international union, sums up the situation:

> If we obey the court, the strike will be lost… the scabs would move in as soon as the pickets disappear. If we defy the court, the pickets will be arrested and the strike will be lost anyway. […] The bosses have us coming and going. I just want to say this—no matter which way you decide, the International will back you up—as it's always backed you up. This is a democratic union. The decision's up to you. (Wilson 49)

The Taft-Hartley injunction is not an embargo on written or verbal communication, but it is an embargo on the strikers' dissent and their ability to register that dissent in a picket line. This speech is no less important than if it were written or spoken and, in this context, its performance is vital. This Taft-Hartley embargo jeopardizes the success of the strike, but also—in an important twist—it jeopardizes the strength of the embargo that the men have placed on their spouses' and sisters' speech.

During the debate, some women are seated together with the men, although most are seated at the back of the hall. The women are allowed to voice opinions, but it becomes clear that the embargo on their speech is as strong as ever. Although the men have no viable solution to the problem posed by the Taft-Hartly injunction, the women do: Teresa proposes that the women take over the picket line, because, as she argues, the Taft-Hartley injunction "only prohibits striking miners from picketing. [...] We women are not striking miners. We will take over your picket line." A "raucous male laugh" is heard, then Teresa continues: "Don't laugh. We have a solution. You have none. Brother Quintero was right when he said we'll lose fifty years of gains if we lose this strike. Your wives and children too. But this we promise—if the women take your places on the picket line, the strike will not be broken, and no scabs will take your jobs" (Wilson 52). The men are forced to choose: they can either continue the embargo on their spouses' and sisters' speech, or they can lift that embargo and begin a common struggle. Luz Morales puts a fine point on the situation when she asks, "which [is] worse, to hide behind a woman's skirt, or [for the men] to go down on [their] knees before the boss"? (Wilson 53).

The idea of the women taking over the picket line is argued forcefully, however, and when a vote is called, the gender hierarchy comes into plain view. This is a union meeting, and although the women have the ability to express themselves to a point, the men possess a greater degree of speech because the union's constitution only gives union members—not their spouses—the right to vote. This realization of the limits to their free speech causes an uproar among the women. In a remarkable exchange, Esperanza expresses the contradiction inherent in the situation:

> ESPERANZA. I don't know anything… about these questions of parliament. But you men are voting on something the women are to do, or not to do. So I think it's only fair the women be allowed to vote—especially if they have to do the job. (We hear cries of approval from the women's section, intermingled with shouted objections from some men. […] Sal [Ruís, the chair of the meeting] has to make a ruling, but he seems undecided. He glances at Charley [Vidal]. Charley winks, nods. He glances at Frank [Barnes, the international union representative]. Frank grins and nods. He clears his throat.)

SAL. Brothers… and sisters. It would be unconstitutional to permit women to vote at a union meeting. (Male applause.) If there's no objection, we could adjourn this meeting... (There are cries of protest from men and women alike. He holds up his hand.)

SAL. No, wait, wait… and reconvene this meeting as a community mass meeting with every adult entitled to a vote!

VOICE. I so move!

SECOND VOICE. Second!

SAL. All those in favor will raise their hands. (Most of the hands are raised.) Now those opposed… (Only a few hands are raised.) The ayes have it! (Wilson 54)

With this vote, the community takes a step toward lifting the embargo on the women's speech and toward becoming a more horizontal space. But this vote, though it is a significant step forward, did not completely lift the embargo on the women's speech, nor did it grant them full equality in their husband's eyes. Though the vote passes and the women do take over the picket line, several men forbid their wives from taking part, including Ramón, Esperanza's husband. Esperanza points out this hypocrisy by

saying that "the motion passed. It's... it's not democratic [for Ramón] to" stop her from participating.[14] Ramón responds by saying that "the union don't run my house" (Wilson 57).

It is only through defying Ramón that Esperanza begins to crack the embargo on her speech: as Mill and Chomsky argue, rights like free speech are won through struggle, and Esperanza's case is no different. When the sheriffs assault the women on the picket line, Esperanza watches from the sidelines. In an attempt to provoke the men into a fight, and therefore into being arrested, the sheriffs speed their cars into the women's picket line, injuring several of them.[15] When the women stop the cars, the sheriffs get out and fight with them. When the sheriffs attack, the women simultaneously repel both the sheriffs and their own husbands, who rush to join the fight. In the course of the fight, Esperanza cannot sit idly by any longer. When the deputies "lash out viciously at any woman who confronts them (61), Esperanza hoists her baby into Ramón's arms and enters the struggle. As Esperanza "comes

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[14] There is a difference here between the dialogue of the screenplay and the dialogue of the film. In the film, Esperanza says that "it's not *fair* [for Ramón] to" stop her from participating (emphasis mine).
[15] This scene of the film is largely taken verbatim from the real events of the strike. The difference is that during the actual strike, the car was driven by scabs, and during the film, the car was driven by sheriffs. For a detailed description of the incident and a photograph of Consuelo Martinez directly after she was hit by the car, see Lorence, 33.

running up" to the fight, "[s]he stops for a second, slips off her right shoe." A deputy "pulls his revolver from his holster. Esperanza whacks him over the wrist with her shoe, knocking the weapon out of his hand" (61). From this moment onward, Esperanza is a full participant in the strike, though the embargo on her speech in her own home has yet to be overcome.

The sheriff and his deputies are not commodities of the Delaware Zinc Company, exactly, but they are used like the company's other tools. The women's success on the picket line frustrates the company's representatives, prompting them to order the sheriff to arrest some of the "ring leaders. The fire-eaters" (Wilson 65). Such an act shows that the Taft-Hartley injunction was successful in what it set out to do: it kept the striking miners from picketing. It also shows that when the women took over the line, the company could not extend the injunction to cover them, so they needed to resort to extralegal tactics. No charge against the women is explicitly mentioned in the film, but the intended result is the same—to clamp down on the picketing, to embargo this specific form of speech. This intent is a complete failure however. The sheriff expects the women to accept defeat in the jail cell; the

resulting scene could not have turned out worse for the law.

The women utilize their voices to get released: they cause such a "racket" by repeatedly and methodically chanting "*Queremos comidas… Queremos camas… Queremos baños… Queremos comida…*" (70). As their chant reverberates throughout the jailhouse, one of the deputies says "I can't shut them dames up" (72), and he's right: he cannot. The degree to which the womens' voices becomes hoarse is more or less the same degree to which their speech becomes strong. This is what resistance looks like: an unflinching, unrelenting hostility to being in jail, that very concrete manifestation of a limitation on liberty. This is a limitation on one type of the women's speech—they cannot, at this moment, walk a picket line—but is it a reminder of the intangible nature of speech. The women's bodies are embargoed in the cell, but their speech itself, by virtue of its intangibility, cannot be taken away. The women exploit this weakness in their embargo to a significant degree. They shout continuously, repetitively, loudly, to the point where, in Esperanza's words, they drive the sheriff crazy (77). After three days of hoarse-voiced chanting, the sheriff lets the women go.[16]

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[16] This is reminiscent of another episode where labor activism and free speech activism intersect: the Industrial Workers of the World free

As the strike wears on, and the women keep it alive, the men, dejected and despondent, are having increasing difficulties with the idea of struggling in common with their spouses and sisters. This tension comes to a boiling point between Esperanza and Ramón near the conclusion of the film:

> RAMÓN. We can't go on this way. I just can't… go on living with you. Not this way.
>
> ESPERANZA. (softly) No. We can't go on this way. We can't go back to the old way either. (Ramón sips his coffee, glares at her.)
>
> RAMÓN. The old way? What's your "new way"? What's it mean? (Wilson 80)

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speech fights, which took place in several cities in the early part of the 20th century. One of the earliest free speech fights took place in Missoula, Montana, in 1909. When the first Wobblies, as they were called, were arrested for violating a ban on public speaking, Elizabeth Gurley Flynn and others sent out a call for others to come to Missoula and purposefully violate the law. Subsequent Wobblies filled the jail—many were arrested for reading aloud from the Declaration of Independence and the Bill of Rights—and continued to raise a ruckus in jail, which was within earshot from the city's main hotel. As Clemens P. Work writes, "[w]ith three days to go before the Western Montana Apple Show opened, with five hundred more Wobblies about to descend on Missoula, and with the growing realization that law enforcement tactics weren't working, the city council capitulated" and "declared that the IWW orators might speak where and when they pleased on the streets of Missoula, provided only that they do not impede traffic" (23). For more information, see Work, *Darkest Before Dawn: Sedition and Free Speech in the American West*; Dubovsky, *We Shall be All: A History of the Industrial Workers of the World*, especially Chapter Eight, "The Fight for Free Speech, 1909-1912; Paul Buhle and Nicole Scholman, eds. *Wobblies!: A Graphic History of the Industrial Workers of the World*; and Joyce L. Kornbluh, ed., *Rebel Voices: An IWW Anthology*.

Ramón asks an exasperated but honest question: his life has been drastically changed, but he is not the agent of that change—Esperanza is. For Esperanza, the new way is liberating, moving from hierarchical submission to a more horizontal relationship. Esperanza intends her "new way" to express the new equality between herself and Ramón, but it also has broader implications for her freedom of speech. Esperanza has chipped away at the embargo that Ramón has placed upon her, but, as the embargo is about to break, Ramón reacts violently. The moment Esperanza breaks the embargo on her speech is worth quoting at length: she asks Ramón if he is "ready to give up," to which he responds, "[w]ho said anything about giving up? I'll never go back to the company on my knees. Never. (He pulls back the bolt of the rifle [that he has been cleaning, preparing to hunt the next day], inserts a cartridge, tests the bolt.)" (81).

> ESPERANZA. You want to go down fighting, is that it? (He shrugs.) I don't want to go down fighting. I want to win. (No response. She walks over to him […].)
>
> ESPERANZA. Ramón we're not getting weaker. We're stronger than ever before. (He snorts with disgust.) They're getting weaker. They thought they could break our picket line. And they

failed. And now they can't win unless they pull off something big, and pull it off fast.

RAMÓN. Like what?

ESPERANZA. I don't know. But I can feel it coming. It's like… like a lull before the storm. Charley Vidal says...

RAMÓN. (exploding) Charley Vidal says! (He rises, flinging rifle aside.) Don't throw Charley Vidal up to me!

ESPERANZA. Charley's my friend. I need friends. (She looks at him strangely.) Why are you afraid to have me as your friend?

RAMÓN. I don't know what you're talking about.

ESPERANZA. No, you don't. Have you learned nothing from this strike? Why are you afraid to have me at your side? Do you still think you can have dignity only if I have none?

RAMÓN. You talk of dignity? After what you've been doing?

ESPERANZA. Yes. I talk of dignity. The Anglo bosses look down on you, and you hate them for it. "Stay in your place, you dirty Mexican"—that's what they tell you. But why must you say

to me, "Stay in your place." Do you feel better having someone lower than you?

RAMÓN. Shut up, you're talking crazy. (But Esperanza moves right up to him, speaking now with great passion.)

ESPERANZA. Whose neck shall I stand on, to make me feel superior? And what will I get out of it? I don't want anything lower than I am. I'm low enough already. I want to rise. And push everything up with me as I go...

RAMÓN. (fiercely) Will you be still?

ESPERANZA. (shouting) And if you can't understand this you're a fool—because you can't win this strike without me! You can't win anything without me! (He seizes her shoulder with one hand, half raises the other to slap her. Esperanza's body goes rigid. She stares straight at him, defiant and unflinching. Ramón drops his hand.)

ESPERANZA. That would be the old way. Never try it on me again—never. (81-2)

Esperanza pushes against this embargo until it begins to crack. Ramón tries to limit Esperanza's speech, demanding that she "be still," that she "shut up." When she refuses,

and he senses that the embargo on her speech is about to crack wide open, Ramón resorts to the threat of violence. In articulating her "new way," Esperanza makes a profound statement of resistance to the way Ramón treats her, to the gender hierarchy that subordinates her, and against the embargo that he has placed on her speech. Ramón is "fierce" in his effort to retain the embargo on Esperanza's speech: he tries to reinforce this embargo through force, but she has broken through. Her resistance has made her strong: her solidarity with her fellow picketers and her determination to "to rise[,] [a]nd push everything up with" her has made it possible for her to break through the embargo on her speech.

Resistance on the Commons

When she says that she wants "to rise. And push everything up with me as I go" (82), Esperanza rejects the competition of the marketplace, and suggests the cooperation of the commons instead. While competition might not be inherently bad, when it comes to the question of free speech, cooperation holds more promise. In a competition, there are winners and losers; a competition can suggest a zero sum game in which a winning idea is

accepted and a losing idea rejected. Such an approach to speech would be disastrous—it would jettison any sense of nuance in favor of simple binaries. Cooperation on the commons has a far greater potential for speech precisely because this metaphor is far more accepting of dissent, unpopular speech, or the additions, nuances, or reformulations that are beyond the binaries of simple competition. In a competitive marketplace, our option is to subtract one idea in favor of another; on a cooperative commons, the sharing of speech might be greater than the sum of its parts.[17]

In the exchange with Ramón in which she articulates her "new way," Esperanza senses that the company is going to "pull off something big, and pull it off fast" (Wilson 82). By saying this, Esperanza foreshadows the film's dénouement: in a final attempt to break the strike, the company tries to evict Esperanza and Ramón from their home. Once Esperanza and Ramón have been evicted, the company's representative reasons, evicting "the rest will be easy" (84).

As the deputies move in, the cry of "Eviction! Eviction!" rings through Zinc Town, and a swarm of people appears: the women, the men, the children, and truckloads

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[17] Cooperative ideas are reflected in the way *Salt of the Earth* was made: both Wilson's script and Biberman's film were vetted by the participants in the strike (Rosenfelt 127).

of people from surrounding communities form a "compact mass" in the space in front of the Quintero's home (88). In a scene that would make Thomas Carlyle cringe, these people appear "on the surrounding hills, on every side" (88). These "other miners, other women, other kids [are] massed, impassive" (89). When he sees this mass of people, Ramón smiles and says, "this is what we've been waiting for."

> ESPERANZA. (anxious, puzzled) What are you saying?
>
> RAMÓN. This means they've given up trying to break the picket line. (A pause.) Now we can all fight together—all of us. (Wilson 86)

At this late point, Ramón discovers that he and Esperanza can share resistance in common. In the film's final scene, the whole community—women, men, children, and allies—stand in solidarity on what, in the eyes of the Delaware Zinc Company, should be commodified space. When the deputies begin to unpack the Quintero's home and pile their belongings on the lawn, the women pick these belongings up and put them back in the house. The men, together with the crowd, stand and watch, militant expressions on their faces, communicating the idea that this mass of people, struggling in common, will resist the eviction, whether the sheriffs like it or not.

For a fleeting moment, Esperanza, Ramón, and their allies reclaim this space. What was San Marcos, what was Zinctown, is, at least momentarily, a space shared in common; a space where the company and its sheriffs have little authority and less ability to exercise that authority. At this moment, the memory of the women chanting in the jailhouse must come reverberating through the sheriff's memory. This resistance to the eviction makes one of the deputies stand "in slack-jawed bafflement" (87). The sheriff is similarly speechless, and he "wheels right and left in helpless exasperation" (87). The sheriff understands the strength of "the massed power against him" (89), but the importance of the scene goes beyond a thwarted eviction. This scene is a symbolic reclaiming of the commons. Esperanza and Ramón refuse to be evicted, but more importantly, they refuse a larger assertion: that this space can be completely commodified. Some of its aspects are beyond even the company's control.

The scene is both symbolically significant and ironic. This "mass" of Chicanas, miners, and fellow workers are assembled on the commons, but they are silent. The silence is deafening, however, especially because of the symbolism of their gesture. What is important here is not only the message—a threat that demands an end to the company's

eviction and commodification—but also the setting: fellow workers from other mines and towns have not been embargoed, but rather have been welcomed to this commons, and their cooperation only makes this resistance stronger. The moment is one of resistance through gender solidarity, resistance to gender, racial, and economic hierarchies, and, above all, resistance by inspiring the idea that this common space cannot be completely commodified.

The importance of this last scene is underscored when we remember the film's first scene: in her opening narration, Esperanza tells the audience that the identity of Zinc Town itself has been commodified by its owners. This mass of people is assembled in a company town, a space where everything (except, perhaps the flowers) is owned by the Delaware Zinc company. The company has usurped the space: it has been purchased, renamed, repackaged, and then sold back (at an intolerably high price) to its previous owners, people who are still its inhabitants. This mass swarms into the commons, standing on it, demanding with their threatening silence that the Quinteros not be evicted. The scene is proof that Esperanza and the Chicana protagonists in *Salt of the Earth* have expanded a space for their speech, and in the process, they have transformed the

exclusionary marketplace of Zinc Town into a more democratic commons.

This reclamation of the commons, although largely silent, is the performance of the swarm's speech. This swarm stands together—the men can no longer embargo the women, just like the company can no longer embargo the miner's protests. This reclamation makes one wonder, however, how such common space could be made common for more than temporary periods. How could the commons come to more directly and frequently challenge the commodification of the marketplace? Esperanza states in the film's opening narration that the story she tells is "the beginning of an end" (Wilson 3), but the act of reclaiming the commons can also be read as the end of a beginning: this symbolic reclamation might be the first step onto the commons, but in order to make this and other spaces more common, many more voices are needed.

Chapter Three

The Emergence of the Swarm in B. Traven's Jungle Novels

The swarm on the commons at the end of *Salt of the Earth* would make Thomas Carlyle cringe, but B. Traven's Jungle Novels narrate his nightmare. Traven's six novels—*Government*, *The Carreta*, *March to the Montería*, *Trozas*, *The Rebellion of the Hanged*, and *General from the Jungle*—take their collective title from their setting: the jungles of Chiapas, Mexico during the Revolution. These jungles are home to the monterías, debt slavery plantations that produce tons of dark, rich mahogany. Over the course of the novels, the monterías also produce a revolutionary consciousness: like the rough mahogany that is made into beautiful furniture, the raw material of disorganized discontent is shaped into organized rebellion. The rebels in these novels explicitly organize themselves into what Carlyle mockingly calls a "swarm," and they prove that he was right to be worried. In this chapter, I continue to dig into some of the problems of grassroots politics, focusing here on questions of free association.

A master narrative told in the Jungle Novels holds that without a hierarchical, centralized authority to direct the larger group, no social or political

organization is possible. In the Jungle Novels, the dictator, the federal army general, the montería operators, and the local *jefes politicos* tell this master narrative because it keeps them in power and keeps the peasants in their places. The peasant rebellion in the Jungle Novels tells a counternarrative about how a swarm emerges, a swarm that is organized horizontally. This swarm's counternarrative ends in ambivalence, however: a story with liberatory intentions becomes, by its end, a new master narrative. By telling this story, however, Traven's narrator reinterprets the identity of the swarm and presents us with an opportunity to analyze its limitations and possibilities for collective action and collective intelligence.

Many critics share Carlyle's skepticism of horizontalism, especially when it implies the radicalism of the democracy intended in this project. In literature and philosophy, swarms, crowds, and mobs have been condemned as antithetical to the peaceful operation of organizations and communities. Atomistic individuals supposedly have a monopoly on intelligence; when characters assemble, they are routinely portrayed as a dangerous herd: Achilles' myrmidons are a good example, as is the army in Mariano Azuela's novel *The Underdogs*, members of which question

whether their acts are moral but carry those acts out anyway. The same could be said about the vigilance committee in Mark Twain's *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*, the lynch mob in William Faulkner's *Intruder in the Dust*, or the bugs in Robert Heinlein's *Starship Troopers*. All of these examples might be summed up by one of the key aphorisms in Nietzsche's *Beyond Good and Evil*: "Madness is rare in individuals—but in groups, parties, nations, and ages it is the rule" (90).

The Jungle Novels, however, present a contrary view. As the rebels attempt to dismantle the dictatorship and all the forms of hierarchy that go with it, they are consistently represented as a swarm, but this representation is meant to be positive—even liberating. Rather than Achilles' unthinking follower-ants, when Traven's rebels attack a *finca*, a large farm that holds their fellow peasants in a form of brutal servitude, the narrator writes that "[l]ike ants, the muchachos swarmed through the rooms in the buildings" (*General* 64). Likewise, when they began their assault on Achlumal, the town that holds their debt records, "the muchachos were swarming […] from all directions" (*General* 147). Other characters in the novels also describe the rebels as a swarm, as when Gabino Villalava remarks about the "bandit gangs that are swarming

about here reducing all the *finqueros* to desperation" (*General* 275). In each of these instances, the sympathies of Traven's narrator are with the swarm.

As we will see, the tension between hierarchy and horizontalism is on full display in the Jungle Novels. In fact, the swarm's horizontalism is explicitly meant to be an alternative to the hierarchical forms of organization the rebels seek to dismantle. Martín Trinidad, the rebel nicknamed "Professor," who had been driven from several positions for teaching and agitating against the dictatorship, states that individuals who rebel are simply drowned in blood, but

> when we work together in a mass, things are different. Then a thousand heads and two thousand vigorous arms make up a superior force. That is why I've been telling you that freedom can evade us easily if we don't form a large mass and if we don't all arrive at the same time. The strongest lion is helpless in the face of ten thousand ants, who can force him to abandon his prey. We are the ants, and the owners are the lions. (*Rebellion* 231)

The authority figures in the Jungle Novels laugh at the idea that they should take these tiny ants seriously

(*General* 217). They believe that this swarm is chaotic and weak, but a threat needing a response nevertheless. Lieutenant Bailleres, a spy for the Federal army, says that "how [Juan Mendez] can be their general, I can't understand. […] No one respects him. They all address him as an equal. Eats like the rest of the gang with his fingers. Sleeps on a mat like the other swine. We can finish off that collection of animals in three hours" (*General* 182-3). One can understand Bailleres' confidence: the Jungle Novels are haunted with stories about how the Federal army and the elite *Rurales* repress strikes and mutinies, doling out severe retribution for even small acts of resistance to the authorities. One can also understand why Professor advocates adopting the identity of the swarm, however, especially because Bailleres' confidence eventually seems more like hubris: the complacency and rigidity of the Federal army ultimately leads to its defeat. The rebel victories are not without ambiguity, but the Jungle Novels show that Professor is right: "a thousand heads and two thousand vigorous arms make up a superior force" (*Rebellion* 231).

Readers may be drawn to the conflicts of force that play out across the novels, and for good reason: in painstaking ways, Traven's novels narrate the brutal

repression of Mexican society under the dictatorship and the "crescendo of violence and brutality" that completes the novels (Stone 57). When one considers that the Jungle Novels are works of historical fiction, and that conditions and characters—such as Porfirio Diaz, the dictator that the Mexican Revolution deposed—are represented with all the brutality that hierarchy can bring, it may be easy to focus on the "two thousand vigorous arms" and therefore miss the very complicated suggestion that Traven's narrator makes about this swarm's "thousand heads."

That the swarm of rebels in the Jungle Novels possesses "a superior force" is not in question. In addition to being strong, however, is the swarm also smart? The narrator writes that "No one had taught [the rebels] self-discipline, how to work without being told and supervised. […] No one had taught them how to organize their work, in order to be able to form themselves into a cooperative society" (*General* 19). Nevertheless, this rebel swarm organizes itself and completes tasks that require high levels of cooperation—not the least of which is the defeat of the better-trained, better-equipped Federal troops. How is it that the swarm in the Jungle Novels, comprised of "common people" (*General* 7) who "had been so long whipped and hanged, so long humiliated and robbed of

free speech," (*General* 20) comes to form an organization of such impressive complexity, especially when the rebels explicitly argue that they "have no chiefs or officers," (*Rebellion* 171) and that "no one any longer is superior or inferior" (*General* 59)? The narrator shows that individual actors inside the swarm are smart—the rebel General, for example, "had been, without knowing it himself, born with the gifts and talents of a great general" (*General* 85)—but is the swarm itself smart?

The evidence we find in the Jungle Novels contradicts Carlyle, Nietzsche, and others who are convinced of the shapelessness and madness that comes when people associate freely. The Jungle Novels display the tension between hierarchy and horizontalism in more detail than any of the other texts I consider in this project; over the course of these novels, Traven's narrator makes several complicated suggestions about this tension, and the capacity that both forms of organization have for collective intelligence. I will argue that Traven's narrator reinterprets the swarm in ways that show important possibilities for grassroots politics, and more specifically, that the Jungle Novels suggest that horizontal organization is not only liberatory, but that it also unleashes the capacity of collective intelligence.

I begin this chapter with an analysis of the mechanics of hierarchy in the Jungle Novels, considering the arguments that authority figures use to justify these hierarchies and analyzing how these hierarchies operate. Next, I chart the emergence of the swarm in order to consider its possibilities and limitations as a form of horizontal organization. Finally, I will unpack the ambivalent stance that Traven's narrator takes at the end of the novels. Traven's narrator leaves little doubt that dismantling hierarchical systems is a justified act, but when the rebels resuscitate hierarchical ideas, they leave us looking for other contexts in which to experiment with horizontal forms of organization.

Lions and Their Pride; Or, Plato's Epigones Redux

"Laws for the common good are all very well," B. Traven's narrator writes in *Government*, the first of the Jungle Novels, "[b]ut there must always be officials strong enough in their own sphere to go beyond or to alter or to tighten up the laws just as they see fit. Otherwise there would be no sense in a dictatorship and you might just as well have a democracy" (16). As Steven Johnson suggests in *Emergence: the Connected Lives of Ants, Brains, Cities, and*

Software, when we see organization, we frequently think in terms of rules and laws, and also in terms of rulers and lawmakers—"pacemakers," in Johnson's terms (14-5). This master narrative is so pervasive that we might assume that any organization must have a centralized authority that sets the pace or directs the larger group. This assumption is on display in the Jungle Novels: there are laws, set by the dictatorship and set by traditions of race, class, and gender hierarchies, but there are also people in various positions of authority that interpret, shape, and stretch those laws just as they see fit.

There also is a contrary view in the Jungle Novels, however. The representations of the swarm are consistent with Marina Sitrin's argument that horizontalism does not just imply a flat plane, but also democratic organization (vi). Likewise, emergence, in the technical sense of that term, is the study of the complexity of organizations—ant colonies, for example—that seem chaotic because they are not organized hierarchically. As Johnson argues, the "movement from low-level rules to higher-level sophistication is what we call emergence. [...] The intelligence of ant colonies may be the animal kingdom's most compelling argument for the power of the collective, and you can think of 'local knowledge' as another way of

talking about grassroots struggle" (18, 224). While the rebels insist that they "have no chiefs or officers" (*Rebellion* 171)—a claim that, as we will see, is more complex than the rebels' insistence—they do have a set of low-level rules. The basic ideas of their revolution, symbolized in their battle cry *¡Tierra y Libertad!*—land and liberty—lead the rebels to organize in ways that display the higher-level sophistication that Johnson calls emergence. These ideas also lead them to reject the need for masters and to construct a counternarrative.

What we have, then, are two competing ideas about organization. Traven does not present the conflict between subordinating the individual to the group or vice versa—his novels move beyond this rusty binary and make us ask completely different questions. The questions Traven's novels raise are about what forms of organization are fit for free people, about how members' intelligence can develop freely, and how this intelligence can be aggregated in ways that allow the organization itself to be smarter. In order to explore these questions, in this section I consider the ways in which the Jungle Novels represent hierarchical forms of organization. In the next section I consider how the swarm emerges as a more horizontal form of organization.

The authorities in the Jungle Novels believe that organization requires hierarchy, and these lions justify their rule as being in the best interests of their pride. The dictator Porfirio Diaz, the Federal Army General, and the montería owners, for example, see themselves on the top of a hierarchy that is, they believe, beneficial to all involved. Furthermore, they believe that they have found themselves in their lofty positions because of what they see as innately superior characteristics: light skin, Spanish heritage, wealth, male genitalia, or military cunning. They see this society as worth defending, a profitable and prosperous order that is fundamentally good.

This is an echo of an argument we have already encountered. Plato argues, like Thomas Carlyle and Samuel Huntington, that the governance of organizations as complex as nations, corporations, or communities must be left to those who have the intelligence and technical skill for such tasks. As Huntington writes, "democracy is only one way of constituting authority, and it is not necessarily a universally applicable one. In many situations the claims of expertise, seniority, experience, and special talents may override the claims of democracy as a way of constituting authority" (113). Thus, hierarchy based on

authority is believed to be in the best interests of the community.

This order requires a high degree of paternalism—a *nobless oblige* that requires the authorities to direct the lives of those beneath them. This paternalism is of a piece with the race, class, and gender hierarchies in the Jungle Novels. Paternal domination leads to degradation of the peasants, a state that deprives those peasants of their liberty. This situation of mental, physical, and economic poverty becomes another reason the authorities use to justify their paternalism. Thus the peasants find themselves in a vicious cycle.[1]

The dictator in the Jungle Novels appeals to hierarchy explicitly: "the dictator thought himself the best Mexican alive and the only Mexican whose life was of consequence" (*Government* 27). The General of the Federal troops holds a similar idea: through his "training he was gradually set apart from the common race of men and had climbed a fair number of steps nearer to the gods" (*General* 210). The General suggests that if the rebels "had been reasoning men they would never have rebelled. Uprisings, mutinies,

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[1] The characters that eventually form the swarm are variously referred to as peasants, peons, workers, proletarians, agriculturists, and other names over the course of the novels. Most come from the various Mayan communities—Tzotzil, Tseltal, Bachajontec, Huasteca, and Chol are ones Traven mentions specifically—in Chiapas and neighboring states. For the sake of consistency, I use the word "peasant" to describe these characters previous to the emergence of the swarm and "rebels" to describe them afterwards.

revolutions, are always irrational in themselves, because they come to disturb the agreeable somnolence that goes by the names of peace and order" (*Rebellion* 213). These "louse-infested, filthy Indians," the Federal General reasons, "could not think for themselves, and that was why they needed dictators and tyrants to relieve them of the burden of thinking" (*General* 47). The general's language belies the extent to which he will go to reinforce "peace and order"—a goal in the name of which he would unleash near total destruction. As we will see, the Federal General would rather massacre scores of rebels instead of letting their resistance to hierarchy upset this "peace and order." Even violent paternalism, then, is justified by a seeming care for the best interests of those "below" him.

The owners of the monterías, the debt slavery mahogany plantations, express this idea most clearly:

> [i]t is all so clear, so simple, so logical, so reasonable, that one has only to wonder why the proletariat won't understand it when they are dictated to. Once they understand for the first time and fully accept that everything done is done only for their good, that no dictator, no shareholder, thinks or has ever thought of impinging on the value of the worker or making

> him into a beast of burden, once they begin to see that people only want their good, even their best, then the time will at last be ripe when they may be counted among the reasonable, and every single proletarian will have the prospect of actually becoming a factory manager and chairman of the board of directors. (*Trozas* 37)

Therefore, we see how hierarchy and authority are conflated with rationality and "peace and order" (*Rebellion* 213). The assumption made by these authorities is that any deviation from this system is a sign of irrationality and chaos. If any peasant can work their way out of poverty, if they would just see how rationality can point the way to a better future, these masters believe, the peasants could give up their ideas of rebellion and work to climb the ladder of hierarchy rather than seeking to dismantle it.

As we will see shortly, this master narrative is told in order to conceal exactly how rigid hierarchies are in pre-Revolutionary Mexico. Traven's narrator presents a complex mix of racial, class, and gender domination, but the thread that unites all these systems of domination is the idea of hierarchy itself. Plato's epigones in the Jungle Novels like to think of themselves as benevolent fathers, not as masters, but these "fathers [would be]

transformed into monsters as soon as their paternal domination and the authority that went with it were threatened" (*General* 107). Lions sometimes need to be brutal to their pride, they believe, but these lions justify this brutality because any challenge to hierarchy or authority, no matter how small, is considered to be a challenge to "peace and order." This is why any challenge to hierarchy and authority in the Jungle Novels is treated as a capital offense. Traven's narrator writes that "the death penalty is inflicted on anyone endangering the life of any person representing authority. That includes not only El Caudillo [the dictator], but all officers, soldiers, and police forces. Even an attempt on the life of a man in authority, be it no more than a threat, is punishable with shooting or hanging" (*General* 208). The notion of hierarchy itself is jeopardized when authority is resisted, and this is why punishment is so severe. This is also why the rebel swarm emerges as an alternative to these hierarchical forms of organization.

These arguments justifying hierarchical rule are a very thin veneer, however. In painstaking detail over the course of more than a thousand pages, the Jungle Novels narrate the conditions that agitate the Mexican Revolution—

the domination of a dictator, pervasive debt slavery, military repression of strikes, rigid racial, gender, and class hierarchies—and the subsequent revolt. Jonah Raskin writes that the Jungle Novels "are among the very finest novels in any language to describe the genesis, growth, and triumph of a revolution" (226). In the Mexico that Traven describes, elections were held, but the outcome was certain (*The Carreta* 150); business flourished, but conditions for workers were reprehensible (*General from the Jungle* 142); slavery was outlawed, but a system of debt slavery cropped up in its place (*Government* 126-7). To the outside world, however, Mexico was a model of democratic peace and prosperity:

> The dictator, Don Porfirio, had astonished the world by showing in a brief space of time that the bankrupt Republic of Mexico was so flourishing that other countries could only envy its bursting treasury. It was proved by the statistics, which proved also that a great statesman had brought the Mexican people to a level of civilization and prosperity which no one would have thought possible. […] The treasury grew richer and richer, the national debt, on paper, smaller and smaller; the poverty of the

> people, ignorance, corruption, and shameless injustice were, on the other hand, more and more widely diffused. (*Government* 71)

This democratic façade is helpful, Traven's narrator suggests, to those who prospered under Porfirio Diaz; to the rest, it is horrifying.[2] As Colin Ward argues, "authoritarian institutions are organized as pyramids [with…] a small group of decision-makers at the top and a broad base of people whose decisions are *made for them* at

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[2] Traven hints at the facets of Díaz's propaganda. An example of this is José F. Godoy's book *Porfirio Díaz: President of Mexico, Master Builder of a Great Commonwealth*. Godoy's book was published, in English, in 1910, on the eve of the Mexican Revolution. The book has several prominent photographs of Díaz, including one set next to a photograph of the American president at the time, William Howard Taft. The book has fold-out maps and multi-colored charts that attest to the health of the Mexican state and economy—clearly it is an expensively-made book, the affluent audience of which might help to sway the English-reading public in Díaz's favor. Godoy writes in his preface that the "wonderful career of this great man, both owing to his military achievements and to his great success as a statesman cannot fail, and has not failed up to now, to claim the attention not only of his countrymen, but also of the whole civilized world. In the English speaking countries, the desire to have a thorough knowledge of the past deeds and present achievements of General Porfirio Díaz, is frequently manifested. The writer of this work, therefore, thinks that a book prepared like the present one and based upon accurate information, a great deal of which has been obtained through personal observation, will prove interesting to the reading public of the United States and England. It may be here stated that, in order to present the facts, as they really happened, and with preciseness and accuracy as to dates and some other circumstances, the President himself, some members of his family and his chief advisers and many of his friends, have been consulted: thereby correcting any misstatement, that unintentionally might have crept into the narrative" (iii-iv). Godoy writes that from 1904-10, "local campaigns against the Yaqui Indians in Sonora and against the Maya Indians in the new Territory of Quintana Roo were successfully terminated, and the same thing occurred with reference to the strikes in Orizaba, State of Vera Cruz, and in the Cananea Mines, State of Sonora, due to economic causes and labor agitation, but not having any political character whatever, and which were similar in effect to the strikes that have taken place in the United States during the past years; these events, however, in no way altered or disturbed the peace prevailing throughout the Republic" (93-4).

the bottom" (22, emphasis in original). This is generally true for the various hierarchical organizations in the Jungle Novels, but the situation is not quite so simple. Rather, as Traven's narrator points out, "[w]here there is a dictator at the top of the ladder, you find nothing but dictators on every other rung. The only difference is that some are higher up and others lower down" (*Government* 12). A dictator ruled the government, in collusion with business owners, intellectuals like Díaz's *científicos*, and foreign backers, but there is no simple chain of command.[3] These systems are diffuse and overlapping, but they all share the idea that hierarchy is natural and proper. The narrator suggests that the rebels do not fully grasp the systems that dominate them, but they certainly know that they want to dismantle them. Because the hierarchical systems in the Jungle Novels are so complex, it is worth quoting Traven at length to get a sense of them:

> The power which determined the fate of [the peasants] was invisible and intangible. It was impossible for them to comprehend that their fate

[3] As their name implies, the "*científicos*" brought their special talents and expertise to the "science" of government in Porfirio Díaz's dictatorship. As Frank McLynn writes in *Villa and Zapata: A History of the Mexican Revolution*, "[d]uring the *Porfiriato*, Díaz's most influential advisers were the so-called *científicos* or Mexican positivists, who believed in capitalism, industrialism, and modern technology; the despised Mexico's colonial past and Indian heritage. Most of the Mexican elite—politicians, bankers, editors, businessmen, generals—subscribed to *científico* ideals" (10).

was determined not by the agents or the contratistas of the monterías but by the dictator, whose actions, in turn, were influenced by the idea that the welfare of the Republic was guaranteed only if native and foreign capital was granted unlimited freedom and if the peon had no other object in this world than to obey and to believe that which he was ordered to believe by the authorities of the State and Church. […] This anonymous power was intrinsically interwoven with all other powers in existence. The import-export companies in New York were not sovereign in their might or influence. Their power, in turn, depended upon the good will of the hardwood import companies in London, in Liverpool, in Le Havre, in Hamburg, in Rotterdam, in Genoa, in Barcelona, in Amsterdam and in Copenhagen. And the power of all these companies again depended upon the good will of the thousands of hardwood-consuming companies and individuals which in their ramifications and branches could, in hundreds of instances, be followed to village carpenters in the smallest countries. […] [F]undamental power was so dispersed, so

> ramified, so branched out and so interlaced with all the activities of human production and human consumption" (*March* 159, 160-61).

Therefore, these systems of domination take on a mystical quality: if no one person is to blame, there is no accountability. If a person is taken out of any given hierarchy, people just shift positions, and little change is made in the pyramid itself. In this way, resistance to such tyranny is seen to be useless.

From the start, Traven's narrator attempts to convey the complexity of the systems of domination, how diffuse and pervasive they are, and the many ways that they impact the peasants. The first paragraph of *Government*, the first of the six novels, sets the scene and describes one way in which the dictatorship entices its local proxies, and extends ideas of hierarchical organization down to local communities:

> The government was represented in the eastern district by Don Casimiro Azcona. Like every other jefe politico, Don Casimiro thought first of his own interests. He served his country not for his country's good, but in order to profit at its expense. He worked better on those terms and, above all, he lived better. If a man can earn no

> more as a servant of the State than he can by running a snack bar, there is no reason whatever why he should aspire to devote his energies to his country's service. (1)

The dictatorship does not discourage these activities, but rather it promotes them. Nor is this practice isolated to any one *jefe politico*: a "dictatorship that has existed for more than thirty years had suckled too many good-for-nothings ready to defend not only the dictatorship but their bellies as well," Traven writes. "And when it's a question of defending bellies, the going is a good deal tougher than when only a superannuated dictator is trying to stick to his throne" (*General from the Jungle* 79). These proxies and beneficiaries of government largess defend the dictatorship because in doing so, they also defend their interests. Thus, over time, these systems of economic and political domination become interwoven.

Like the local government proxies, the Mexican business owners are also mindful of their place in these hierarchical systems. The amount of money at stake in the monterías is a powerful motivation to keep their workers in their places and to trump any concern those owners might have for the peasants who work in those monterías:

> Mahogany, when landed at New York, sold for seventy to a hundred dollars a ton, depending on the market. At such a price it was impossible to take the so-called rights of Indians literally, or any of those phrases about comradeship and respect for humanity. In the proper conduct of any business that is to show a profit there is no time for dealing with phrases and ideas of world betterment. […] You cannot have cheap mahogany and at the same time save all those innocent Indians who perish by the thousands in the jungle to get it for you. It must be either one or the other. Either cheap mahogany or respect for the humanity of the Indian. The civilization of the present day cannot run to both, because competition, the idol of our civilization, cannot tolerate it. Pity? Yes—with joyfulness and a Christian heart. But the dollar must not be imperiled. (*Government* 228-9)

In this competition between profit and concern for the workers, profit easily wins. The montería owners find reasons to justify their atrocities, and these reasons are directly linked to the ways that the dictatorship operates in order to maintain its power. "It was […] a highly

patriotic activity to supply the coffee plantations and the monterías with labor and to keep the supply constant; it was just as important as dying gloriously and miserably for the honor of your country" (*Government* 128). Whenever the montería owners were questioned about the reasons for their domination, they "had only one line of defense—patriotism: nothing they did was done for business reasons, still less from greed, but simply from genuine and unalloyed patriotism" (*Government* 133). This patriotism has a strong allure, and it suggests that deception and pathetic manipulation contribute to the complexity of the attempts to dominate the peasants and to maintain positions of power.

The people in positions of authority are not homogenous, nor is there a single hierarchy that unites them. As Traven's narrator shows, the situation is far more complex:

> It was not only the dictator who ruled. The big industrialists, the bankers, the feudal lords, and landowners had the well-defined duty of assuring the dictator's domination. But these lofty personages at times also had something to decree on their own account. They did not do it themselves, but forced their leader, the

> dictator, to decide in their favor. In this way they could enchain the people, supporting their acts with laws. If they had taken it on themselves to make decisions openly, the people would have soon seen that the leader served only to fill the pockets of the powerful. Dictating to the dictator what he should decree, however, they had their wishes published as being in the interests of the State, and thus they deceived many sincere patriots. (*The Rebellion of the Hanged* 200)

When financial interests become indistinguishable from the "public interest," this becomes a potent weapon for deception and domination. Those nearer the top of this hierarchy clearly profit from confusing public interests and property interests, so they have a clear incentive to maintain the current state of affairs and the collusion between business and the dictatorship.

This hierarchy is aimed at keeping profits unchecked, but it is also aimed at keeping the population in its subordinate position. We can see why the rebels would adopt a more horizontal organization as an alternative to this hierarchy, but the methods of domination in the Jungle

Novels—which range from subtle ideological coercion to overtly violent means—illustrate the point even better. These methods take various forms: few children go to school in the Jungle Novels, but when they do, they find that the curriculum is designed to reinforce racial, class, and gender hierarchies. A system of debt slavery is used to produce a constant stream of cheap labor for the monterías. The military is used to keep the population pacified. Torture is used as a means to make sure that the workers submit to the orders of their overseers.

In *Government*, the local *jefe politico*, Don Gabriel, takes it upon himself to teach the children of his village. His main method of instruction is rote memorization, and the basic facts that he drills into his students reinforce patriotic myths. When the students were able to recite the few lines he made them memorize, phrases like "The governor rules the state uprightly and well" and "the president of the country is a general and a good and wise man," (*Government* 41), Don Gabriel

> would take it as a compliment to himself and recognize that the boys were being brought up to respect his authority. The dictator would have no need to fear that when they grew up they would be rebellious and demand their rights, if the

> machinery worked so well at a simple word of command. Once this was drilled into them in their youthful years, the dictator or the archbishop had only to shout 'Atención!' and they would all forget that they had come to claim their rights and liberties. (*Government* 34)

This type of education paid great dividends to the authorities over the course of the novels. Schools and churches are institutions of ideological coercion in the Jungle Novels, where patriotism and submission are the curriculum and the dogma.

This mental domination fulfils its goals to a significant degree, but it is not sufficient by itself to dominate the public. Economic coercion is, perhaps, the most potent tool the authorities wield to keep "peace and order." While "slavery was strictly forbidden and severely punished,"

> debt was not slavery. A man, any man, was as free to contract debt as not to contract it; and if a debt was forced upon him, under threat of death or by torture, then it was not accounted a debt by law. [...] There was no reason to call Mexico uncivilized because the dictatorship recognized debt and supported the creditor in exacting

> payments. He who has contracted a debt must pay it—that was good old Roman justice, respected by every country which called itself civilized. If the debtor could not pay in money he had to pay with whatever else he had. If he had nothing but his labor he had to pay with his labor. (*Government* 126-7)

At best, workers took on debt for the necessities of life, and when a parent would die, their debts were passed on to their children (*March to the Montería* 198); at worst, peasants would be tricked and cheated into debt. Contrary to "good old Roman justice," forced debt is pervasive in the Jungle Novels. Wages, of course, were far below a workers' expenses: the "hard workers, the fellers and boyeros, earned [...] four or five reales a day, but for that they also had higher advances and debts, and moreover higher deductions for inadequate production and higher payment to the kitchen. It was all so fair, every one of them needed between six thousand and ten thousand years to be absolved of his debts through his work" (*Trozas* 165).

The narrator frequently hints at how far the dictator and the montería owners will go to dominate the public. When workers or peasants would rebel or strike, the dictator, in collusion with the montería owners, would not

hesitate to send in federal troops or the *rurales* to put the strike down. The *rurales* "were the instrument of terror, by which [the dictator] mercilessly and ruthlessly repressed the slightest resistance or criticism of his authority" (*General from the Jungle* 5).[4] In the Jungle Novels, the *rurales* are a specter, always present in the minds of the peasants, and always ready to be called up by the dictator. Traven's narrator tells the story of one such episode:

> When, as happened in several of the textile workers' strikes, the officers of the army refused to undertake—after the suppression of the strike—a bestial slaughter of the now humbled and conquered men and women workers, as ordered by El Caudillo, [the dictator,] a troop of *Rurales* was marched at top speed to the region. And there what the army officers had refused to do the *Rurales* carried out with such brutality that in the general massacre no one was spared who had the misfortune to find himself in that quarter of the workers' town which had been cordoned off by

[4] The *rurales* in the Jungle Novels are represented as terror personified. Historians have taken a more complex view, however. The *rurales* were brutal in their repression of strikes and mutinies, but they were also highly symbolic with their new weapons and sharp uniforms. They were also frequently less than an efficient fighting force—Frank McLynn calls the *rurales* "corrupt and incompetent," and as such, they "were a fitting symbol of a lazy, corrupt and unpopular regime" (22, 23).

> the *Rurales*. Workers and non-workers, women, children, old people, the sick—no distinction was made between them. And that happened, not during a strike, but days, often weeks, after the strike had ended, when the workers had returned to the factories and the whole district was entirely quiet. It was the law of retribution and vengeance which the dictator invoked as a warning to all those who disagreed with him as to the benefits of the glorious, golden age which he, El Caudillo, had brought to his people. (*General from the Jungle* 5-6)

Juan Méndez, the montería worker who would become the rebel general, confirms this, saying that when he was a sergeant in the federal army he "saw [the *rurales*] take part in suppressing strikes and punishing runaway peons" (*The Rebellion of the Hanged* 195).[5]

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[5] One of these "textile workers' strikes" is probably the strike at Rio Blanco near Veracruz in January 1909 which, in his book *Barbarous Mexico*, John Kenneth Turner calls "the bloodiest strike in the labor history of Mexico" (167). After the strikers had lost, they dejectedly appealed to the mill's company story to advance them food until their next pay came. When they were refused, the starving workers burned the company store to the ground. Fighting erupted between the workers and the army, and by the end of the conflict, as John Mason Hart writes in *Revolutionary Mexico: the Coming and Process of the Mexican Revolution*, "the army killed almost two hundred workers, and the number of wounded defies estimate. Four hundred workers were taken prisoner. Armed workers killed approximately twenty-five soldiers in just over twenty-four hours of fighting. They wounded between thirty and forty soldiers" (71). The stories of the strike and subsequent fighting spread quickly—as well as into Traven's novel—and they fomented both worker revolt and revolutionary ideas.

This violence is ominous, looming throughout the novels. The narrator writes that anyone "who had other ideas concerning human rights was whipped or otherwise tortured until he changed his opinion, or was, with the blessing of the Church, shot if he spread such ideas" (*March to the Montería* 159). Such violence is not only shown in whispers of past events. The Jungle Novels are filled with vivid scenes of torture, such as the hanging of montería workers. The workers are not hanged by their necks, but rather by their limbs, and sometimes by their ears and noses. Kenneth Payne, one of the few scholars who has written on Traven's fiction comments on this moment.[6] In his essay "*The Rebellion of the Hanged*: B. Traven's Anti-Fascist Novel of the Mexican Revolution" Payne writes that

> The worker found "guilty" of not reaching his quota [of four tons of mahogany per day] is taken

[6] Traven's Jungle Novels have received relatively little scholarly attention, but more attention has been devoted to assembling the details of Traven's enigmatic biography. Richard E. Mezo, in one of the few book-length works to treat Traven's fiction, writes that "an enormous amount of effort has been expended upon the biographical questions concerning Traven, but surprisingly little has been devoted to his work" (xiv). Unfortunately, at this point, Mezo's words are still correct. For more information about the efforts to understand Traven's biography, see the two articles by Judy Stone in *Ramparts*, and her subsequent book, *The Mystery of B. Traven*. Other notable titles in this area are Michael L. Baumann's *B. Traven: An Introduction*, Karl S. Guthke's *B. Traven: The Life Behind the Legends*, and Will Wyatt's *The Secret of the Sierra Madre*. Traven kept his identity so secret that one imagines that a contemporary audience may not know of Traven at all, had it not been for the 1948 film version of Traven's novel *The Treasure of the Sierra Madre*, directed by John Huston and starring Humphrey Bogart. The most relevant aspect of Traven's biography to my argument is the author's professed anarchism—a philosophy that is consistent with the critique of hierarchy that we find in the Jungle Novels.

> out into the forest at night and hung from a tree by his four limbs. This is the [montería owners'] own "new invention," says one of the cutters, Santiago, and another of the men explains how the victim's nostrils and ears are smeared with fat in order to attract insects—a refinement introduced to ensure that an uncooperative victim will cooperate fully in his own punishment on future occasions. (101)

This torture is designed to coerce the workers into submission, but it is also designed in such a way that it would not do permanent damage to the workers. "These hangings were all the more terrifying and destructive of any resistance" Traven's narrator writes, "because they were not deadly. Had they caused death they would have been less impressive. The coyotes never hanged anyone with the intention of killing them. A dead man would not have brought them any money. Only the live brought returns" (*March to the Montería* 72-3). Any challenge to the authority of the montería owners or managers is met with a torturous response, and the point of hanging is to cultivate a high degree of submissive behavior in the workers. This domination is very effective, but even this

method of coercion, extreme though it may be, has its limitations.

Santiago, one of the montería workers, says that "human beings can become like oxen or donkeys and remain impassive when they're beaten or goaded, but only if they've succeeded in suppressing all their natural instinct to rebel" (*Rebellion* 64-5). This "natural instinct to rebel" is not suppressed completely. As we will see, when these peasants begin to associate freely, they find that, as Santiago says in *The Rebellion of the Hanged*, "[t]he day will come when we too will be hanging and unhanging. And when we approach them it will be not to accept blows, but to give them" (72). When hanged and smeared with fat, the peasants fight against the ants. When the peasants become rebels, the insects will switch sides.

The Emergence, Possibilities, and Limitations of the Swarm

Noam Chomsky echoes Santiago's idea when he writes that, in response to conditions like those in the Jungle Novels, "it only makes sense to seek out and identify structures of authority, hierarchy, and domination in every aspect of life, and to challenge them; unless a justification for them can be given, they are illegitimate,

and should be dismantled, to increase the scope of human freedom" ("Hope" 178). As the preceding pages show, there can be little justification found for such brutal hierarchies; the question for us then, is to examine how the rebels in the Jungle Novels go about this task, and how Traven's narrator reinterprets the swarm in the process.

As Payne writes, "Traven's novel[s] spoke loudest as a statement of revolutionary inevitability, albeit grounded in the actualities of Latin-American history. In the words of Martín Trinidad, Traven's Professor, the novel[s] demonstrate that 'the Dictatorship and tyranny are neither invulnerable nor invincible'" (106). As we will see, the swarm emerges as an alternative to the more hierarchical systems that dominate the rebels. This emergence is slow, and at the end of the novels the rebels resuscitate hierarchical ideas, but Traven's narrator suggests that horizontal forms of organization show important possibilities for grassroots politics.

While *Government*, the first of the Jungle Novels, outlines the complex ways that the various Mayan communities are governed, the hierarchies beyond those communities continually seek to impose themselves. The early Jungle Novels illustrate a dystopian society, where resistance is present, but limited. Traven's narrator

writes that, in the early novels, "whatever the men undertook or thought of undertaking was done individually, everyone for himself and everyone in his own personal way. […] There was no link of comradeship or any inclination for mutual assistance" (*March to the Montería* 109, 111). As is painfully shown in several examples, like single ants against a lion, individual resistance is weak when compared to the power and resources of the montería owners or the dictator. These "link[s] of comradeship" and "inclination[s] for mutual aid" are learned slowly throughout the Jungle Novels, but when these lessons are finally learned, the rebels discover that they possess a remarkable degree of power and intelligence.

This slow emergence begs a question: how is it that a group of protagonists, each of whom are limited in terms of intelligence and ability (and alas, this does not only apply to peasants and rebels) are able to display complexity in their group behavior? Traven's narrator repeatedly says that the rebels' "idea of the rebellion was limited to the simple thoughts: 'Down with the dictatorship!' 'Down with tyrants and oppressors!'" (*General* 67). While several "pacemakers" are present in the swarm—namely General, Professor and other leaders like Celso—the very limited and abstract ideas about "*¡Tierra y*

Libertad!" serve as organizing principles to a far greater degree than these pacemakers do. It is these ideas about *"¡Tierra y Libertad!"* then, that are the low-level rules that aggregate to form high-level organization.[7] Although each rebel had different, sometimes contrasting interpretations of these ideas, these ideas provide an intellectual scaffolding upon which to build something much larger. Furthermore, it is precisely because the ideas of *"¡Tierra y Libertad!"* are vaguely defined that these low-level ideas result in high-level organization. If the ideas were rigid they would bind the rebels' actions rather than offering the parameters without which any organization could be possible. Rather than an idea given from above and enforced, the ideas symbolized by *"¡Tierra y Libertad!"* are plastic enough to allow the rebels to operate in a very broad framework. In other words, while some orders flow from the top down in this particular swarm, its greater pacemaker is a set of ideas, not a set of leaders.[8]

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[7] The rebels in the Jungle Novels, like Emiliano Zapata and many of the Mexican Revolutionaries, adopt the phrase *"¡Tierra y Libertad!"* as coined by Ricardo Flores Magón, a radical journalist and activist for the Mexican Liberal Party. For more information, see the collections of Flores Magon's writings, especially *Dreams of Freedom: A Ricardo Flores Magón Reader* and *Land and Liberty: Anarchist Influences in the Mexican Revolution*. For a scholarly study of Flores Magón's influence on the Mexican Revolution and his subsequent persecution, see Colin M. MacLachlan, *Anarchism and the Mexican Revolution: The Political Trials of Ricardo Flores Magón in the United States*.

[8] Actual ants go much further than Traven's rebels do with emergent organization. Ant colonies have no centralized, directing authority figure, but they do have a complex set of relatively low-level rules—about food gathering, reproduction, tending for the dead, and the like—

One of the earliest moments where we can see swarm intelligence begin to emerge is in *March to the Montería*, the third novel in the series. At this point, an overseer, Don Anselmo, is driving a "large group" of Indians to the montería known as "La Harmonia"—"harmony" (*Trozas* 87). Don Anselmo's mind begins to wander when some in the group begin to shout at him. At this point,

> Don Anselmo was afraid. Suddenly it dawned upon him that he had placed himself in a most dangerous situation. […] For the first time he fully realized that he was alone in the depths of the jungle with a large group of Bachajon Indians who, because of their rebellious nature, had the worst reputation in the whole state. They certainly had not the slightest interest whatever in his life or in his well-being. On the

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that combine, on a large scale, to show staggering organization. As Deborah M. Gordon writes in *Ants at Work: How an Insect Society is Organized*, "the basic mystery about ant colonies is that there is no management. A functioning organization with no one in charge is so unlike the way humans operate as to be virtually inconceivable. There is no central control. No insect issues commands to another or instructs it to do things in a certain way. […] Somehow […] small events create a pattern that drives the coordinated behavior of colonies" (vii). Watchers of Disney movies might object at this point and raise questions about the ant queen, but, as Gordon points out, calling the ant queen a queen says more about human ideas of hierarchical organization than it does about how ant colonies actually operate. "[A]lthough 'queen' is a term that reminds us of human political systems," Gordon writes, "the queen is not an authority figure. She lays eggs and is fed and cared for by the workers. She does not decide which worker does what" (118).

> contrary, they had no wish whatever to see him alive and happy. He knew that he was completely defenseless and at their mercy. He was a good enough marksman to shoot six of them, but the twenty left alive would not give him time to recharge his gun. (*March to the Montería* 123-4)

Even though Don Anselmo possesses the power to "shoot six of them," the peasants, if they were to cooperate, could prove that they possess a greater degree of power than Don Anselmo does. At this stage in the swarm's evolution, however, these rebels in waiting are more like individual ants who decide to take on the lion.

Sensing that Don Anselmo is weaker than they are, two of the group attack him. Sensing that this attack is immanent, Don Anselmo reaches for his gun.

> At the same time that he drew his gun his horse received a powerful blow on the rump with the broad side of a machete from one of the men who had jumped from a cup and landed close to the horse. […] Immediately he got up […] The Indian hit him a blow with the sharp edge of his machete straight across the face. Then another Indian came from behind and struck Don Anselmo a terrific blow on the right shoulder. The blow had

> been aimed at the head. If it had landed true that would have been the end of the fight. (*March to the Montería* 128)

This last machete blow did not hit its expected target, however, and Don Anselmo is able to fight off his attackers. Once the rest of the "large group" sees that Don Anselmo is able to fight off his attackers, they sit idly by. Traven's narrator falls on a racial stereotype to explain why the others did not join the fight:

> Indians, although by nature highly intelligent, have, as a rule, little experience for organization. The Bachajones, true to their race, did not know how to organize the situation they had created to their advantage. Unable to keep the final end in view, all those who had not actively participated in the fight simply sat where they had been sitting before the struggle started. […] If one of them had had the sense to yell: "Now, come on, let's finish him," that would have signaled the end. But nobody did anything. The two who had launched the attack were now worrying about themselves. They did not think of attempting a second attack. And the old feeling of submission, of obedience and respect

> for the ladino rapidly regained its hold on their minds. They turned completely humble. By just wiggling his finger Don Anselmo could have ordered any of them, even his two attackers, to come close. And the man would have come, saying in a sheepish way: "*A sus órdenes, patroncito*, at your service." (*March to the Montería* 129-30)

But this episode is only the beginning of the characters' growing awareness. Once the group reaches the montería, the story of the fight spreads through the workers. "In the montería [Don Anselmo] was asked how he had gotten his wounds. He said that one of the men had hit him with a machete and then run away. He did not go into details. In due time, however, the circumstances of the case became known, because some of the men told them to fellow workers at the montería" (*March to the Montería* 142). These ideas spread, and the incident with Don Anselmo plays a formative role in the swarm's emergence.[9]

Moments like the fight with Don Anselmo begin to accumulate. In *Trozas*, the fourth novel in the series, Don Severo, one of the montería overseers, begins to suspect that he can no longer count on torture or other means to

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[9] The story of this fight spreads through the montería in much the same way it spread into Traven's fiction. As Heidi Zogbaum points out, this episode is taken almost verbatim from Chiapas folklore (125-6).

dominate the workers. One day, at the end of work, Don Severo

> saw that all the lads, already prepared for the journey home, were standing together in a group, that they all had machetes in their hands and were all looking at him. He didn't know whether the lads intended just to make a challenging impression or whether they seriously thought of attacking him. He thought it wisest not to decide the question definitely there and then. He casually dropped his arm with the whip and said: "You could surely have done a bit more today to get the trail ready quicker. Maybe you're right, you're tired. But you'll all be up at twelve! I shall be calling you. The trozas from up there must all be at the tumbo tomorrow. Don Severo has ordered that expressly." Without waiting for an answer, he turned his horse and rode off. (*Trozas* 248)

This is a key moment in the novels. Don Severo knows that the peasants make up a superior force, and the workers know it too. This moment is not quite an epiphany for the workers, because the awareness of their power evolves slowly over the course of the novels, rather than in a

single moment of illumination. This is a tipping point in the narrative, however. Very soon *Trozas*, the fourth novel, comes to a close, and the fifth novel, *Rebellion of the Hanged*, begins. *Rebellion* and *General from the Jungle*, the last novel, show how the rebels break into open warfare. Once they leave the montería, the rebels "would destroy every form of authority they met" (*The Rebellion of the Hanged* 199). They burn debt records and destroy anything they believe contributes to their domination. They also begin at this moment to exhibit the signs of emergent horizontal organization.

The first time the rebels are characterized as a swarm is also the first time they fight their domination in a way that shows successful coordination. When the overseer nicknamed El Gusano—the worm—threatens to rape Modesta, Celso's companion, Celso spontaneously attacks El Gusano. For a moment, it looks as if Gusano might escape. As opposed to the earlier attack on Don Anselmo, however, the rebels realize that the "comedy has lasted long enough" (*Rebellion* 166) and they join Celso to kill Gusano. For a moment, the rebels seem like Carlyle and Nietzsche's stereotypical mob—crazy with the blood of Gusano, they immediately, magnetically start off to find the other

overseers on the finca. Celso and Martín Trinidad, however, interject:

> "Hey!" Celso shouted. "Come on, everybody. We have to think. We must make plans. [...] First we're going to think what we must do and how to do it. If we rush in crazily it won't cost us anything to take over the office. But then? You know very well that there are overseers in every corner of the jungle and that the other men don't yet know anything about our plans. The overseers can all get together and finish us off easily. They're all well mounted and armed. They can gallop to outside camps for reinforcements, and we can't win against them. Listen to what Martín Trinidad told you—he speaks the language of reason. Let's stay here and talk it over. If we make useful decisions now, we won't have to regret them later." (*Rebellion* 164, 165-6)

The rebels "sat in a circle" (*Rebellion* 164) to discuss their plans, which include methods of stealing arms and ammunition, the degree of "pity," if any to have toward the overseers, and, importantly, the ideas that motivate the rebellion. The meaning of "Land and Liberty," while never explored very deeply by the rebels, is discussed at some

length in this moment. "We must raise all the men suffering in the camps," Trinidad says. "The peons must be free—all of them, absolutely all. […] All of them must have their patches of land that they can cultivate in peace, and the harvests must by for them only and for nobody else. That is land and liberty!" (*Rebellion* 165).

After some additional preparation, the rebels begin their attack on the finca. When they arrive at the main house, it is Don Severo, the overseer who first got a hint of how threatening rebels can be, who meets them. Realizing that something grave is about to happen, Don Severo "stuck out his chest, and tried to look as though he believed in his own authority" (*Rebellion* 178). When the rebels laugh in response, Don Severo shouts, "[b]ut, men, what is it you want?" The rebels shout in return that they "want to go back to our people. We don't want to work now! We want our freedom! We're going to set free all the men on the fincas and in the lumber camps! Land and Liberty!" (*Rebellion* 179). As Don Severo falls, he is sure that he had fired seven times at the rebels, "because the chamber of his pistol was empty when the men burst into the office. They swarmed in a mass from the open space and the slope. Not one of those who had arms fired a shot. They attacked the foremen with sticks and rocks" (*Rebellion* 180).

It is significant that the first mention of the swarm comes at this moment. Traven's coupling of swarm imagery and freely associated rebels is more than just a coincidence—it is, rather, indicative of a change in how the rebels cooperate. They are no longer single ants fighting against lions, but now a swarm. As such, they coordinate their activities, confer together, and act in cohesive ways—all without the authorities that formerly directed them. This in and of itself is significant: although the rebels will soon designate a general and adopt a command structure for their army, they repeatedly assert that all the rebels are equal, and that they "have no chiefs or officers," (*Rebellion* 171) and that "no one any longer is superior or inferior" (*General* 59). The rebel swarm is not a flat plane—some rebels are leaders, some are foot soldiers—but it is clear that the rebels explicitly attempt to organize themselves in more horizontal ways. It is also clear that they do so without any contribution from montería overseers, government officials, or Federal army generals who argue that "louse-infested, filthy Indians […] could not think for themselves, and that was why they needed dictators and tyrants to relieve them of the burden of thinking" (*General* 47).

From this point on, there is now way to contain the rebels. On their march, "they would destroy every form of authority they met. They would kill all the finqueros, bosses, aristocrats, and white men and would enlist all the peons and workers being held as slaves" (*Rebellion* 199). More formal aspects of organization begin to emerge, such as a council of war, which deliberates and decides the direction of the rebellion (*Rebellion* 198-9), but at the moment when their organization emerges, so does the ambivalence of their goal: "nobody seemed to ask himself what would happen once everything had been destroyed. Even Martín Trinidad had only a vague picture of what might happen later" (*Rebellion* 199). Even though the rebels "argued animatedly" about the tasks that were ahead of them, they had little appreciation for the "windbags of revolution," who "talk and talk" (*Rebellion* 239, 238). This swarm is an army, not a debating society, but compared to the Federal army, a hierarchical organization that has very little value for debate or discussion, the swarm seems like it takes with it a mobile commons, and at moments of relative calm, the rebels discuss and debate—albeit in limited ways, the narrator always points out—the ideas of their revolution, especially of their battle cry, "*¡Tierra y Libertad!*"

From this moment on, the Jungle Novels illustrate how "a thousand heads and two thousand vigorous arms make up a superior force" (*Rebellion* 231). Building to a crescendo, the rebels "swarm out fanlike over the terrain" (*General* 44). When confronted, "the well-drilled, smartly riding *Rurales* [believed] that nothing could bring order out of this panic-stricken mob," and they are partly right (*General* 46). The *Rurales* can no longer bring "order" to these rebels, but they are no mob. They are a swarm, and this misunderstanding is costly. This assumption of disorder, of irrationality, this assumption that any effective organization would need to be "led by knowledgeable officers," (*General* 47) proves fatal. When the first real battle is over, literal ants pick up where the metaphorical ants end: moments after the rebels successfully end their fight, "the mangled remains of the *Rurales* were already swarming thickly with red ants" (*General* 54).

Traven's narrator leaves little doubt that the rebels win each military encounter they enter, and in these encounters, Traven frequently uses the language of the swarm. At subsequent stops on their march, "like ants, the muchachos swarmed through the rooms in the buildings" (*General* 64). Along the way, literal insects continue to

fight on the side of the rebels. "At this time of year," Traven writes, "the insects are particularly numerous and even more bloodthirsty. Quite apart from the discomfort of their stings, they fall in swarms into the soups and sauces of the diners and swim lustily in every wine or water glass. So, for even the most hardened toper, a lengthy session at table is generally more of a torment than a pleasure" (*General* 126). At Achlumal, "the muchachos were swarming […] from all directions" (*General* 147), and as the final novel ends, Gambino Villalava makes it seem as if the rebels are omnipresent "gangs that are swarming about here and reducing all the *finqueros* to desperation" (*General* 275).

Although the swarm's "two thousand vigorous arms make up a superior force" (*Rebellion* 231), what does Traven's narrator suggest about the swarm's "thousand heads"? What do the Jungle Novels suggest about collective intelligence? The answer, in part, is in how Traven's narrator reinterprets the swarm over the course of the novels. If military intelligence counts toward determining the intelligence of the swarm, the swarm itself clearly possesses some intelligence. Strength is not evidence of higher-level intelligence, however, so we are left to ask

if there are other characteristics of the swarm that make it intelligent.

Just as there is strength in numbers, the same idea might hold for intelligence: multiple brains are better than a single brain, just like "two thousand vigorous arms" make up a superior force. But this idea also leads to a dead end—in the Federal Army, too, there are multiple brains. The difference is in how intelligence is aggregated in different groups. In more hierarchical organizations, where decision-making power resides at the top, the judgment of a relatively few experts almost always has opportunities for expression, and the lower one goes, those opportunities become more seldom. This is a generalization, of course, but it is a generalization for which we can find ample evidence in the Jungle Novels. We may even say that the Federal General's unwillingness to incorporate the intelligence of his soldiers causes his defeat.

Whereas the rebel General is portrayed as contemplative and empathetic (*General* 42), the Federal General consistently refuses to admit that the rebels pose a military threat. In "an example of the atrophied powers of thought of all those who occupy a public office or a position of responsibility under a dictatorship" (*General* 208), the Federal General is approached by one of his

sergeants, who, after first asking permission to speak, offers the most tepid of comments: "I think, sir, that there's something not quite right in this whole affair, if I may put it like that, sir" (*General* 207). With a "paternal smile still on his fat, rosy lips," the General "said indulgently and patronizingly, 'Sergeant Morones, your question and your observation do you credit. They show that you are an excellent soldier, able to think for yourself and weigh unusual occurrences'" (*General* 207-8). The General dismisses the Sergeant, however, by saying that the rebels "are yellow cowards, and they all behave just as one would expect of such riffraff" (*General* 208). The sergeant is unsatisfied by the General's response, but

> as a dutiful and experienced soldier who, moreover, knew that his promotion to officer depended on always conceding one's superiors to be in the right, always being tactful toward higher-ups, and not concerning oneself with matters not expressly entrusted to one, he carefully avoided even mentioning any doubts that still lingered in his mind after his commanding officer had expounded his opinion. (*General* 209)

Hubris, sycophancy, and submission to authority make a deadly combination for the Federal army. Traven's narrator

writes that "[m]uddled thinking becomes a virtue under a dictatorship, but in a democracy it is simply regarded as laziness" (*General* 214). Traven's narrator suggests that the weaknesses of hierarchical organizations are that they stifle free thinking and that they cannot aggregate the collective intelligence of its members. A more horizontal organization would find ways to unleash the intelligence of its members and to aggregate their intelligence in ways that makes the organization itself smart—clearly this is the strength of the swarm, and it is one of the major factors of its victory.

Whereas the Federal army is rigidly hierarchical, the rebel army attempts more horizontal forms of organization, though not completely. The rebel army has several characteristics in common with the Federal army, not the least of which is that it too, has a general and a command structure. But the rebels express their belief in free speech and debate frequently throughout the novels. Although Traven's narrator argues that independent thought takes time to develop (*General* 19), at several moments, we see the rebels engaged in discussion, debating tactics and strategy, but also discussing their views on the revolution's goals. The narrator frequently points out how

the rebels "had never been allowed freedom of expression; every possibility of communication and discussion had been denied them" (*Rebellion* 200). This is clearly a lament, but it is also meant as a wedge to separate and distinguish the swarm as a horizontal form of organization from the Federal army, which is far more hierarchical.

If we couple the distinction between the two armies with the fact that Traven's narrator all but points to the Federal General's hubris and dismissal of dissenting ideas as a reason for the Federal army's defeat, we see that the narrator has reinterpreted the idea of the swarm itself: rather than the unthinking, irrational swarm of Thomas Carlyle's imagination, Traven's narrator suggests that horizontal organization is not just liberatory, but that it also is the form of organization most able to unleash the intelligence of its members and to aggregate that intelligence in ways that make the organization itself smart. The more horizontal the organization, Traven's narrator suggests, the greater the capacity for collective intelligence; the more hierarchical the organization, the greater the chances are for thought to atrophy.

Hierarchy Redux

Traven's narrator would prefer a horizontal organization without any residue of hierarchy, but he does not represent the rebel swarm as such. As a result, Traven's narrator's ideas about horizontal organization are pronounced, but the narrator's stance on the rebels' actions conveys a deep ambivalence. The narrator leaves little doubt that the rebels are justified in their attempts to dismantle the hierarchies that dominate them, but the situation grows murky when those rebels resuscitate hierarchical ideas in their own organization. When the rebels begin to display characteristics that resemble the structures of domination that they had sought to dismantle, Traven's narrator has a difficult needle to thread. The rebels are committed to the idea of an egalitarian society, one in which "land and liberty" are the goals, and where all are equal. In early interactions between the rebels and the peasants they meet, the rebels quickly correct the peasants when they defer to the rebels' authority. Even the rebel General voices his devotion to the egalitarian ideals of the revolution: "I'm not your chief!" General says to a group of peasants. "I'm your friend and comrade. We are all comrades. There are no more bosses, no patrons, no major-domos, no *capataces*" (*General from the Jungle* 69). The situation is more complex, however, than General suggests

it is. Besides the fact that the rebel army has several hierarchical features—a fact which undercuts General's claim of an abolition of hierarchy—there is also the uncomfortable fact that the rebels

> were mounted on proud horses, and they carried weapons. And whoever came riding on such fine horses, and had revolvers and rifles, and fought with *Rurales* must be a new master, probably a crueler, more relentless and unjust master than the former one. What happened at this *finca* now was exactly the same as occurred later throughout the whole Republic: the peons, accustomed for years to masters, tyrants, oppressors, and dictators, were not in truth liberated by the revolution, not even where the feudal estates were divided among the families of peons in little holdings, in *ejidos*. They remained slaves, with the single difference that their masters had changed, that mounted revolutionary leaders were now the wealthy, and that the politicians now used small-holding, ostensibly liberated peons to enrich themselves immeasurably, to increase their political influence, and, with the help of the now independent peons, whom murder and

> bestialities kept in a constant state of fear and terror, were able to commit every conceivable crime in order to become deputy or governor, and that with no other intention than to fill their chests and coffers with gold to overflowing. (*General from the Jungle* 60-1)

What began as an attempt to articulate a counternarrative to hierarchy becomes, to some degree, a new master narrative. Traven's narrator seeks to put the violence of the rebels in perspective by arguing that the rebels' "acts could not be taken as proofs of cruelty, because their adversaries and oppressors were a hundred times more savage and cruel than they when safeguarding their interests" (*Rebellion* 200-1). This is undoubtedly true, but especially when one considers that, as historical fiction, there is no bright line between the events in the Jungle Novels and the events of the actual Mexican Revolution, it is not satisfactory, either.[10]

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[10] Like much of the material for his novels, Traven takes this ambivalence from the narrative of Mexican history. Traven wrote the Jungle Novels in the 1930s, approximately a decade after the end of the Mexican Revolution, when it was already apparent that the legacy of the revolution was not as positive as many hoped it would be. It is for this reason that Traven writes that the "end of the dictatorship [is] a disgrace our country will suffer under for a hundred years to come" (*General* 279). Like they were for Traven, the ambivalences of the end of the Mexican Revolution present problems and inspirations for many other writers. See, for example, Adolfo Gilly's history of the Mexican Revolution, *La revolucíon interrumpida*—the "interrupted revolution." For fictional explorations of this ambivalence, see, for example, Mariano Azeula's novel *The Underdogs*, Martin Luis Guzmán's *The Eagle and the Serpent*, and Carlos Fuentes' *The Death of Artemio Cruz*.

Traven's narrator, then, reinterprets the swarm itself, not the rebels who make up the swarm. The swarm itself is seen in a new way, as a positive form of horizontal organization. The rebels, however, are like many other revolutionaries: they seek to dismantle someone else's hierarchy, but end up replacing it with one of their own; they end up replacing one hegemony with another. The ambivalence at the end of the Jungle Novels, then, is due to the ways the rebels resuscitate hierarchical ideas in their organization, not due to any intrinsic characteristics of the swarm. The positive connotations attached to the swarm in the Jungle Novels, therefore, suggests that Traven's narrator believes that the swarm holds promise for more horizontal forms of organization. Fortunately or unfortunately, the Jungle Novels end soon after the rebels defeat the Federal army. We get little evidence to suggest whether the swarm could successfully transition from a fighting organization into a horizontal form of organization in civil society. Traven's reinterpretation of the swarm, however, leads one to think that similar forms of horizontal organization should be tested in other contexts, and that the ideas that guided the swarm might be useful in other organizations as well.

The Jungle Novels, therefore, present us with both a problem and a promise. After six novels of domination and resistance to hierarchy, we are left both unsettled and hopeful. If the resuscitation of hierarchy in their own organization were not enough, as they arrive at the village of Solipaz—sun and peace—in the last novel's last pages, the rebels find out that their isolation has kept from them the news that the dictator that they had sought to dispose had fled Mexico even before their rebellion on the montería began. The idea is an ominous one, and it underscores just how powerful and pervasive hierarchical systems are: even without a dictator, race, class, and gender hierarchies remain.

The end of the novels is not without hope, however. Even though we have no tidy ending, we still have a suggestion of struggle to come, and questions about how experiments with horizontal forms of organization might be expanded. The name of Solipaz itself is a hint of things to come, and it all but begs the question of whether horizontal forms of organization are fit for civil society as well as for rebel armies. This question is also symbolized in the last act of the swarm: Traven concludes his novels by giving a "greeting"—"*¡Tierra y Libertad!*"—the rallying cry of the revolutionaries. Gabino Villalva, the

teacher whom the rebels meet in the closing moments of the final novel "stood up. Drew himself up. Held his clenched fist on high and shouted in greeting, 'Muchachos, *¡Tierra y Libertad!*' And the muchachos answered with one voice: '*¡Tierra y Libertad!*'" (*General from the Jungle* 280). This "greeting" can be read as a question and a welcome—a calling to those who would further nurture ideas about how the swarm can emerge. These questions are only suggested fleetingly in the Jungle Novels however; to pose them further, we must turn to a more contemporary swarm—one in which rebel ants have evolved into beetles and guerrillas.

Conclusion

The Swarm's Democratic Horizons

Ya se mira el horizonte,	Now look to the horizon,
Combatiente Zapatista,	Zapatista combatant,
El camino marcará	The path will mark us
A los que vienen atrás	To those who come after us

- from the Zapatista anthem *"El Horizonte"*

The contemporary Zapatista movement has also been called a swarm—not by B. Traven, of course, but by the United States Department of Defense. Writing for the RAND Corporation, one of the Pentagon's think tanks, in *Swarming and the Future of Conflict*, John Arquilla and David Ronfeldt point out that "the Zapatista movement in Mexico, which fused the Zapatista National Liberation Army (EZLN) with a transnational network of sympathetic nongovernmental organizations [...], kept the Mexican government and army on the defensive for years by means of aggressive but peaceful information operations" (2).[1] In the span of just over a decade, Subcommandante Insurgente Marcos—the Zapatistas'

[1] Also see Arquilla and Ronfeldt's other two works on related topics, *Networks and Netwars: The Future of Terror, Crime, and Militancy* and *The Zapatista Social Netwar in Mexico*.

balaclava-wearing, pipe-smoking writer, spokesperson, and theorist—has driven these "information operations" by producing texts that can be placed in various literary traditions. Marcos' communiqués stand with a foot in the tradition of the manifesto and a foot in the epistolary tradition, his fables and histories are frequently derived from folklore, and his fictions—like the stories that feature the talking beetle Don Durito de la Lacandona—often evolve from classics like *Don Quixote*, the text that Marcos calls "the best book of political theory" (García Márquez and Pombo 79).

Texts such as the Quixote-inspired "Durito IV: Neoliberalism and the Party-State System" present the opportunity to confront one final problem of grassroots politics: the idea that the only options for significant political change are variations on master narratives, stories that always end with one hierarchy replaced with another, one master exchanged for a new master. Referring to previous political movements, plans, and the *caudillo*, the traditional strongman of Latin American politics, Marcos writes in "Durito IV" that the "problem with revolution (note the lowercase letters) is no longer a problem of THE organization, THE method, THE *caudillo* (note the uppercase letters)" (92). The statement is a

provocation and a puzzle: this departure from the radical tradition leaves us wondering what this novel approach to grassroots politics might look like. While the end goal is purposefully unclear, such a novel approach begins with challenging the need for master narratives. Marcos and the Zapatistas have taken on this task, and through this process, I will argue, they are reinterpreting the swarm's radical democratic project.

Each of the preceding chapters has told a counternarrative to a particular master narrative; the Zapatista literature presents the opportunity to confront the idea of master narratives as such. In this Conclusion, I will first consider the context, content, and structure of "Durito IV" in order to explicate the ways in which this text mobilizes a critique of and an alternative to a master narrative told about what Durito calls "a structural deformation that cuts across the spectrum of Mexican society" (90). Next, I will analyze how Marcos reinterprets the swarm's radical democratic project by examining how he tells stories that challenge the very idea of master narratives. Just as the view from Whitman's shoulders became too limiting, however, so does the view into the democratic horizons from behind Marcos' balaclava. Therefore, in closing, I will consider the ways in which

"Durito IV" prompts questions that can motivate further research on grassroots politics and the literatures of the Americas.

The Beetle and the Guerrilla

It is difficult to overstate what the Cervantes scholar James Iffland calls "the enormous resonance the Zapatista movement has produced throughout the world" (177). Howard Zinn, for example, calls the Zapatistas "one of the most dramatic and important instances in our time of a genuine grassroots movement against oppression" (*¡Ya Basta!* n.p.), and Valeria Wagner and Alehandro Moreira write that the Zapatistas' commitment to the "nonauthoritarian foundations of democracy" are widely influencing contemporary political struggles (190). "Whether considered as the 'model' for antiglobalization movements or as representing the transition from armed to symbolic struggle that characterizes them," Wagner and Moreira write, "the Zapatista insurgence clearly emerges as paradigmatic of the new forms of resistance, political organization, and transformation that have been called for,

with growing consensus, to understand and cope with globalization" (187).[2]

The Zapatistas get their name from Emiliano Zapata, rebel general of the Mexican Revolution, and many of their ideas about horizontal organization echo those articulated by B. Traven's narrator. In "Durito IV" we read that "the Zapatistas of 1994 and those of 1910 are the same" (89), but although the contemporary Zapatistas are the swarm reborn, they do not tell the same stories that Traven did. It might be said that previous revolutionary movements were more linear—their focus was on taking power of the state, which would allow them to direct society, from above, in the ways that they decided were best. In fact, this idea is one more master narrative: it was thought that significant political change could only come through a hegemonic struggle in which one hierarchy would be replaced with a better hierarchy. The Zapatistas, however, tell a different story. In John Holloway's phrase, they seek to change the

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[2] The Zapatista movement has inspired a fair amount of scholarship, mostly from social science fields. The work that is most relevant to my concern here is about the Zapatistas' use of information technologies to convey their texts to a network of supporters. See, for example, Harry M. Cleaver's work, especially "The Zapatista Effect: The Internet and the Rise of an Alternative Political Fabric." The "information operations" run by the Zapatistas and their allies include websites and blogs such as the official Zapatista website, <http://www.ezln.org.mx/> and the Chiapas Centro de Medio Independientes <http://chiapas.indymedia.org/>, podcasts like Radio Insurgente <http://www.radioinsurgente.org/>, and print publications like the English language volumes *¡Ya Basta!: Ten Years of the Zapatista Uprising* and *Our Word is Our Weapon: Selected Writings of Subcomandante Insurgente Marcos.*

world without taking power. This goal has proven to be both attractive and difficult. Rather than the relatively linear goal of toppling a government through force, the Zapatistas have embraced the more chaotic goal of organizing autonomously in self-governing communities. In this way, the Zapatistas are less like Odysseus, who knows his final destination, and more like Don Quixote, whose path is much less well defined. Perhaps it is no surprise, then, to find that Marcos' fictional beetle, Don Durito de la Lacandona, is prone to literary fits like those that affected Alonso Quijano, the "sane madman" who fancies himself to be Don Quixote.

How do Durito's literary fits, however, counter the master narrative about hegemonic struggle? Our first clues to this question come from the structure of the text, and its unique characteristics. Marcos begins "Durito IV" with a brief introduction, but unlike most of his other texts, Marcos does not sign his name to it. Rather, an unnamed narrator notes that "Durito IV" was written while Durito participated in the Exodus for Dignity and National Sovereignty, a "41-day protest march against electoral fraud from Tabasco to Mexico City" (87). After this introduction, we find the heading of the letter:

Zapatista Army of National Liberation

Mexico, May 1995

To: Mister So and So

Professor and Researcher

National Autonomous University of Mexico

Mexico, D.F.

From: Don Durito de la Lacandona,

Knight-errant for whom Sup Marcos is squire

Zapatista Army of National Liberation

Mexico

From the start, Durito's letter presents an interesting set of complexities for literary study: it is signed by a knight-errant beetle, written by a guerrilla soldier, written to a fictional professor, and written about a harsh reality in Mexico. Because the text appears under Durito's signature, its readers participate in the fiction and imagine, as the signature suggests, that Durito's voice has supplanted Marcos' authorship. This authorial playfulness makes the text's readers break from the guise of assuming that Durito is only an invention inside the text but is, rather, its author as well.[3] "Durito IV" is genre-bending text: part fiction, part academic analysis, part satire, part manifesto. "Durito IV" could be described in much the same way Robin D. G. Kelley describes Aimé Césaire's

[3] For this reason, when the text I quote is in Durito's voice, I refer to him as the text's author. When the text suggests Marcos' voice, I attribute the quoted material to him.

Discourse on Colonialism: it is "full of flares, full of anger, full of humor. It is not a solution or a strategy manual or a little red book with pithy quotes. It is a dancing flame in a bonfire" (10).

In his opening address, Durito acknowledges that "it may seem strange that I, a beetle that carries out the obligations of the noble profession of knight-errant, write to you. Do not be perturbed or seek out a psychoanalyst," Durito writes, "because I will quickly and promptly explain everything to you" (88). We might not be perturbed by Durito's text, but we do have a potent cocktail, even in these opening words. Durito's tone is at once mocking and serious; his ideas are both disarming and an opening salvo thrown at those who tell master narratives. But because "we knights-errant cannot refuse to help the needy, no matter how large-nosed or delinquent the helpless soul in question is," Durito gives a critique of the current party-state system of governance in Mexico and a proposal for "the transition to democracy according to the Zapatistas" (89).

After additional remarks, including one which reminds his readers that "this is the 'rebellion of the hanged'" (89), a reference B. Traven's fifth Jungle Novel, Durito splits his text into several sections. The section titled "The Current Political Situation: The Party-State System,

Principle Obstacle to a Transition to Democracy in Mexico," is a brief institutional analysis (90-1). The following section, "Democracy, Liberty, and Justice: Foundation for a New Political System in Mexico" describes the principles of these new democratic horizons (91-3), and the final section, "A Broad Opposition Front," immerses itself directly in "the transition from one to the other" (93-4). What emerges out of the structure of "Durito IV" is a rather familiar form: Durito chides the "excellent analysts" (91) who will need to provide a fuller critique, but Marcos' fictional tropes do not fully obscure the fact that this text mocks academic analysis while using the tools of academic analysis.

It might be argued that Don Durito, like Don Quixote, is determined "to redress grievances, right wrongs, correct injustices, rectify abuses, and fulfill obligations (Cervantes 30), but Don Durito has more ambitious goals: he seeks a "profound and radical shift of all social relations" (91). By putting such words in a beetle's mouth, Marcos appropriates the conventions of multiple genres and multiple narratives. In ways that are reminiscent of Aimé Césaire's *Discourse on Colonialism*, "Durito IV" mobilizes multiple tones, some fiery and some humorous. Some care, then, is needed to approach "Durito IV." As Iffland writes

in "Don Quijote and the Dissident Intellectual: Some Thoughts on Subcomandante Marcos's *Don Durito de la Lacandona*,"

> [q]uite clearly, Don Durito evolves into an alterego of Marcos, incarnating the many thoroughly quixotic aspects of the entire Zapatista enterprise. But rather than assuming the role of the Cervantine protagonist himself, Marcos displaces it onto the little talking beetle while he himself becomes the mere "escudero." Rather then the emblematic big belly of Sancho Panza, it is Marcos's apparently prominent nose which becomes the constant butt of Don Durito's jokes. ("Narizón escudero" becomes a leitmotif throughout the text.) (174)

But while Marcos clearly adopts the *Quixote* as a frame for his own narrative, he is not content in tweaking Cervantes' novel alone for his purposes. Rather, it is as if Marcos, like Alonso Quijano before him, has read so much that stories overlap in his mind, genres mix together, and familiar narratives pop up in surprising ways.

Such is the case, for example, in an earlier communiqué in which Marcos first appropriates the frame of Cervantes' novel. The relationship between beetle and

guerrilla formed when Don Durito pointed a twig that he called a sword at Marcos and said, "You will be my squire."

> "I?" [Marcos says], visibly surprised.
>
> Durito pays no attention to my question and continues, "Furthermore, it isn't a twig…it's a sword… the only, the best… Excalibur!" he says, brandishing the twig.
>
> "I think you are confusing the times and novels," I tell him. "The beginning of your speech seems an awful lot like a part of *Don Quijote de la Mancha*, and Excalibur was King Arthur's sword." […]
>
> "Silence, rogue! Knowest thou not nature imitates art? What difference does it make if it's Alonso Quijano or the page Arthur? Now, it is… *Don Durito de la Lacandona*." (*Conversations with Durito* 68)

Nature imitates art, indeed. Or one might say that literature imagines beetles as knights-errant. Or that counternarratives to master narratives can come in many surprising styles. This particular narrative, as Iffland notes, is "the product of a 'reading' of Cervantes's

masterpiece" (175).[4] This reading and the many other literary aspects of Marcos' writing have led Gabriel García Márquez to note that "everything [Marcos says], in form and content, suggests a considerable literary education of a traditional kind" (77).[5] García Márquez's observation raises questions about how the very idea of master narratives can be challenged. Durito certainly stands in contrast to the other protagonists in the texts considered in this project, like Esperanza in *Salt of the Earth*, who is portrayed as dignified and valiant, or the swarm in Traven's Jungle Novels, which is clearly a vigorous force. Durito, in contrast, is as frequently satirized as he is valorized, and Marcos includes himself in the joke: Durito frequently mocks Marcos' big nose (89), but Marcos also portrays Durito as clumsy or prone to getting pinned under his desk (122). These comic elements of the Durito stories cause Wagner and Moreira to argue that Durito "has become increasingly ridiculous, and Marcos, in turn, increasingly subdued by it" (201). Durito is not all laughs, however: he

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[4] Iffland refers to the Spanish language version of the Durito stories, *Don Durito de la Lacandona*, published by the *Centro de Información y Análisis de Chiapas*.

[5] One might call the Durito stories "magical realism." It is no surprise to see García Márquez's interest in the Zapatistas, nor is it a surprise that the Zapatistas might call upon elements of magical realism in the Durito stories. As Frederick Louis Aldema points out, however, at times the term "magical realism" can point readers away from the social and economic concerns of a text. Because we are very much concerned with social and economic questions, we will bracket the question of magical realism in the Durito stories.

writes "veeery seriously and veeery formally" (89), but he writes about "a structural deformation that cuts across the spectrum of Mexican society" (90) and argues for "a revolution that makes revolution possible" (93). As with Don Quixote's journey, Don Durito introduces a degree of uncertainty from the beginning: how should we read this mix? As mocking? As an effort to undercut the seriousness of guerrilla soldiers who do have guns, and have used them? As a funny façade on top of a frightful reality? "Durito IV" is all of these things—as Marcos says in an interview with Gabriel García Márquez and Roberto Pombo, "[i]t's as if it all goes through a blender. You don't know what you tossed in first, and what you end up with is a cocktail" (77). In order to unpack the ways that "Durito IV" articulates a counternarrative to the entire enterprise of telling master narratives, I will now transition to a discussion of the ways in which the Zapatistas are reinterpreting the swarm's radical democratic project.

A Novel Approach to Grassroots Politics

The party-state bureaucrats, the political elites, and the people who were shocked by the Zapatistas' political innovations had told their master narratives so frequently

that everyone knew the refrain. These stories were backed up by the muscle of the Mexican state, by what Durito calls "the mass media, big capital, and the reactionary clergy" who march under the banner of the *Partido Revolucionario Institucional*, or PRI, for its acronym in Spanish (90). But a well-told story, Marcos surely knows, can subvert even the most polished master narrative.

Durito's institutional analysis is largely focused on what he calls the "party-state system," the coupling of the state and the PRI. "The political system of Mexico," Durito writes, "has its historical basis, its present crisis, and its mortal future, in that deformation called 'the Party-State System'" (90). Durito writes that this "deformation" is "a consequence of the savage capitalism at the end of the 20th century," a system that "masks itself in what is called 'NEOLIBERALISM'" (90, emphasis in original). In a few short paragraphs, Durito outlines in broad strokes the deficiencies of the PRI. While Durito's analysis is brief, his conclusion is unequivocal: "any attempt to 'reform' or 'balance' this deformation FROM WITHIN THE PARTY-STATE SYSTEM," he writes, is "impossible" (91, emphasis in original).

In the years between when Traven wrote his novels and when Durito takes up his pen, the PRI had not only

"declared it was the legitimate heir of the Mexican Revolution" (Gilly ix), but it had also appropriated the language and symbols of the revolution itself.[6] In the logical acrobatics of the party-state, then, to rebel against the state or the party is a counter-revolutionary act. This sort of thinking led to high levels of state violence, including a "dirty war" in which the Mexican left was brutally repressed and, in just one example among many, demonstrating students were gunned down just before the 1968 Mexico City Olympics. We might paraphrase Octavio Paz's explanation of the situation: the party-state that eventually became dictatorial first appeared, in embryo, as liberatory (*The Labyrinth of Solitude* 121). This cautionary tale is what leads Bill Weinberg to argue that there is an explicit parallel between the rebels in the Jungle Novels and the story of the contemporary Zapatistas in his book *Homage to Chiapas: The New Indigenous Struggles in Mexico*. Weinberg writes that the "Indians in [*General from the Jungle*], isolated in the jungle, didn't know that the Revolution was already over and the dictator overthrown; the peasant army which emerged from that jungle in 1994

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[6] As I noted above, the title of the original Spanish language version of Gilly's book is *La revolución interrumpida*. This title has no small relevance to the Zapatista movement, but as we will see, the Zapatistas, while possessing a profound understanding of previous revolutionary movements, do not seek to continue the same revolution, after an interruption, but rather are proposing a new understanding of the radical democratic project.

claims that the Revolution has been betrayed and dictatorship restored" (15). What was apparent to Traven in the 1930s is painfully obvious to the Zapatistas: a liberatory war led to a reactionary state—what would be, in a memorable phrase used by Mario Vargas Llosa and many others, "the perfect dictatorship."

One of the tasks Durito faces, then, is to reinterpret the language of revolution; another is to challenge the narratives told by party-state masters. The result of these shifts in orientation, tactics, and language is a new political project for the swarm, one that Durito insists is "anti-vanguard and collective" (92). As Wagner and Moreira write, the Zapatistas' counternarrative "does not conform to the practice of power that characterized Latin American revolutionary guerrillas of the seventies, and it is definitely incompatible with the model of the revolutionary avant-guard leading the masses forward toward the realization of a project they cannot fully grasp" (190). As often happens when people first hear unfamiliar stories, this new political narrative was not immediately understood. As Carlos Fuentes writes,

> Many people with cloudy minds in Mexico responded to what happened in Chiapas by saying, 'here we go again, these rebels are part of the old

> Sandinista-Castroite-Marxist-Leninist legacy. Is this what we want for Mexico?' The rebels proved exactly the contrary: Rather than the last rebellion of that type, this was the first post-communist rebellion in Latin America. For the rebels, the demand for democracy was central. (56)

The Zapatistas' "demand for democracy" has little to do with hierarchical interpretations of democracy, however, and it needs some clarification. In his interview with García Márquez and Pombo, Marcos argues that previous revolutionary movements followed a model in which

> [t]here is an oppressor power which decides on behalf of society from above, and a group of visionaries which decides to lead the country on the correct path and ousts the other group from power, seizes power and then also decides on behalf of society. For us that is a struggle between hegemonies, in which the winners are good and the losers bad, but for the rest of society things don't basically change. ("The Punchcard and the Hourglass" 70-1)

In contrast to a hegemonic struggle, Durito insists that the Zapatista movement "is not about seizing Power or the

introduction (by peaceful or violent means) of a new social system, but about something that precedes both. It is about constructing the antechamber of the new world" (92). It is not, however, about constructing a master narrative that we can all memorize and repeat. Durito writes that "[i]n summary, we are not proposing an orthodox revolution, but something much more difficult: a revolution that makes revolution possible" (93). But Durito must point to the brevity of his own analysis and admit that his text is "a problem and not a solution" (91). We can take what Durito calls an "orthodox revolution" to mean what Fuentes calls a revolution in the "old Sandinista-Castroite-Marxist-Leninist legacy." What is meant, however, by "a revolution that makes revolution possible"? What is this "antechamber of the new world"?

The Zapatistas' "Specialty of the House"

Durito writes that "I am only making points to be developed on other occasions or to provoke debate and discussion (which seems to be the Zapatistas' 'specialty of the house')" (92). Much like how the view from Whitman's large shoulders became too limited, so does the view from behind Marcos' balaclava. The question, then, is about how

new vistas and horizons are to be imagined. What Traven's rebels longed for—the common space in which to speak and debate—shows up in great quantities in the Zapatista writings. The provocation of debate, the invitation to speak together about how best to walk into the democratic horizons, is a profound shift from the vanguardist tradition and it is indicative of the ways in which many new narratives might be mobilized, narratives without masters but rather with many protagonists. The Zapatistas, however, can only imagine their own new worlds—the blueprints for them are not transferable out of their specific contexts. This does not mean, however, that the Zapatistas' ideas cannot be used in other experiments in grassroots politics—quite the contrary. How then, might we use "Durito IV" as a springboard to motivate further research on grassroots politics and the literatures of the Americas?

As Gilles Delueze praised Michel Foucault for showing us "the indignity of speaking for others" (qtd. in May, 97), Durito openly mocks the idea that the Zapatistas can provide "THE method" (92) which could serve as the one true way to revolutionary activity. Durito steps out of the shadow hierarchy casts when he argues that "all methods have their place, that all fronts of struggle are

necessary, and that all levels of participation are important" (92). It is, as Marcos says, "political masturbation" "to believe that we can speak on behalf of those beyond ourselves" ("The Punch Card and the Hourglass" 72). The "indignity of speaking for others" leaves a purposeful silence, one that invites other voices. This focus on questions and the provocation of debate is the next logical step after giving up the vanguardist pretense of speaking for others and after dismantling the machinery that goes with the traditional interpretation of grassroots politics. This move raises important problems in turn, however.

The revolutionary vanguard, that hierarchical figure of political movements of the past, hoarded the task of imagining alternatives to himself; instead of liberating the swarm, he caged it. What he promised was certainty—certainty that, in Durito's words, "THE organization, THE method, THE *caudillo*" (92) were correct and did not need to be challenged. The certainty that came with vanguardist hierarchies was easy—the swarm was expected to follow its keeper obediently, and everything would work out well in the end. This ease required no intellectual struggle from the swarm itself, and therefore these master narratives had sad endings: such vanguardist certainties ended up as

tyrannies, ended up suffocating the swarm's political activities. By breaking the lock on this cage and choosing to cultivate what Wagner and Moreira call the "nonauthoritarian foundations of democracy," Durito and the Zapatistas tell new narratives that are directly opposed to the narratives masters tell. In doing so, the Zapatistas reinterpret the swarm's radical democratic project. The catch is that they invite us to tell our own stories as well. The questions, then, are: what narratives will we tell each other? How might these stories nurture radical democratic movements? How can these narratives motivate new protagonists to join grassroots movements? What stories will these new protagonists tell? How will these protagonists' narratives reshape grassroots politics?

While on one hand, it may be frustrating that the Zapatista literature does not provide a master narrative to memorize and repeat, it is also liberating: rather than a command from above, we find an invitation to what the Zapatistas call "a collective network of all our particular struggles and resistances, […] the network [of] all of us who resist" (*Our Word is Our Weapon* 117). The shape of this resistance, like the features we see in the horizon, are not always clear; without a master, the details of the narrative change, and the end is always in doubt.

Nevertheless, as Noam Chomsky argues, it is of "critical importance"

> that we know what impossible goals we're trying to achieve, if we hope to achieve some of the possible goals. And that means that we have to be bold enough to speculate and create social theories on the basis of partial knowledge, while remaining very open to the strong possibility, and in fact overwhelming probability, that at least in some respects we're very far off the mark. (*The Chomsky-Foucault Debate* 45)

Horizons, like vistas, are things we walk toward, but never reach. As we walk toward these impossible goals, what was in the foreground shifts to the background; previously blurry landscape comes into focus. Twisting paths into those vistas and horizons take us places we did not think we would go; sometimes the path is blocked, forcing us to take new paths. We may find, as George Orwell argues, that Whitman's "'democratic vistas' have ended in barbed wire" (*Essays* 219). We may find tools to dismantle that wire.

These new vistas and horizons leave us with a problem that is always to come: how might we continue to imagine narratives about new democratic horizons? What might Durito's "democratic space[s]" look like? Might they look

something like the ones Whitman suggested in *Democratic Vistas*, with democratic control over even rigidly hierarchical organizations like the armed forces? How might literary study expand upon Chomsky's call for thinking about "democratic control in the workplace and in the community"? As Durito admits, these are difficult questions, ones that need "brilliant and forceful analyses (said without sarcasm)" (91).

While the horizons are always in the distance, the means of walking into them might be just a bit clearer. "We do not believe that the end justifies the means," Marcos writes. "We define our goal by the way we choose the means of struggling for it. […] Sometimes this yields results and sometimes it doesn't. But it satisfies us that, as an organization, we are creating an identity as we go along" ("The Punch Card and the Hourglass" 76). It could also be said that the Zapatistas are imagining new democratic horizons as their narratives go along as well, albeit horizons that are still, and will always be, in the process of imagination.

The stakes implied by the swarm's new vistas and horizons are significant: much depends on continued efforts to tell stories that reinterpret grassroots politics and imagine deeper, more meaningful ideas of democracy. The

question remains whether democracy will be interpreted in hierarchical or horizontal ways; the effort to reinterpret grassroots politics as radical democracy will take a great deal more research and a great deal of struggle. To reinterpret grassroots politics and radical democracy will entail experimenting with new and unknown ideas, testing them, improving them, and using them in many different contexts. There are many other questions to consider: problems of ecology, problems of identity, problems of globalization, problems in the workplace and the community. There are questions of literary study itself: how might this reinterpretation of grassroots politics influence the readings of texts and widen the archive of texts considered within literary studies? These new narratives may provoke the literary imagination. They also may be the most radical aspects of grassroots politics, and the aspects that motivate our further research.

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