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Composing and Composting: Revising and the Freshman Student

At the beginning of the spring semester, a young man in a baseball cap, backpack slung over his shoulder, appeared at my office door, nervously shuffling a sheaf of his papers.

“You hated my essay,” he said, thrusting the pages at me.

“Hated it?” I asked incredulously. I remembered his essay, an honest, evocative one on a subject of significance to him. I remembered feeling encouraged that he felt safe enough to risk sharing his experience with me. In my class, I encourage students not to follow strict rules of organization and development in early drafts as they work toward discovering their own unique writing process. Most freshmen this early in their college careers are not quite sure what to make of this freedom.

Because students in my classes work toward a final portfolio, their early drafts aren’t graded. We dialogue about their writing through a series of questions: they write a non–yes/no question about their writing at the end of their papers, and I respond while raising other questions in the margins for them to consider as they continue to revise. This process creates an opportunity for them to take some creative risks with their writing. As this young man stood in my office doorway, I tried to think what I might have written that he could have interpreted as negative.

He laid the paper on the desk between us. I had

underlined a few errors for him to deal with on a future draft and raised some questions to facilitate his revision: “Tell me more” and “How did you feel when this experience occurred?” and “How might you illustrate this feeling?” There was no grade at the top. There was no red ink. There were no directive, critical remarks such as “awkward” or “unclear.” It looked to me like an essay full of possibility. I had hoped my questions would help his ideas to marinate, percolate—no, perhaps “compost” is the best word—and, over time, would help his essay develop into one filled with meaning for him.

Compost is a perfect metaphor for revising. That rich mixture which emerges from decaying organic matter shares with the word *composition* an Indo-European root which refers to “things deposited.” The value of compost emerges from *what is left behind* when the process is completed. This shared genealogy makes clear that the process is as important as what we have *deposited* on the page after our process is completed. In both processes elements combine to leave something behind that is new and rich. Compost is actually a process of de-composition. So composting may in fact connect more logically with the process of revising than with that of composing. When we revise, we break down a composition in order to improve it. How might I make clear to this student that dialoguing in the margins about his revision is a crucial part of this writing journey?

“What have I written on your essay that makes you think that I hated it?”

“You wrote all over it,” he said. “That can’t be good.”

Because he assumed that anything a teacher writes on a paper must be critical, he hadn’t bothered to read my carefully crafted questions. The sheer number of words that I had written on his paper convinced him of what he assumed: he was a poor writer. After twelve

years of schooling and perhaps no prior opportunities to revise his work, he assumed that I was the enemy. I wondered what I might do to help him see that we were both on the same side.

Teachers often casually sweep words away as we read students' papers, piling them in gutters and stuffing them in bags as we do leaves for compost each fall, tending to forget that students work hard to produce them. Once those words are formed, it is difficult for them to throw any of them away. In their anxiety to fulfill an assignment, they may ignore the heat their words may generate. They may not yet grasp that writing, like anything worth doing, needs to be tended and nurtured. Heat can be spread; ideas can cook.

Barry Lane says that revision is more than a stage in the writing process: it is the source of the entire process. "Writing itself is revision," he says (5). David Kaplan calls it "the key process of writing." Revision, he says, "is an art, it is a craft, and moreover, it is a way of deepening your understanding" (1). Students, however, tend to believe that their first draft is their last draft. They may not know how to approach the revision process, what it is, really.

As their teacher, I want to help them uncover the source of their own energy, to discover through revision what they don't know that they know, to help them come to know what they think. I want not to "impose change" but instead to "provide the conditions for others to seek change, an empowering" (Hultgren 28). Am I wanting too much?

As each new semester begins, I am filled with hope for my new writing students as well as filled with questions about ways in which I can better help them connect to revision. I want to know what the experience of revising is like for them. What pressures does it hold? What is their experience as they answer my questions and develop questions of their own,

digging down deep into their own lives for meaning? In what ways might I guide them so that they come to experience the personal satisfaction of crafting a piece of writing so it expresses exactly what it is that they want to say? Perhaps because many of them have never experienced this pleasure, they fail to recognize that writing can be more than the hard labor to which many have consigned themselves.

“Who is she?” my students must wonder. “Why should I place my confidence in her? What if I take the creative risks she encourages, but I fail?” My students are often away from home for the first time, often homesick, sitting in classes with strangers, learning strange, new ideas in rooms that are often too warm or too cold, too crowded or too large. They sit in uncomfortable chairs, sometimes tired, sometimes hungry, sometimes frustrated because they couldn’t find parking or angry at themselves because they overslept. They are in a required class, not one they have chosen for themselves. When we add to this base of frustration and confusion the possibility that their understanding of who a teacher is may be based on strictness, authoritarianism, criticism, and aloofness and that their idea of writing may be based on form rather than substance, we often have a situation that is doomed from the start.

Many also may be afraid that they are not smart enough to succeed at college, or they may question why they are even there, sitting at those desks in those thermostatically controlled rooms. They fear evaluation, criticism, failure. What can be done to convert an impersonal classroom into one of shared space?

Here is an e-mail I received from one of my students early in the semester:

Hi Prof. Bass. I had the worst birthday. I was in the emergency room all day getting my infected belly button ring surgically removed. I am not going to be in class (I have a

doctor's note) because of all the pain medicine I'm on. I may have to get more surgery since the belly button ring caused a cyst to form in my navel. I'll keep you posted on what is going on. Can I turn my assignment in our next class?

My students bring to class not only what I see on the surface—this young woman with the infected belly button, the big athletic young man with the baseball cap pulled down low over his eyes, the small girl with nine earrings in one ear, the disheveled boy who looks as if he just rolled out of bed—but who they are as human beings. I also don't see what is hidden below the surface, belly button rings, for example. How they show themselves to me in class is part of their process of growing up. "We're more than just students," they seem to be saying. They are human beings, struggling to carve out a place for themselves in this new, often impersonal environment, trying to make sense of the world. According to Robert Brooke, they have identities that are "more powerful for real academic success than the traditional identity of the successful student" (142). What teachers see on the surface may not be a prediction of who will succeed in class and who will not. Is it possible to uncover what is below the surface in the brief time I have with them? How can I encourage them to reveal themselves through their writing? Brooke says, "It may be that the process of allowing a particular kind of identity to develop is what contemporary writing instruction is all about" (142).

As one who reads students' personal essays, I probably learn about more of this "underlife," as Brooke refers to this phenomenon, than my colleagues who do not teach writing, but that information still just scratches the surface. They have been at major league baseball camps, they have adopted whales, built churches in South America, raced on NASCAR tracks, worked as congressional interns, gone skydiving, been to the Olympics, won tap dancing contests—all

experiences I myself have never had. Writing about this underlife helps them express the truth about themselves as political worker, as baseball player, as church member, as environmentalist, as race car driver. It is this truth that emerges through their work, their individual voices allowing me to see them as human beings struggling to carve out a place for themselves in this new environment, as well as writers struggling to make sense of the world. Jane Tompkins says, “My chief concern is that our educational system does not focus on the inner lives of students or help them to acquire the self-understanding that is the basis for a satisfying life. Nor, by and large, does it provide the safe and nurturing environment that people need in order to grow” (xii).

My hope is that my students begin to develop individual identities through both writing their essays and communicating with me through our dialogues. According to Brooke, “Student underlife primarily attempts to assert that the individuals who play the role of students are not only students, that there is more to them than that” (151). Writing and revising essays that focus on these other parts of their lives encourages them to display their complexity in an on-task assignment, and allows them to extend their identities “beyond the roles offered by the normal teacher-as-lecturer, student-as-passive-learner educational system” (Brooke 141).

Brooke raises an important question: “In writing classrooms, ‘voice’ is often felt to be the paradox that prompts pedagogical change—as teachers, we want students to write in their own voice, but how can they when we *assign* them to? And how can their voices really be their own when they are evaluated by us?” (149). We have taken students from their usual space in the world—as sons and daughters, athletes, friends, musicians, and artists—and placed them in a classroom. We then conjure up artificial topics for

them to write about and grade them by standards with which they may not be familiar. There is a space between us that often cannot be filled. Brooke says, however, that some writing teachers “feel themselves to be after something different from what the traditional educational system produces——instead of traditional ‘good students,’ they want students who will come to see themselves as unique, productive writers with influence on their environment” (149). As writing teachers we are interested in the process our students go through as they write, as well as the final product that they produce. We look for signs of individuality as their work emerges. We guide them as they uncover their experience, as they make meaning for themselves as they revise.

At the end of one semester, I asked my students to write, anonymously, how they felt about revising their essays in my class. Here are some of their responses:

Over all, I hate it. I usually end up rewriting the whole paper over again, which then leads to more work because I then need to revise the second paper.

I hate looking at my writing and not being able to improve it. The vocabulary, the grammar, and just the level it is written in doesn't sound like a college student's paper. So as I revise, I try to make it more professional, but then it doesn't sound like I wrote it.

I dread revising. I get a headache when it is time to revise.

My thoughts become fragmented.

I find revising almost harder than writing the paper. I find it difficult to bring back the ideas I originally had. I feel like I have completely killed the idea I had for the paper and can't add anything new that is worthwhile.

I feel annoyed that I am still working on the same paper and

I just want a grade already. I get frustrated and ready to give up.

There comes a point when I just don't care anymore.

Sometimes I get scared when I revise. If I don't like what I wrote, I feel as if I might not know how else to put my thoughts and have to hand in something I do not like.

I can never seem to find the same groove I was in when I wrote my first draft.

I feel discouraged. I feel like it didn't make a difference.

What if I look at what I wrote and think I am not a good writer?

Honestly, it can drive me crazy sometimes.

These students reveal feelings of pain, confusion, frustration, loss, fragmentation, dread, fear, and embarrassment. Is it possible for revising ever to be a positive phenomenon, one that emerges from within, or must it be a negative experience, enforced from without? Do any come to value the process of revision, or do they all see it only as an obstacle to fluency and creativity?

Until reading these descriptions, I had thought that a good number of my students had embraced the process, since they had taken advantage of the unlimited revisions they may submit. Although some become easily frustrated and resentful, a good many students' essays do grow during the semester, and their work displays new levels of self-understanding. One student exclaimed, after reading her final draft, "I can't believe I wrote that!" I had attributed the personal growth of this student to the revision work she had done, believing that revision can produce an enlargement, not only of student papers but of the

students' lives as well.

However, I have come to understand that many of those who make the most of the process do so reluctantly, and very few embrace revision completely. Of the two classes I initially surveyed, only two students expressed any sort of positive feeling toward revision. One said, "I feel kind of a sense of renewal when I revise." The other said, "I feel as if I'm fine-tuning a machine so that it runs without a flaw. I feel as if I'm handing in actual works of art that I took time on as opposed to other school papers that I rushed to get out of the way."

However, when the revision process works, it really works. Here is an excerpt from an essay in which the writer made discoveries about himself through revising which encouraged him to revise his life.

In his first draft, he had written that to maintain a lie about himself, when with his friends, "I sit there and bad mouth people who are just like me." He was getting to something important here. I asked him, in the margins, why he thinks he behaves this way and suggested that answering this question might reveal how hard keeping this secret is for him. Here is what he adds in his next draft:

Putting on this false front is one way to disguise my inner person. I go around clowning and degrading people who live the same lifestyle that I have bottled up my whole life when in actuality the person who I speak of so badly is me, staring right in my face. The pain of the lie to my friends, family, and especially to myself is painful.

So much clarity and honesty wells up in this short paragraph. Through revising, he comes to understand that one can revise more than an essay. At the end of the semester, he wrote, "Writing this essay helped me realize the truth. Revising gave me confidence to express myself more profoundly and accept who I am."

As we nourish and guide, we hope we may bring

our students to this place of questioning, of answering, of questioning further. It is a return to the idea of curriculum as inner journey. We establish trust, help our students create new habits, reassure them that they don't have to know all of the answers, encourage them to welcome the imbalance that emerges, and welcome where the questions might lead them. We encourage them to see what they hadn't seen before.

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A

The Slippery Truth in “Han’s Crime”

As Nietzsche observes, “We cannot decide whether that which we call truth is really truth or whether it merely appears that way to us” (“Live Dangerously” 124). Shiga Nayo’s “Han’s Crime” (translated into English by Lane Dunlop)—the story of a Chinese juggler, Han, who, during a performance, kills his wife, the assistant whose body he outlines with knives, as he drives a knife to the right of her throat and severs her carotid artery—explores this slipperiness of truth. Although she dies a violent death through Han’s action, it is “not at all known” whether this is “a deliberate act or an accident” (102). Thus, although the judge confronts “the fact of homicide,” he sees “no proof as to whether it [is] premeditated murder or manslaughter” (103). What is the truth of Han’s crime? Is he guilty of first-degree murder or of second-degree murder? Or is he guilty of manslaughter? Although Han is guilty of violence that kills an individual, the truth of Han’s crime is elusive,

for the focus of this story is on unknowability. That is, although on the one hand there are certain facts, and on the other hand there are certain interpretations of those facts, the facts and interpretations do not come together to build the bridge of knowledge and certainty. As Shiga reveals through the story's title, the truth is not an illusion, but it becomes the uncertain, slippery, and ungraspable phenomenon that falls through the cracks formed by fragmented facts and unverifiable interpretations. Neither the facts themselves nor the interpretations of those facts produce the clear, indisputable, and undeniable meaning(s) that constitute(s) truth. Yet, despite a clear absence of undisputed meaning, both Han and the judge refer to "the truth": the self-absorbed Han's position is that he is telling the truth, and the excited judge's position is that he is hearing the truth. Clearly, Shiga situates the slipperiness of truth in the overwhelming force of the faculty of emotions, and he also suggests that emphasizing the use of the rational faculty in quest of truth is futile.

One of the ways in which Shiga builds the sense of uncertainty and ungraspability is by emphasizing that together the past and the present yield only a few facts about the relationship between Han and his wife. The only facts we have here are those of Han's marriage, the birth and death of the baby, the economic plight in the wife's family, the couple's refusal to divorce each other, their sexual relationship, which clearly reflects the complete absence of an emotional bond, and the death of the wife during a performance, all playing out in the shadows of patriarchal hegemony. The facts to show exactly what Han and his wife feel for each other before the birth of the baby, or what Han's wife and her cousin feel for each other, are missing. Further, we do not know *exactly* when the marriage occurs ("[a]bout two years ago"); and we do not know if Han's interpretations regarding the baby's death by choking, or the wife's cousin's motives for making the match

between Han and his wife, are accurate. To grasp the truth we need more facts.

Because there are no chronological connections, there is no intrinsic coherence. There are only disjointed fragments. To make sense of these fragments after the violent incident, the watchers of the relationship between Han and his wife turn to interpretations of these facts, but these interpretations do not produce coherence. In response to the judge's question, like the owner-manager who does not "know" if the death is accidental or deliberate, as a watcher the Chinese stagehand is nonplussed: "Actually, I've thought a lot about that. But the more I've thought, the more I've come, by degrees, not to understand anything" (104). Instead of producing knowledge and certainty, thinking, or reasoning, ironically produces only the awareness of the absence of the same. Although the rational faculty helps one to see what is *not* truth, it does not bring the seeker to truth. Hence the stagehand, who realizes that the introducer's notion of Han's accidental violence may be the result of his "not knowing too much about [the couple's] relationship" (105), also realizes that his own initial notion of Han's deliberate violence may "in the same way" simply have been because he has known "a good deal about their relationship" (105). Clearly, the mindful and sensitive stagehand's rationality only deepens his befuddlement. Hence, even though he interprets the couple's relationship as revealing that they "were surprisingly cruel to each other" (103), he realizes that he "can't be sure of anything" (105). That is, although he tries to interpret the facts, truth proves to be elusive, for interpretation, which does not enable the disjointed, fragmented facts to come together to form a meaningful design, may simply be a misinterpretation of the facts. Clearly, Shiga, who suggests that a fact does not necessarily translate into truth, makes an existential point about the futility of searching for an

inherently coherent narrative in the world. As Nietzsche claims in *The Will to Power*, “We cannot establish any fact ‘in itself’: perhaps it is folly to want to do such a thing” (Section 481).

Further, the silence that shrouds the wife is a poignant expression of the elusiveness of truth. Although we hear Han’s voice in his detailed attempts to explain himself, we never once hear the wife’s voice. What, then, is the “truth” of patriarchal hegemony as a woman suffers? Does the wife’s silence reveal the helplessness and submission of victimization? Does her silence illustrate that “[t]he subaltern as female cannot be heard or read” even when she speaks or leaves behind any other form of text (Spivak 104)? Clearly, although Han’s wife says that the baby’s death “was an accident,” he does not listen to her (106). Further, does the wife’s silence reveal resilience? According to Han, “the patience with which she endured hardship was beyond what one would have thought possible even for a man” (107). Does she then show the silent patience that reveals the triumph of the human individual’s ability to create a purposeful and meaningful existence? Does her struggle constitute a purposeful existence? Or does her silent endurance, which never demonstrates her sense of self-fulfillment, only show the “extraordinary hardship” of the suffering human individual who struggles but fails to create a meaningful existence (107)? And does the wife’s exercise of power really torment Han, and make him writhe? If so, is she aware of this torment? Is she a victim of the patriarchal society that in turn makes her a victimizer?

As Shiga continues to turn the screw of uncertainty, Han’s long and detailed speech also reflects the ungraspability of truth. After his self-piteous outburst on his “writhing, desperate attempts” to enter upon his “true life,” he claims, “I thought I would act in such a way as to leave no room for error” (107). Does Han mean that he wishes to devise the perfect murder in

quest of self-fulfillment, or does he mean that he wishes to devise a responsible and conscientious plan in a quest for self-fulfillment? Is he equivocating? And what exactly is this self-fulfillment that he seeks? Clearly, “it is difficult to understand what bare ascription of truth amounts to—evident grammaticality notwithstanding” (Ullian 62). Further, Han admits that, prompted by weakness, he thought about killing his wife the night before the “incident” (108). Does he acknowledge his culpable thoughts to impress the judge with his honesty or to relieve himself of the burden of guilt? But if Han’s words suggest the guilt of a morally weak man whose self-pity prompts him towards an escape, they simultaneously suggest the honesty of a morally strong man whose conscience prompts him towards acknowledgment. Thus they illustrate that the “fact of homicide,” that is, the fact of Han’s “Crime,” does not yield either the truth of “premeditated murder” or that of second-degree murder or “manslaughter.” As Kafka describes the complexity of ethical nuances in his own human mind, “if he had to appear before a tribunal, a human tribunal, he would like to conceal from it the inner combat between the good and evil soul which, to make the confusion worse, change their roles from round to round. Yes, he would like to deceive his judges, ‘and what’s more, without actual deception’” (paraphrased by Heller xvii). Han too seems to want to deceive his judge without actual deception.

Clearly, Han does not mind his dearth of knowledge, for he can use this dearth to his advantage. Accepting his wife’s silence regarding the nature of her relationship with her cousin, Han never questions her about it. And, although he admits that after her death his immediate conviction is that he has “killed” her intentionally, he goes on to claim an absence of knowledge: “Gradually, despite myself, I became unsure” (111). His point is that because of the act of contemplation he moves from certainty (“my crime”)

to uncertainty (110): “Thinking back over the incident, [...] for some reason, a doubt rose up in me as to whether I myself believed it was murder” (111). The “doubt” that shows his use of reason also shows the elusiveness of truth. Not only is one’s knowledge of others so obviously limited that it is full of gaps and holes, but one’s self-knowledge, which only shows tiny pieces of the truth, is equally full of gaps and holes. But Han’s use of rationality and awareness of his own limited perception impress the judge and draw an emotion: sympathy. After all, as Nietzsche claims, “[t]he pride connected with knowing and sensing lies like a blinding fog over the eyes and senses of men [. . .]” (*Philosophy and Truth* 80).

But despite revealing an absence of pride, Han clearly suffers from the blinding fog of self-absorption. Although Han presents himself as a contemplative man who is in quest of self-knowledge, the lack of self-knowledge, ironically, proves to be self-fulfilling: “[I was happy] because it was completely unclear” (111). He readily claims that this uncertainty produces elation: “I was so happy, I was beside myself. I wanted to shout for joy” (111). So self-absorbed is Han that he seems to twist and appropriate the absence of meaning to turn it into a paradoxical meaning: “I could now tell the truth and be found innocent” (111). Thus he reveals himself as an utterly self-absorbed but articulate and contemplative man who demonstrates a remarkable ability to influence the judge into finding him innocent. Further, he feels no sorrow about his wife’s death. Indeed, he is so steeped in patriarchal narcissism that for him his wife is no more than “her body,” which fills him with “displeasure” (106). And his hatred fuels his sexual appetite for that same body. If she deviates from the role of supreme subservience that he expects her to play dutifully, he nurses an intolerable frustration. Thus, if she fails to serve him his supper as promptly as he expresses his hunger, he accuses her

of dawdling “over the preparations” (108). Further, overwhelmed by self-pity, he can only blame her for his own failures: “My writhing, desperate attempts to save myself, to enter upon my true life, she coolly, from the side and without the slightest wish to help, as if surrounding me, looked on at” (107). So limited is the power of the rational faculty that Han, a contemplative and observant man, expects his wife to behave like a human being when he dehumanizes her. But on the other hand this “intelligent-looking man” (105) is calmly cognizant of his own self-absorption: “I was afraid of the law, and I had never had such thoughts [of killing] before. It was merely because I was weak. But even though I was weak, my desire to live my own life was strong” (107). Indeed, in identifying his “attempts to save [himself]” as “writhing” and “desperate,” he uses his rational faculty only to make an unequivocal admission of his self-pity. Further, he also admits to the judge that his act of kneeling down beside his wife’s dead body “in silent prayer” is only an act of deception: “That was a trick that occurred to me at the moment. I knew everyone thought I seriously believed in Christianity. While pretending to pray, I was thinking about what attitude I should take” (110).

One wonders why Han freely incriminates himself and reveals the freedom of choice that instills no sense of responsibility. Although he admits that this thought occurs after a quarrel which leaves him “excited longer than usual” (107), still he *chooses* the knife-throwing act for the next day’s performance. Shiga’s point about freedom of choice is clear even in the beginning of the story, when the stagehand observes that “Han follow[s] his own will” regarding the question of divorce (104). As Shiga emphasizes Han’s freedom of choice, the latter does not stop his performance even when he “realize[s] the danger of having chosen this act” (109). And the truth of Han’s lack of a sense of responsibility slips under the crack between the fact of

the inscrutable wife's death and the patriarchal judge's interpretation of Han's account as remarkably honest. Does Han's ambiguous cheerfulness suggest the peace of a struggling individual who clings to uncertainty because he is morally relieved at not being certain of his own guilt? Or does it suggest the insensitivity of a self-centered killer who uses uncertainty to emotionally manipulate the judge with a show of honesty? Clearly, the enthralled judge, who is fascinated by the nuances of complexity in Han's mind, has no questions when Han admits, "And up to now, no matter what my feelings of hatred for her, I never imagined that I'd be able to talk so cheerfully about her death" (112).

For Han strikes the patriarchal judge as a uniquely subtle and courageous man who, despite the hazards of self-incrimination, unflinchingly and conscientiously acknowledges his guilty thoughts. Han's manner of self-accusation has the effect of suggesting a moral refinement: "one part of me kept having that dirty, hateful thought" (108). Further, as a courageous individual, Han appears to be a contemplative man who is intent on creating a meaningful life instead of surrendering to defeat: "Even if I broke through, and broke through, I might not break through all the way. But if I went on breaking through until the day I died, that would be my true life" (108). As the judge's impression of Han's rational sophistication waxes, so it steers him away from the truth of the latter's guilt and towards emotion. Hence his face softens, and he nods in sympathy as Han, who underscores his manhood, explains that for him there is "a great difference" between thinking passively of leaving his wife and putting his thought into action. By this point perhaps Han realizes that the judge, who has wondered why Han is "unable to take a more assertive, resolute attitude," is looking for signs of his masculinity (107). Now, with his talk of "a great difference" between "thinking" and "deciding," Han manages to elicit the

judge's respect by suggesting that if he thinks about an act, his intention is to honor that thought with his action. But the judge, who is not a particularly attentive listener, misses Han's obvious contradiction, for he asks his question, "Why didn't you think of leaving your wife" (109) after Han tells him "I often thought I'd like a divorce" (106). Despite his obvious irresponsibility, Han is careful to produce an impression of responsibility on the judge: "I kept thinking that no matter what I would have to do something. But I no longer thought of killing her, as I had the night before. And I was not at all worried about that day's performance. If I had been, I would not have chosen that particular act" (109). Is Han's boldness, then, suggestive of his manipulateness, the cornerstone of a carefully orchestrated plan? As a watcher, the judge, who shares Han's phallogocentric values, not only accepts Han's "bodily fatigue" and mental exhaustion ("my nerves were edgy," and "a weariness [...] had eaten into my heart") as a legitimate excuse, but he also accepts Han's curious "joy" at having disburdened himself of his existential fear and responsibility (109-10). Thus, when Han freely claims that he now feels "happy because come what may it was no longer a question of a confession of guilt," and when he demonstrates his ability "to talk so cheerfully about her death," the judge, completely in the grip of emotion, pronounces Han "Innocent," for an "excitement" that he cannot "put a name to [...] surge[s] up in him" (111-12).

Shiga's point about this excitement is that one does not "know," one only feels. That is, the exiguosness of knowledge is a contrast to the copiousness of emotion, for emotions become a thickening veil that, like rationality, shrouds the truth. Choosing neither the verdict of "premeditated murder" nor that of "manslaughter," the judge declares Han innocent after Han himself advances the point of innocence, saying,

“I decided that I would have to be found innocent” (110) and “being found innocent meant everything to me now” (111). Perhaps Han appropriates unknowability and exerts control over the judge because of the force of his own emotion. Or perhaps the force of the unknowable and uncontrollable phenomenon produces emotion in the judge. What is abundantly clear to the judge is that Han has felt “a terrible, uncontrollable anger” towards his wife, as the stagehand claims (104), and that Han has admitted to “suddenly” feeling immediately after his wife’s death that his act is deliberate (110). Although the emotions surrounding the act of violence are clear, the knowledge regarding the same is absent, and one suspects that the absence of knowledge is inextricable from the surge of emotion. The judge, who feels an “excitement” that he cannot identify (“he could not put a name to it”) and that he does not comprehend, does not know what “Han’s Crime” is, but his fascination, sympathy, and admiration for the defendant overwhelm him (112). Emotion, not knowledge, guides one.

Indeed, Shiga underscores the word “excitement,” which reveals the force of emotion, not simply through the judge but also through Han. Thus Han asserts that his “doubt” about his guilt fills him with vigorous passion: “A sudden excitement swept over me. I felt so excited I couldn’t sit still” (111). Also, the night before the catastrophic performance, Han feels and “remain[s] excited longer than usual” (108). Earlier, Han, who does not *know* that his wife murders her baby, feels a guilty pleasure at the baby’s death: “I felt that the baby’s death was a judgement on her for what she’d done” (106). One does not feel the force of “truth,” one only feels the force of emotions. Shiga shows this point elaborately as Han describes the last moments of his wife’s life: “I was about to drive in the next [knife] to the right, when suddenly a strange look came over her face. She must have felt an impulse of violent fear.

Did she have a premonition that the knife about to fly at her would go through her neck? I don't know. I only felt that face of violent fear [. . .]" (109). Han's suggestion here is that such is the force of emotion (specifically, fear) that it proves to be deadly. His first point is that his "strained, edgy nerves" are a force that he can barely manage: "I began to feel that I could not trust my own arm. Closing my eyes, I attempted to calm myself" (110). On top of this enormous challenge comes that of his wife's sudden "violent fear." Han suggests that, as a result, he is confused and overwhelmed by the force of emotion: "Dizziness struck me. But even so, with all my strength, almost without a target, as though aiming in the dark, I threw my knife . . ." (110). Han, who repeatedly demonstrates that he appreciates the power of suggestion, implies that his wife's fear becomes a deadly weapon that takes control of his own deadly weapon: "I only felt that face of violent fear, thrown back at my heart with the same force as the knife" (110). But Shiga suggests that perhaps Han's emotion of hatred for his wife is just as potent as the emotion of fear, and they collide to produce a lethally vicious cycle. As far as the patriarchal juggle is concerned, however, Han skillfully manages to shift the burden of violence from himself to his wife. But his words also go on to suggest that even if his hatred is only subconscious at the time, and hence, even if it is supposedly slumbering innocuously in the depths of his self-absorbed heart as the performance begins, it rises instinctively to meet the challenge of his wife's "violent fear," and hence he hurls the knife with all his "strength."

Shiga's point, then, is that the "truth" of "premeditated murder" or that of "manslaughter," like that of patriarchal hegemony, has slipped between the cracks made by fragmented facts and unverifiable interpretations, and that the subtle, complex force of emotion is so overpowering that one is in the

grip of that to which one cannot even “put a name.” Not only does one gain no more than infinitesimal knowledge of the other, but one also gains no more than infinitesimal self-knowledge. Indeed, the point is not that there is no truth, but that the world is so full of unknowability and undecidability that one does not even know if one’s sense of the lack of meaning and coherence is necessarily uncontrollable, or if one creates a paradoxical meaning and coherence despite or because of unknowability and undecidability. Thus, although the “fact of homicide” is undeniable, and although initially the question of “innocence” is never under consideration for the judge, who begins his examination with his rational faculty, just as the truth becomes elusive, so Han escapes both possible verdicts (“manslaughter” and “premeditated murder”) which are under consideration, not simply because of the judge’s rational sense of the absence of “objective proof” (111), but also because of the uncontrollable force of emotions. Such is the force of emotions and the fragility of rationality that, despite the “fact of homicide,” any attempt to quest for the truth of Han’s guilt is simply futile.

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I

Teaching *The Name of the Rose*

. . . books speak of books: it is as if they spoke among themselves. . . . a long, centuries-old murmuring, an imperceptible dialogue between one parchment and another, a living thing, a receptacle of powers not to be ruled by a human mind

—Adso of Melk, in Umberto Eco's *Name of the Rose*

n the mid-1980s I became fascinated with Umberto Eco's first, most famous book, *The Name of the Rose*. About fifteen years ago, I began thinking about how one might construct a course that would be interdisciplinary in the widest sense possible within the confines of a single semester. I began to think that Eco's book might offer a means of achieving my goal. It became clear that aesthetic considerations related to literature, music, the visual arts, architecture, theater, and film, complemented by philosophical, religious, political, economic, and ethical issues raised in Eco's novel, could provide the means of focusing and linking the range of ideas and phenomena I hoped to bring into play. Later, I wrote an article based on the novel that was published in *CEAMAGazine* (Vol. 17, 2004-2006, pp. 40-52), under the title "Intertextuality, Words, Literature, and the World."

One of the attractions of this course is a sense of shared discovery. No one (not even we hallowed professors!) could possibly be fully competent in such an undertaking; there are no "experts" or "authorities" in the room. Students have a chance to make real contributions, since almost any major could provide insight into some aspects of the class. Also, I have found that teaching while hanging on (with bloody fingernails) to the very edge of the competencies for which my training has (or has not) prepared me is a powerful spur to energetic, creative (and very well-prepared) teaching. Further, precisely because of the interdisciplinary nature of the material, focus is adjusted in order to maximize a professor's particular competencies—and those of the students.

But one must take care not to overwhelm students. One must keep the focus on a few central points, while showing in specific relationship to those points the enormous range of manifestations and consequences

they bring into being. The issues I linked and focused on in the last iteration of this course were 1) the mediatedness of the human condition, 2) the limits of rationality and knowledge (including who gets to decide what counts as knowledge and why), 3) the problem of “difference,” 4) the importance of humor in life, and 5) tragedy as an articulation of humans’ homelessness in the world. The course works best with graduate students; juniors and seniors in an honors, philosophy, or cultural studies program; or juniors and seniors who are registered with permission of the instructor.

THE BOOK

Umberto Eco is a leading philosopher of semiotics, an accomplished student of medieval history and art, and a world-class novelist. *The Name of the Rose* is cast as a murder mystery in an early fourteenth-century monastery located in northern Italy. Not just a “good read,” it is a spectacular work of erudition, a profound study of the human condition as revealed through a cataclysmic collision of religious, political, sociocultural, economic, philosophical, and scientific developments that prevailed at that time. The early fourteenth century has been described by present-day historians as the historical apex of the Church’s power and influence. However, it was not the monolith that we might expect, but rather a vast battlefield upon which many factions within it fought over religious, political, economic, philosophical, and sociocultural issues. The Church itself was also at war with the *secular* world over the same issues and with an eye toward maximizing its secular influence and power. And of course, in all of this the gaping maw of the Inquisition was open to all accused of heresy.

Several aspects of the novel need to be highlighted here. They are especially useful in exploring the problem of humans’ mediatedness. The various historical, physical, educational, economic, political,

and religious situations of the characters greatly affect their perceptions of, and responses to, the phenomena they encounter. This process is endlessly recursive. Our situatedness infects our own perceptions and responses—and those changes gradually change the perceived nature of the very sources of human mediatedness: history, institutions, politics, religion, economic contexts, and so it goes.

FAITH AND KNOWLEDGE

By 1274 the Church (through the work of St. Augustine in the early fifth century, and St. Thomas Aquinas nearly nine hundred years later), had achieved one of its most important goals: providing a rational foundation for religious thought through a reconciliation of the work of Plato and Aristotle with the Church. Despite many difficulties, this goal was relentlessly pursued because the leaders of the Church realized that there was no ignoring these men. Plato and Aristotle were becoming well-enough known that to go on as though they had never existed was not an option.

But by 1327 Aquinas had been dead fifty-three years. In that short interval, the mysticism of Meister Eckhart, the voluntarism of Duns Scotus, and (especially) the nominalism of William Bacon were breaking down this mighty “synthesis.” It became clear to most intellectuals that it was impossible to find in knowledge a rational foundation for faith.

It is ironic, therefore, that the central metaphor of the book is an enormous library—which is also a vast labyrinth. William and Adso had to penetrate the inner sanctum of the library to learn the “truth” about the murders. The power behind the library was Jorge de Burgos, a Spanish monk, aged and blind, but a man of powerful conservative commitments: to monastic (absolute adherence to authority) rather than scholastic (a more openly interpretative stance toward the Bible and other authoritative documents) form of education,

to ancient church authority rather than newly discovered knowledge, and to the fading idea that the past was superior to the present and even the future. Excepting de Burgos' conservatism, we are reminded (as Eco intends) of scholar Jorge Luis Borges, also a blind man who, as it happens, became the director of the Argentinean National Library, and among whose works is a book of fantastic stories called *Labyrinths*—which contains a story about an infinite, labyrinthine, meaningless, library.

APOCALYPSE

There is an apocalyptic atmosphere enveloping the story, driven by the monks' belief that the millennium (the *Dies Irae*, originally thought to occur in the year 1000) is *not* measured from the birth of Christ but from the Donation of Constantine (ca. 325-327)—a donation of land to the Church that provided the foundation and justification for the Church's direct action in the lived world, not just for the interpretation and practice of spiritual matters. However, the Donation was a forgery (perpetrated by eighth- or ninth-century monks). But *that* is a fact that would not be discovered for some hundred years after virtually all of the persons in the novel were dead! This is a sobering thought when we realize that *we* must hold as true at least some influential beliefs and ideas that are entirely unfounded, worse, impossible to discover as false in our own lifetimes.

HUMOR AND LIFE

William of Baskerville, the protagonist (with our narrator, Adso) is a composite of monk, former inquisitor, sleuth (Sherlock Holmes), scientist (William Bacon), and philosopher (William of Ockham, who was a central player in initiating the gradual descent of the Church from its point of greatest influence in the world). This description sets William forth as virtually

the direct opposite of Jorge. It is no surprise, therefore, that these two are at the center of another controversy that pervades the monastery, one that eventually focuses on the lost, second part of Aristotle's *Poetics*—the part on comedy—which eventually leads us to the very center of the murder mystery. The first part of Aristotle's little book is the well-known discussion on tragedy. We gradually learn that the *second* part (which today is lost) is seen by Jorge as an extremely dangerous document, in that it suggests that humor, especially if used in its various manifestations as ridicule, can become an powerful weapon against any person, power, or institution. William, on the other hand, sees humor and whimsy as fundamental to the human condition—essential for a balanced life. It is the second part of the *Poetics* and the intrigue surrounding its location in the library that are emphasized and exacerbated by the contest between Jorge and William.

POVERTY

Another important conflict focuses on the question of poverty. In the early fourteenth century there were a large number of movements (many ultimately determined to be heretical) whose members avowed personal poverty. These movements argued, generally, that Christ and the disciples were poor, that whatever they had was just for use and not legally possessed by them. These movements argued for the poverty of the Church—maintaining that its worldly activities were undermining its spiritual focus. This was seen as a very dangerous idea by Church leaders, who were seeking to expand its wealth and worldly power—despite strong opposition from yet others: political leaders who saw the Church as encroaching upon their power.

DIFFERENCE

Adso, William's companion and the narrator of the story, is a young novitiate who is certain of his faith,

believing that “the Good propagates throughout the world of its own accord.” But Adso soon finds his faith severely shaken. He quickly begins to see that difference may not be so easy to discern, that truth may be not in a thing itself, but in what is *thought* of that thing. For example, it becomes increasingly clear during the novel that the difference between who is a saint and who a heretic often has little to do with who those individuals *are* or what they believe and say, but what people *think* the saint/heretic is and/or believes and says. Worse, this can come down to hairsplitting! Pick up the newspaper any day and you have numerous examples of the same phenomenon in our culture to use in class.

Out of these points, an extremely important insight emerges among students regarding their own situatedness: humans are *all* radically mediated by our own socioeconomic, political, historical, philosophical, sociocultural, and religious situations. Those mediations are often impossible to fully perceive *or* avoid.

We can see that Eco’s novel provides a riveting focus to what might otherwise be a daunting range and complexity of issues. This focus is beautifully brought to life by Eco in a wealth of detail. His brilliant evocation of persons and situations enables students to envision the richness of early fourteenth-century Western culture and to sense, somehow, the experience of living in that culture—as well as to find powerful connections with their own world. Virtually all of the important characters were real persons or are built up out of composites. Most of the books and references are or were also real. *The Name of the Rose* envelops us in a world that is a vast metaphor for our own, containing all of the contradictions, complexities, and challenges the people of that world faced, and demonstrating the successes and failings of the prevailing world view of the fourteenth century. But the book also exposes the larger issue mentioned earlier that weighs upon us all: the liabilities and blind spots *any* world view, *any* society’s

historical situatedness proliferates but cannot address because that situatedness itself mediates the perceptions and rationality of all who occupy that historical space. These liabilities and blind spots inevitably plague any culture, undermining many of the rational means used to engage the problems—and catastrophes—such liabilities visit upon us.

The importance of leadership and civic engagement also arises in this novel. The challenge to students throughout the course is to seek ethical and aesthetic perspectives and insights that are both stringent enough *and* flexible enough to provide a useful and positive basis to improve their interaction with, and hopefully, influence on, *their* world. Students must articulate these perspectives and insights as they evolve during the course by means of regular and detailed involvement in analyses and critiques of situations that arise in the novel and how they provide opportunity for reflection on our own circumstances.

Eco's book is itself a literary production of the late twentieth century, therefore reflecting the past through the prism of its own present. It *is* what it purports to document—its inter-textual relations to both present and past summon up a range of connections of breathtaking complexity and richness. For this reason, the final third of the course is devoted to examining the same philosophical, aesthetic, religious, and ethical insights developed in our examination of the forces impinging on fourteenth-century monks as a means of examining and criticizing human experience and values in the early twenty-first century.

THE COURSE

I require that all students enrolled in the course read the book *prior* to the class. This makes a significant demand on students, but most say they are glad to have read it, since when they reread the book during the course, they develop a better sense of the whole, grasp-

ing complexities they did not see or understand in their first reading.

The unfolding of the course itself demonstrates different ways of viewing history. The *story* follows the linear passage of events throughout the seven-day period of the action. Students tend to like having the material of the *course* presented in the same manner, a manner they have often experienced in their previous learning situations. However, one of the points of the course is that a view of history as linear, progressive, cumulative, convergent/teleological (supposedly toward The Truth) is a remnant of Enlightenment thought. Students have little trouble seeing the monastic view of a *devolving* history as problematic, but do not see their *own* linear/progressive model as equally suspect. So we look at a “constellational” view of history that uses the metaphor of constellations as a conceptual device in developing more subtle *and* richer views of history. A spherical constellation (or the “big bang”) can be used to represent evolutionary change. There, we see history not as a linear phenomenon, but as an expanding, *global* intertwining of billions of strands of activity, demonstrating how multitudinous, synchronic and a-synchronic changes provide a view of change as exponential. In the constellational view, ideas, events, groups, and individuals have “gravitational” rather than linear relationships. Different phenomena have different masses and inertias that both affect other phenomena and are themselves affected by those same phenomena. These metaphors greatly help students perceive relationships among a large number of phenomena.

An outline of each class is provided beforehand. There is room for students to take notes on that outline. Class material is presented via PowerPoint, but with very little text. When used, text provides the barest of outlines interspersed with important quotes, artworks, films and film clips, music, whimsical, even wacky art, found in media of all kinds. One of the

ideas important to develop during the course is William of Baskerville's belief that humor is an essential aspect of the human condition. We consider if it may be that humor, especially as manifested in whimsy, is critical for human survival.

I adjust the course to interests I'm engaged with at the time. This works well for me (and, I believe, the students). I have taught this course with different ideas driving the discussion. In its first iteration we looked at the book primarily through the lens of social issues and theory; the second, literary issues and theory; the third, science, culture, knowledge, and theory; and the latest, tragedy as viewed by Aristotle, Nietzsche, Heidegger, Kaufmann, and Steiner.

Tragedy is the only term adequate for *The Name of the Rose*. But it is not a tragedy in Aristotle's sense—in either form or substance. We read Aristotle's book (and the reconstruction of the part on comedy) as an example of the problem of categories and particulars. The tragic view of humans' homelessness in the world (a theme in Heidegger's and Nietzsche's thinking) is emphasized. Heidegger's translation and analysis of the second choral ode of Sophocles' *Antigone* points to its importance as one of the most powerful and poignant articulations of that theme in all of literature. Nietzsche, Kaufmann, and Steiner also develop the theme of homelessness in their own ways.

Here are several texts used in the most recent iteration of this course:

Aristotle. *Poetics I, with Tractatus Coislinianus, a Hypothetical Reconstruction of Part II, the Fragments of the On Poets*.

Trans. Richard Janko. Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Co., 1987.

Borges, Jorge Luis. "Fauna of Mirrors." *The Book of Imaginary Beings*. New York: Discus Books, 1969.

—. *Labyrinths*. Trans. William Gibson. New York: New Directions Books, 2007.

Eco, Umberto. *The Name of the Rose*. Trans. William Weaver.

New York: Harcourt Brace and Co., 1984.
 Nietzsche, Friedrich. *The Birth of Tragedy*. Trans. Walter Kaufmann. New York, Random House, 1967.
 Sophocles. *Oedipus Rex*. Trans. J. E. Thomas. Clayton, DE: Prestwick House Touchstone Edition, 2002.

An invaluable secondary text is Adele Haft et al., *The Key to the Name of the Rose* (Harrington Park, NJ: Ampersand Associates, 1987). This provides translations of all non-English phrases and quotes, short bios on all of the persons mentioned or represented in the novel, historical notes, and a short glossary.

In the first meeting, I model both the nature and degree of analysis and critique I expect the students to demonstrate in their examination of the novel. They are assigned to study groups for the duration of the semester. The groups are responsible for analyzing the novel throughout the course, with each student given two scheduled opportunities to speak. Students must present very focused, individual, timed discussions of two minutes each, with a shared summative discussion among the group. Then a class discussion and debate follows, focusing on what the class as a whole considers to be the important ideas, contradictions, and philosophical problems driving the action of each section of the novel. This discussion can extend and/or critique the study group's analysis. Most of the points students bring up I will seek to have them elaborate further.

What follows is a brief description of some of the kinds of projects expected from students. Careful advising of students in the preparation of their projects, papers, or project/papers is essential; consequently, they are expected to step up to a level of intellectual rigor they have not experienced before. Students examine ideas and questions emerging out of our studies through the lens of their chosen field, creating artistic works such as paintings, sculptures, dance, theater, musical compositions or dramatic performances.

They may also construct web sites, mazes, or models. They have produced papers, including economic, historical, philosophical, and scientific studies, religious commentaries, library science, herbal remedies, medicine, etc., etc. All are required to present a fifteen- to twenty-minute discussion on this project or some aspect of it.

Students are required to visit museums to examine medieval *and* contemporary artworks, or attend a live concert of medieval or contemporary music. Student participation in broader community or regional events related to the course is coordinated with individual students or student groups. All students are required to attend a lecture, a Latin Catholic Mass, and a theatrical production, film, or opera on related topics, or as exemplifications of some of the aesthetic ideas discussed in the course. All students are required to keep a notebook on pedagogical techniques employed in class.

Students must meet with me twice during their paper/project preparations. This is important: I engage the subject they have chosen using the Socratic method—through questioning alone they must learn what they know and what they don't know. There *must* be a critical element to the work that they produce. These are not research papers; they must combine research and criticism in some depth.

There are two exams: a mid-semester, and a final—both of which are take-home and can be done in consultation with other students in the class as long as that consultation is documented. (Surprisingly, a large percentage of students consult on the mid-semester but not on the final.) They are given the essential elements of the mid-semester and final in the *first class* of the semester—five points by the well-known American philosopher Joseph Margolis. Below is one example:

Reality is cognitively intransparent: that is, all discourse about the world is mediated by our conceptual schemes,

and there is no way to tell whether what we claim about the world directly “corresponds” with what is there, in the world independent of inquiry. (7)

We discuss these points often with regard to the book and the course. By exam time, students should be able to articulate what each of Margolis’s statements means and to apply it to their work. Students must use one or more of Margolis’s theses as “lenses” through which to discuss and critique certain aspects of the novel and/or course. Students get extra points on any part of the exam in which they first *refute*, the Margolis point, then use that refutation as the basis of their discussions and analysis of material in the exam. They have two weeks for the preparation of the exams.

This course is very demanding, for both students and the professor, but I have found that the effort expended in becoming ever more worthy of guiding others on this journey is well worth the rewards.

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The River as Structural Kingpin in *The Mill on the Floss*

his study is an interpretation of *The Mill on the Floss* in terms of a narrative dynamic of exclusion which guides the different plot developments and links the concept of exclusion to the narrative structure. Maggie's exclusion of the traditional female role of wife and mother for the sake of her intellectual yearnings opposes a second exclusion that is expressed by the society she lives in; St Ogg's and the Dodsons embody the "natural" life against which Maggie is viewed as a "mistake of nature." This double exclusion creates a narrative tension that must be resolved by an inclusion at the end of the narrative if there is to be closure. Eliot prepares a structure of inclusion by linking different images of women with those of water. Thus this analysis reveals the importance of the flood as a means of inclusion for Maggie, "central" character left "outside" the narrative until her death.

Throughout the first part of *The Mill on the Floss* Maggie Tulliver displays an intellectual precocity that the family finds ill-omened in a female child. The narrative participates in the family's perspective, calling her passion "weakness" and "wantonness." On a hermeneutic level this double condemnation underlines Maggie's unfitness for the options offered to her at the societal and narrative levels. She is excluded from the elevated sphere of intellectual activity and incapable of conceiving of the emancipating gesture that she needs to make in order to free herself; as Colette Caraes points out, "armed . . . with self-assurance . . . Maggie and Dorothea would have escaped their fates" (537; my translation). On the other hand, Maggie cannot resign herself to becoming part of the world of St. Ogg's either. Rather than suffering her separation as a punishment (Fuchs 426), Maggie effectuates a second, unsuccessful attempt at self-exclusion, exercising the right to choose that Barbara Hardy finds in the Eliot heroine (135-39). Maggie remains in total exclusion.

This “central” character finds herself “nowhere.”

John Hagan points out that various critics argue the wrongness of one or the other of the opposing forces of intellect and society (53). However, the problem is not one of righting any wrong, or of correcting a flaw. Rather, it is a problem of relieving the tension created by this opposition; it is opposition itself that is wrong, or rather unstable, and straining to be resolved. The images of water and of the flood at the end of the novel both point out the importance of this opposition and eliminate it. Maggie, doubly excluded, is finally doubly included at the close of *The Mill on the Floss* by a uniting of female images with water images that annuls this tension. Comprehension of the structure of Maggie’s end is necessary to an understanding of the conflict as a whole, and to a deeper understanding of the complex questions of woman’s place that infuse George Eliot’s work.

Symbolic images of the witch and the Virgin form a complex parallel to Maggie’s life and death. A full understanding of these images involves considering them in conjunction with the image of water, the dominating image of the end of the work. This ending has often been brought into question; Hardy insists that the “river imagery . . . expose[s] . . . gaps in the action” and that the “foreshadowings [of drowning] strike us as artificial because they are uninvolved with action” (47). Others have also seen the ending of *The Mill on the Floss* as extraneous, a convenient ending to a work that Eliot wanted to end quickly, a cheat on the reader and an insult to his/her aesthetics, etc. However, this ending is exactly in keeping with the structure of exclusion developed in the novel. An immediate answer to Hardy’s criticism is that the Floss is supposed to take part not in the action but in the structure of the narrative, the structure of tension and opposition.

Gordon Haight and Françoise Bolton show that the research for the novel started with the idea of the

flood (Haight III: 145; Bolton 27, 33, 89). On a more structural level, Reva Stump identifies the rhythm of the novel as that of the river, and even Hardy notes the “eddying” quality of the work’s movement (Stump 67; Hardy 53, 54, 56). These observations indicate that the flood was always central, and not peripheral, to the structure of the novel. But more pertinently, the river performs the final gesture necessary for the ending of the book: the inclusion of Maggie. The Victorian mindset demands that each person have a place, albeit a fallen one (Weissmann 166, 167); thus the tale cannot end without some final resolution of Maggie’s suspension outside of society in her “place of agony” (Woolf 217). Maggie’s death in the river forms part of a complex system of images finally linking her to humanity. This complex system is also constructed on the images of the witch and the Virgin; these three elements enclose Maggie, reversing the gesture of shutting out that dominates the narrative until the end.

As Maggie’s exclusion is double—from her chosen path and from the life forced on her by St. Ogg’s—the inclusion is also double, involving images of the mother as well as of the Virgin. The first parallel, left vague in the narrative, presents Maggie’s drowning as a return to the womb, as Caraes suggests (190). Maggie, the “mistake of nature” (*Mill* 9; bk. I, ch. 2), is reabsorbed by that (Mother) Nature.

The narrative draws close parallels between water and mother by comparing their characters. The river, usually presenting a “low, placid voice,” a calm current, can rise up and charge “as sudden death” in flood time (*Mill* 2, 131; bk. I, chs. 1, 12). In the same way, a mother could be calm until something stirs her up: “Mrs. Tulliver was a mild woman, but even a sheep will face about when she has lambs” (*Mill* 43; bk. I, ch. 6). Bessy embodies this protective instinct when she is ready to brave the anger of Tom and let the disgraced Maggie into the house (*Mill* 546; bk. VII, ch. 1). Thus

the mother of the novel, Bessy, incarnates a direct parallel to the Floss.

This same tendency to attack prompted by protectiveness is one of the properties of the Floss: “The old mill ‘ud miss me, I think, Luke. There’s a story as when the mill changes hands the river’s angry; I’ve heard my father say it many a time. There’s no telling whether there mayn’t be summat *in* the story” (*Mill* 296; bk. III, ch. 9). The river, like a mother, has the instinct to rise up to protect its own. The maternal character of water inspires a metaphor at the end of the novel, that of the victory of the maternal over Maggie.

A more powerful image of water embodies the most conclusive elements of Maggie’s inclusion. This time it is an inclusion by sacrament, the metaphor of water as baptism. Baptismal water washes away sins, allowing for a rebirth; through this image, the “sin” of Maggie’s exclusion is erased, and her return to the womb also involves a rebirth in the society that made of her endeavors a sin.

This reading of the river as holy depends on its link with the images of the witch and the Virgin. Water not only blesses the faithful, but protects them from evil in a more direct way. This link of Maggie to witches and water starts to be forged at the very beginning of the narrative, as Maggie explains an illustration to a guest:

“That old woman in the water’s a witch; they’ve put her in to find out whether she’s a witch or no, and if she swims she’s a witch, and if she’s drowned—and killed, you know—she’s innocent, and not a witch, but only a poor, silly old woman. But what good would it do her then, you know, when she was drowned? Only, I suppose, she’d go to heaven, and God would make it up to her.” (*Mill* 14; bk. I, ch. 3)

Water protects good people from the machinations of Evil. The illustration is taken from Defoe’s *History of the Devil*, a formative influence on Maggie’s image of

woman. This particular woman is a threat to society, and is tried to protect the community, a protection which depends on the good faith of the water. Maggie, like the witch, is seen as a threat to the society of St. Ogg's through her anti-conformism, and is put to her own test. Her position as witch in the narrative is reinforced by her dark colors and impulsive actions, as Caraes interprets them (149). Maggie's cousin Lucy adds more direct parallels when considering the "witchery" of Maggie's beauty, the "witchcraft" of her seemingly miraculous acquisition of knowledge through her clandestine meetings with Philip, and her general "uncanniness" (*Mill* 415, 433; bk. VI, chs. 2, 3). Through these traits, Maggie forms a close parallel with the witch; this has great importance for the end of the tale.

With the other contributing image, that of the Virgin, water is presented not only as protection but as salvation, with the full implication of the baptismal rite. The link of salvation and water arises through the recounting of the legend of St. Ogg, the boatman who agrees to row a poor woman and baby across the Floss during a storm, to find on reaching the other side that the woman is the Virgin. Ogg is sainted by this act, and he and the Virgin appear on the water at time of danger to protect anyone caught on the water (*Mill* 130; bk. I, ch. 12). The Virgin gives protection and benediction of the water.

The complement to this link of water to the Virgin is the link of the Virgin with Maggie. Images of Maggie in the form, guise, or position of the Virgin, either in her Old Testament equivalent of Eve or in her New Testament sainthood, abound in the later part of the novel. Both of these female images return to the water once they are connected with Maggie. The first parallel between Maggie and the Virgin is created through an image of Eve before the fall. Maggie is pre-sin, in a state of temptation: ". . . the poor child, with her soul's

hunger and her illusions of self-flattery, began to nibble at this thick-rinded fruit of the tree of knowledge . . ." (*Mill* 320; bk. IV, ch. 3). Maggie's character is described as matching almost exactly that of the Eve of *The History of the Devil*, vain, "self-flattering." Her sin is her attempt to appropriate the forbidden fruit of knowledge. Diana Postlethwaite's interpretation shows that this is the ultimate sin against the social order (202, 207, 213). The words "the tree of knowledge" echo the words of Genesis, "the tree of the knowledge of good and evil" (Gen. 2: 17). Maggie is caught in the Eve-gesture of this transgression of the ordained, a gesture considered to be against her nature and her "unique occupation" (Defoe 18; 1-V). This comparison underlines the risk of falling that Maggie narrowly avoids when the temptation is taken from her by her father's bankruptcy. The removal of the temptation implies that Maggie is still pure and virginal, that she has not yet fallen.

The second time the Virgin image appears, Maggie becomes the fallen Eve by association. Stephen designates Philip as "the fallen Adam" (*Mill* 410; bk. VI, ch. 1), not in order to attribute to him any particular sin, but in order to situate Philip outside of Paradise. Stephen forms an inverse parallel between Philip and himself, putting himself in the garden with his radiant Lucy-Eve. This gallant comparison contains a new system of implications inverting of the Bible image; Adam-Philip falls, bringing his Eve-Maggie down with him. It is the male who causes them to be flung from their home. This is a foreshadowing image; later, Maggie receives an ineradicable stain to her virtue because of the impetuosity of the other Adam, Stephen, become tempter and sinner. This temptation occurs on the water—through the boat ride they take alone together on the Floss. This forms the first link of Maggie-Eve and water.

The images of Maggie as Virgin in the New

Testament personification, the interceding saint, become even more closely connected with the Floss. The first of them presents Maggie as a Madonna—guardian angel for Bob, as she reproaches him for his peddler's cheating tactics (*Mill* 317; bk. IV, ch. 3). In this first apparition, the saint is pure, benevolent, and untouchable. Maggie can participate in sainthood at this time because temptation has been removed from her. Maggie is in a state of grace in which she can start reading Thomas à Kempis and begin her conversion to asceticism.

As the narrative progresses, the image of this Virgin lowers. From pure protector of sinners, Maggie becomes a pagan symbol, Virgin as goddess-queen: her “full lustrous face, with the bright black coronet, looked down, like that of a divinity well pleased to be worshipped . . .” on Philip (*Mill* 365; bk. V, ch. 3). This Virgin is more full of self-contentment than of charity; she does not serve the sinner, but rules over him. Philip's position as sinner implies a first foreshadowing of his later fallen position.

Maggie ceases to reign entirely in the third parallel image; she becomes the sinner begging for intervention. This comes at a moment when Lucy is trying to plan out Maggie's visit, and other things besides:

“Now Maggie's tale of visits to aunt Glegg is completed, I mean that we shall go out boating every day until she goes. She has not had half enough boating because of these tiresome visits, and she likes it better than anything.—Don't you, Maggie?”

“Better than any sort of locomotion, I hope you mean,” said Philip, . . . “else she will be selling her soul to that ghostly boatman who haunts the Floss, only for the sake of being drifted in a boat forever.” (*Mill* 517-18; bk. VI, ch. 13)

The parallel is still more complicated here, and functions on several levels. First, the fact that Philip places

Maggie in St. Ogg's boat normally confers on her the status of Virgin and forms a direct parallel with the legend. However, in order to get into the boat Maggie must pay with her soul, the price that the devil demands in exchange for his services. For the privilege of rowing with Ogg Maggie has to commit the ultimate sin, the sin of witches, and give herself to Evil. The entire image of Ogg is distorted into that of a fallen Virgin being rowed by a rebel from God. This image is realized in the boat ride on the Floss. Worse still, Maggie has tempted Lucy into a mortal "sin," that of finding a convention of society (visits to relatives) tiresome.

At the moment when Philip evokes St. Ogg, Lucy is putting in place her grand plan: to use the boat rides as an excuse for leaving Maggie and Philip alone together. This coupling would partially reconstruct the Ogg image, since Philip has long considered himself Maggie's "guardian angel" (*Mill* 343; bk. V, ch. 1). He would thus become a male Virgin protecting the fragile sinner Maggie. However, such a reconstruction cannot take place. First, Philip cannot preside as Virgin, being male; the role of Mother of God can be taken only by a woman. Second, Maggie can no longer be held in the status of repentant sinner at this point in the tale; she has returned to her position of Eve before the temptation of Stephen's seduction of her. From Eve before the fall with knowledge as the forbidden fruit, Maggie becomes Eve falling with Stephen as serpent. Thus Philip cannot and does not fulfill his duty as guardian angel; he falls ill. Maggie then fulfills the prophecy of Philip and sells her soul, her state of grace, as she gets into the boat with Stephen, Lucifer disguised as suitor accomplishing the revolt against his God, Lucy, that started with the turning of his eyes away from his idol, as Defoe describes it (18; 1-V; Maheu 30; *Mill* 424; bk. VI, ch. 2).

By her act, Maggie excludes herself from the status

of saint and benefactrice, a fact that is underlined in her dream on the Floss:

She was in a boat on the wide water with Stephen, and in the gathering darkness something like a star appeared, that grew and grew till they saw it was the Virgin seated in St. Ogg's boat, and it came nearer and nearer, till they saw the Virgin was Lucy and the boatman was Philip—no, not Philip, but her brother, who rowed past without looking at her . . . (*Mill* 530; bk. VI, ch. 14)

Maggie is situated completely outside of any possible redemption. Lucy takes the place of the saint, thereby excluding Maggie. Philip, the fallen guardian angel, receives the blessing of this new Virgin, which redeems the sin of having left Maggie a prey to temptation. Tom, the Old Testament judge, the Rhadamanthus of Hades (*Mill* 55; bk. I, ch. 6), refuses his mercy in refusing his gaze. All of these positions repeat themselves on Maggie's return to St. Ogg's; Lucy, "gratia plena," pardons Maggie, as does Philip in his new status as saint, while Tom remains judgmental, and Stephen continues to tempt (*Mill* 574-75, 565-68, 544-46; bk. VII, chs. 4, 3, 1). The image of the Virgin of St. Ogg's finds its first full parallel in the temptation and fall of Maggie.

The last parallel occurs at Maggie's death, and unites the image of the Virgin with that of the witch. The Floss floods while Maggie passes a vigil that marks her final exclusion, the exclusion of sin; she refuses Stephen's plea to join him on the continent (*Mill* 580-81; bk. VII, ch. 5). While trying to help Bob save the boats, she is swept away by the water in one of them. Her first instinct is to try to save her family; she rows to the mill and finds Tom there. He gets into the boat from the attic window and takes the oars, but the boat capsizes (*Mill* 581-88; bk. VII, ch. 5). This last passage unites all of the preceding narrative elements discussed here.

In this last image, Maggie is in the boat again, but in the position of Ogg, the mortal sinner, rowing. She commits the act of charity that redeems her in the eyes of Tom through saving him. Tom gets into the boat from the attic where Maggie used to torture her doll to combat the negative attitudes around her; thus the negative attitude comes to her with open arms, transformed, and the ghosts of her aunts' reproaches disappear. Tom's realization of what Maggie has done for him removes from him his Old Testament status of judge, replacing it with the New Testament status of sinner acquiring a state of grace. It is a penitent brother, a Paul with the scales fallen from his eyes, who blesses his sister. This passage also brings back the images of mothering that water represents; Maggie's fixation for Tom has maternal overtones.

Again, the benediction cannot be accepted in this image at this point. First, Tom cannot take the position of Virgin, any more than Philip can. Second, Tom has just been cleansed of his sin of pride, and his state of grace has not reached a stage of beatification yet. Thus Tom takes the oars, putting himself in the position of Ogg, and Maggie accedes to the status of Virgin finally and definitively, demonstrating that she has in fact been innocent throughout the narrative; too naive for her exclusion to ever take the form of wantonness, removed from the temptation of forbidden knowledge, saving herself from the menace of Lucifer-Stephen, Maggie finally has a chance to show her purity of soul and highmindedness.

But the boat capsizes, and Maggie drowns. According to Defoe's test, Maggie is therefore not a witch, the worst form of sinner. Proof is given that the originality of her character and her wish for intellectual pursuit were not sins. According to the nine-year-old Maggie's exegesis, God will make it up to Maggie

for having been drowned innocent. In this way, the narrative gives its final blessing to Maggie; the water that extinguishes this life offers its sacraments of baptism and beatification.

This final inclusion operated by the Floss marks the flood and the drowning as vital elements necessary to resolve the tensions of the long double exclusion that constitutes the narrative of *The Mill on the Floss*. The central conflict of the novel, the opposition of the exclusions, can finally be resolved, thus giving closure to the narrative. Philip and Stephen are no longer representative of any absolute moral right or wrong in such an interpretation, but are absorbed in the total dynamic of inclusion that is dominated by images of women and of water, in which they participate as male counterparts or catalysts. All of the different themes surrounding those of the women and the water weave together as the narrative ends to illustrate Maggie's primal struggle against the exclusion forced on her, and the exclusion she tries to achieve. Maggie must remain outside her Eden of knowledge and of the little Eden of St. Ogg's, but she cannot be left "outside" on a narrative level. Although the conscious refusal of a traditional role and the implicit refusal of any other immobilize Maggie for most of the narrative, the double exclusion is finally cancelled by the all-inclusive element of water. Her sufferings are those of an outcast, but the stigma is washed away in the waves, along with the place of aspiration and agony.

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The Unifying Function of Performative Collective Memory on Shi'a Religious Identity

argue in this paper that Shi'a Islam's performative commemoration of the Battle of Karbala (Iraq 680 A.D.) crosses national boundaries, allows for participation in collective historical trauma, and employs "sites of memory" (a term used by Pierre Nora) and monuments as a way of mourning and remembering. This metahistorical commemoration of the tragedy of Karbala is a reflection of Shi'a Islam's unswerving love for and faith in the House of Mohammad and functions as a powerful unifying force, thus preventing schisms within the sect.

From earliest times societies have undertaken a number of ways to commemorate their fallen heroes or martyrs. According to Jan Assmann in *Religion and Cultural Memory*, the "need to record events is so great that from a very early stage mankind has had recourse to all sorts of mnemonics and systems of notation with which to facilitate subsequent access" (Preface ix). Furthermore, Dominick LaCapra argues that other than structural trauma such as birth which all human beings experience, those individuals who suffer historical trauma endure an event at a particular point in time (cited in Suleiman 133). Thus, some incidents of personal or historical trauma become part

of the collective memory of a people or society. As a result, various “sites of memory” as well as monuments have been erected to mourn or to remember those who have suffered personal or collective trauma. Maurice Halbwachs claims that members of all strata of society construct their own memories, and “[e]very collective memory requires the support of a group delimited in space and time” (qtd. in Introduction 22). This collective memory is kept alive through performative commemorations, and each celebration of the historical event reinforces the memory. Halbwachs also believes that through participation in commemorative meetings with group members of the current generation, we can recreate through imaginatively re-enacting a past that would otherwise slowly disappear in the haze of time.

In a chapter titled “Staging Traumatic Memory,” Diana Taylor explains that in the Andean culture, “Masked dancers from pre-and post-Hispanic performative traditions” (190) yearly perform stories of violence enacted against their culture from the days of the Conquistadors to the more contemporary violence by the members of the Shining Path. Peru’s chief theater collective is called Yuyachkani, a term that “signals embodied knowledge and memory and blurs the line between thinking subjects and the subject of thought.” As a result, there is no “shared identity.” Instead, according to Taylor, the “I” and the “you” in the case of the multi-ethnic Andean or Peruvian people are the products of “each other’s experiences and memories, of historical trauma, of enacted space, of sociopolitical crises” (191). This remembering is more powerful than archival materials as it “introduces itself as a product of a history of ethnic coexistence. Its self-naming is a performative declarative announcing its belief that social memory links and implicates communities in the transitive mode of subjective formation” (192). This collective performance of memory or re-enactment of a historic past by an ethnic

minority is evidenced in the commemoration of the Battle of Karbala by Islam's second major sect.

The historical trauma of Shi'a Islam's commemorative collective memory is rooted in the Battle of Karbala, an event of great magnitude in Islam. After the death of the Prophet Mohammad, Islam was divided into two camps; those who supported the accession of Ali, the Prophet's son-in-law, to the caliphate are known as Shi'a, which means "party." After the accession to the Caliphate by a former rival of his family, Husain, the younger grandson of the Prophet Mohammad, was persuaded by the people of Kufa, a city on the banks of the Euphrates south of Baghdad, to come to Iraq and set himself up as the new Caliph.

The foundation for Shi'a collective trauma and the birth of Islam's first schism was laid by the people of Kufa's betrayal of Husain. The people did not meet Husain outside Kufa as proposed, and Husain was left with only his seventy-two followers and the women and children of his family. Instead of leaving Husain alone or allowing him to turn back, the Caliph's forces engaged his forces on the plains of Karbala on the tenth day of Muharram, the first month of the Islamic lunar calendar year. The battle began soon after dawn and was over by noon. That afternoon only the women and children were left alive. Later that evening the survivors were taken in chains to Kufa, where they suffered numerous indignities. Later, the captives were marched in chains to the Caliph's capital, Damascus (Syria), seven hundred miles from Kufa.

Commemorative mourning for Husain began almost immediately, as his sister Zainab and the other women of the family wailed and narrated the events of Karbala outside the palace walls in Damascus and demanded redress. Zainab was now the sole survivor-witness of the butchery enacted by the Caliph's army. Hence, she became a "moral witness" and an agent

of collective memory. According to Susan Suleiman, “Collective historical trauma is experienced by individuals, one at a time, and this fact has important consequences for the concept of testimony. Every testimony is unique; it reports what the speaker has personally witnessed or lived through” (133). Moreover, Suleiman argues that the “witness who recounts his or her own story represents, in both senses of the word, multitudes who did not survive to testify . . .” (134). This could refer to the Karbala Martyrs, now effectively silenced from telling their stories themselves, except that their impaled heads were oracular proof in the journey from Kufa to Damascus. Furthermore, this witness speaks on behalf of those “who may have survived but have remained speechless” (134) as in the case of Karbala’s survivors, women and children whose spokesperson at first was only Zainab. Later the Shi’a collective memory would prevent the trauma from disappearing into the past.

Moreover, the survivor-witness bears the burden of having to tell the truth and pass down to generations what is personal to that witness and to the greater community, in this case the Shi’a Muslim community. Consequently, Zainab’s role became that of *superstite*, a Latin term Giorgio Agamben employs to define a spectator plus survivor (17). In the person of Zainab, we see one instance where a woman has the historical role of creating a collective public memory out of her personal trauma—the loss of her brothers, sons, and nephews.

The first recorded event of Shi’a commemorative mourning took place one night soon after the Battle of Karbala. The people of Kufa gathered around Husain’s tomb and wept at the tragic outcome of their capricious behavior; they determined the next morning to locate and slay Husain’s killers. Frightened at the reaction the events at Karbala had generated, the Caliph sent the survivors of Karbala back to Medina, where the Prophet

Mohammad spent thirteen years. There their tale of woe, especially Zainab's, was met with so much anguish that over time its repercussions promoted collective historical trauma, as the atrocities endured by the Prophet's remaining family members struck the people of his former city with intense sorrow.

When the past traumatic experience is not discussed by the traumatized person and is submerged in the subconscious, the experience becomes inaccessible to him or her, but this was not true for Zainab in the seventh century. Every year after the event, on the tenth day of Muharram, the anniversary of the Battle of Karbala, Zainab recounted the poignant tale of the death of her brother and his followers, including her two sons. This repeated narration refreshed the details, which were then carried down through posterity. Thus Zainab occupies a central position in Shi'a Islam as a reliable witness; and metahistoric narratives stress the ignominy she suffered at the hands of the soldiers of Yazid, the Caliph in Damascus, when they pillaged the camp of the family's personal belongings and tore the earrings out of her ears, as well as the veil from her head. Iwona Irwin-Zarecka contends in *Frames of Remembrance* that "[i]f traumatic, tragic experiences by their very nature engender a great deal of memory work," then "the formative drama that begets a generation may live on by sheer force of the effect it had on individual lives" (53). This is true of Shi'a Islam. Pilgrims still journey to Zainab's mausoleum in Damascus, Syria, where it is a site of memory and a monument to her personal trauma and exemplary courage. This pilgrimage in itself is performative collective memory.

Furthermore, the remembrance of Karbala was almost immediately established in Iran, and the anniversary of the massacre began to be clandestinely observed, as the Iranian tradition of performative memory trauma (a pre-Islamic tradition in Eastern

Iran) was transferred to the martyrdom of Husain. Husain's wife was the daughter of Persia's last pagan king. When the news of Karbala reached Iran, the Iranians were mortified that the Arabs had mistreated the Prophet's family, including the husband and family of one of their princesses. The second reason for the observance of Muharram, called Taziyyeh in Iran, is the Pre-Islamic Eastern Iranian tradition of remembering and commemorating their fallen heroes in the writing and recitation of poetry and dramatic performances. According to Irwin-Zaecka, "If the memory of victimization can so well serve the cause of communal unity, it is not only because of its particular emotional strength. Structurally as well, the self-definition as a victim clearly marks the boundary between 'us' and 'them' in ways only matched by ties of kinship" (60).

The Muharram observance had and still has two parts, the private or esoteric and the public or exoteric. The private mourning was observed within the homes of the rich or within special buildings constructed for this purpose where the story of Karbala would be narrated by the Shi'a cleric with great emotion, reminding the Shi'a community that they alone recognize the family of the Prophet as the true spiritual leaders of Islam and that Husain and his family were not after the political leadership of the Muslims. The exoteric mourning took place in the village squares where participants dressed in black recited elegies and sang dirges while beating their chests. The followers of Shi'a Islam never forget Karbala and the suffering of Husain. In the yearly performative enactment of the tragedy, whether esoteric or exoteric, or in private *majlis* or gatherings throughout the year, Karbala transcends spatial and historical context, and the mourners feel the presence of Husain. In *At Memory's Edge*, James Young emphasizes that the sites know only what we know although people claim to be able "to sense the invisible aura of past events" (62). Thus, when the

cleric skillfully “performs” the murder of Husain and the male members of Husain’s family, the mourners actually visualize the re-enactment of the tragedy in the moment; and they project, through the intensity of their collective emotions, the presence of the past, especially the tragic figure of Husain. The majlis serves as a “collective reconstruction” since memory, which according to Halbwachs is not “an objective given,” is “developed in individuals in proportion to their communication with others and their membership of social constellations” (cited in Assam 93). Since for Shi’as the commemoration of Karbala is a question of personal and collective historical identity, Frank Korom states it is required that “[a]n audience member could not just observe passively. The viewer had to show emotion by weeping in order to experience the suffering of Husayn [Husain], and only in this way could he or she completely *identify* [italics mine] with the martyr” (39).

This majlis or gathering for the purpose of the recitation of the event of the Battle of Karbala becomes a “site of memory.” Pierre Nora explains *lieux de mémoire* as the “sites of memory, because they are no longer *milieux de mémoire*, real environments of memory.” The Karbala event is a re-enactment of a “particular historical moment, a turning point where consciousness of a break with the past is bound up with the sense that memory has been torn” but “a sense of historical continuity persists” (7). This historical continuity would not have persisted or prevailed had Zainab not exercised her role as survivor-witness and had Iran not taken up the cause and succored the descendents of the Prophet.

In the fourteenth century, Shi’ism with its performative rituals spread east to India, when Shi’a mercenaries accompanying Tamerlane on his Indian campaign settled in Lucknow in Northern India. A minority in a land that was predominantly Hindu

and Sunni Muslim, the Shi'as brought with them the exoteric Iranian Muharram performative rituals, which were embraced by Hindus and Sunnis. Furthermore, Iranian traders and religious scholars who visited the Deccan courts in Southern India before travelling on to Southeast Asia continued to spread Shi'ism. Just as exoteric Iranian Shi'a rituals underwent a change in Northern India, similarly, there were many new rituals observable in the fete-like activities in the Deccan, which later extended to the Caribbean.

The religious missionaries of the Iranian Shi'as seem to have pandered to the local population, and Muharram rituals became a blend of religious feeling and Hindu festivities. An archeologist, Christoph Marcinkowski, believes that the Iranian traders carried their form of Islam to Southeast Asian countries—Burma, Thailand, Malaysia, Vietnam, and Indonesia. According to Marcinkowski, as early as the seventh century, in the “formative period of Islam,” what he terms “proto-Shi'ism” was spread among the Cham people in what today is Cambodia and Vietnam. He argues that it is not surprising as there were “major maritime trade routes between East Asia, China in particular, on the one hand, and the wider Indian Ocean/Middle Eastern region, on the other” (385-86). The people of Malacca, Indonesia, however, do not commemorate Muharram as a performative ritual, even though they claim to be the descendants of Indian-Arabs. There is further evidence that Shi'a immigrants came to Thailand from India as well as Iran right up to end of the seventeenth century as they have left a trace of their religious “sites of memory” in the shape of stone tablets and edifices, even though there may not be Shi'as or even Muslims today among the local populations of these countries.

With the British introduction of indentured labor in the mid-nineteenth century, Indian Shi'as, Sunnis, and Hindus of low economic status were shipped to

British domains in East Africa and the Caribbean. This deliberate movement of labor resulted in the spread of Shi'a Islam to East African countries such as Tanzania, where the performance of collective memory is limited to the presentation of the "master narrative" of the Battle of Karbala and a public procession on the tenth day of Muharram.

The newspapers in nineteenth-century Trinidad, as well as British government records, refer to the commemoration of Muharram as the "Coolie Carnival." When the British brought indentured servants from India to their plantations in the Caribbean to work as "house boys" to replace freed slaves on the sugar plantations, among the Indians were Hindus, Sunnis, and Shi'a Muslims from Lukhnow, the seat of Shi'a Islam in India. These indentured laborers overcame religious differences and participated in a communal celebration of their common Indian heritage, and Hindus joined the Indian Shi'as to commemorate Muharram as a form of catharsis which symbolized their own exile from their common homeland.

Although the indentured laborers arrived in Guyana in 1838 and in Trinidad in 1845, the first known record of the commemoration of Muharram was in 1854. Known as "Hosay," a corruption of "Husain," the festival is a Caribbean manifestation of Muharram by Trinidadians of Indian descent, Africans, and Creoles, regardless of religious affiliation. The migrant labor force had no books or tracts and no religious clerics to guide them in their observance of Muharram, and it was only through an oral tradition of recall almost a decade later that the Muharram rites began to be observed with some differences in the Caribbean, based on faulty memories and what Korom refers to as the creolization of Muharram (5). The indentured migrants from India had unknowingly followed Halbwachs' belief that the past is reconstructed, not rediscovered,

and a group becomes a group “by reconstructing its past togetherness” (cited in Assam 93-94).

In Trinidad, the space of a decade between the arrival of the Indian labor and the first known commemoration of Muharram dramatically altered what Korom refers to as the “master narrative” of Karbala (38), employing a term that he credits, in his introduction (2), to Fredric Jameson. Trinidadians believe that both Hassan and Husain were killed at Karbala. Moreover, with the ethnic mingling and added local rituals, the commemoration is no longer a site of memory and a remembrance of Husain the way it is in Muslim countries, as the Caribbean commemoration over the years has taken on the form of a cultural festival.

In contrast, traditional Iranian performative commemoration defines the community of Pakistani Shi’as, who crossed the borders into Lahore and Karachi when India was partitioned in 1947. The Pakistani Shi’as, who claim Iranian descent, follow the Iranian tradition closely, and have a more reliable performative collective memory of Karbala in their need to preserve the event which gives them their identity in a predominantly Sunni country. According to Vernon Schubel, Shi’a children witness their parents’ and other adults’ “emotional ritual responses,” which makes Karbala “incontrovertible evidence of the power” of the event. Furthermore, he claims that this yearly attendance makes sure of the continuance of the Shi’a Islamic identity, which is a personal allegiance to the Prophet Mohammad and his family (“The Muharram Majlis” 119). Pakistani Shi’as believe that historical and meta-historical performance of ritual is required to keep contact with the Prophet and his family, and the mourners end the majlis with a blessing on the House of Prophet Mohammad and the martyrs of Karbala.

The Muharram performative remembrance allows for multivocality as it is both a personally distinct

and a communally shared experience of the event of the Battle of Karbala. The concept of unity is further played out as it is a familial experience, and women perform an important role in the narrative. They serve as witnesses and thus are the historical links to the event as it was Zainab who took temporary leadership in the community after Husain's martyrdom, and it was she who publicly accused the Caliph of his crimes. As Irwin-Zarecka states, the term "collective memory" sometimes "is used to describe the heritage of the whole of humanity, at times, it becomes a national property, at still other times, it is said to bond generations" (47). In the same way, the tragedy of Karbala has become the property of Shi'a Islam, and the performative aspect of its *lieux de mémoire* is the bond that has united Shi'as across the globe. regardless of their ethnic origin. The Holocaust worry about witnesses dying does not exist in Shi'a Islam. The collective commemorative experience in this case has captured the complexity of the effects of the experience of the tragic circumstances of Karbala beyond individual memories. Therefore, the martyrdom and trauma of those who suffered in Karbala become memory markers for successive generations who did not witness but who have a "personal relevance" to that traumatic memory.

In the United States today, both Shi'a and Sunni adolescents participate in the performative rituals of collective trauma and group memory. For, as the Sunni parents put it, this is the only way their children, a new generation, born in the United States and far from their religio-cultural identity, will have any sense of the Muslim collective history and identity. Thus, the Shi'a re-enactment of the tragedy of Karbala creates unity, and upholds the very foundation of Islam, while perpetuating the memory of the House of the Prophet Mohammad in an age of transnationalism.

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The Unifying Function of Performative
Collective Memory on Shi’a Religious
Identity

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