Race Theory and Literature

Dissemination, Criticism, Intersections

Edited by

Pauline Moret-Jankus and Adam J. Toth

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION

PAULINE MORET-JANKUS AND ADAM J. TOTH

The present volume, *Race Theory and Literature: Dissemination, Criticism, Intersections*, is based on the primary assumption that literature and racial theories have a peculiar, if not unique, interplay.

However, as Michael Banton pointed out, any reflection on "race" or "racial theories" encounters, from the very beginning, an obstacle: the co-existence of two modes of discourse. "One is the practical language of everyday life, employing what are sometimes called folk concepts. The other is a theoretical language in which scientists employ analytical concepts to designate things that the public know under other names."[1] Colette Guillaumin also spoke of "theoretical uses" versus "banal uses".[2] Indeed, "race" as a word is not endorsed by the scientific world anymore – although, following the latest research on DNA, recent debates and discussions have questioned this.[3] The word is nonetheless still very common in everyday discourse, particularly in English.

The present volume seeks to explore how literature engages with the theoretical constructions of race. But what is a racial theory? And can we

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[1] Michael Banton, *Racial Theories*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1998, p. 3.
[2] Colette Guillaumin, « Usages théoriques et usages banals du terme *race* », in : *Mots* 33, 1992, p. 59-65.
[3] See for instance the reactions to David Reich's article "How Genetics Is Changing Our Understanding of 'Race'", *The New York Times*, 23rd March 2018. With the help of DNA sequencing technology, he argues, "we are learning that while race may be a social construct, differences in genetic ancestry that happen to correlate to many of today's racial constructs are real." URL: https://www.nytimes.com/2018/03/23/opinion/sunday/genetics-race.html. In France, the proposed removal of the word "race" in the Constitution sparkled a series of debates too. See for instance Nancy Huston et Michel Raymond, "Sexes et races, deux réalités", *Le Monde*, 17/05/2013; Alexis Jenni, "Sexes et races, deux illusions", *Le Monde,* 24/05/2013; Stéphane Foucart, "Les "races humaines" existent ? Alors énumérez-les !", *Le Monde*, 3/06/2013. The word has been effectively removed in 2018.

really speak of a "race theory" in the singular form? Certainly not. With Claude-Olivier Doron, we believe that "There is no unique matrix of race, just as there is no unique idea of race, and not even one unique *modern* idea of race".[4] Monogenism, polygenism, exclusion, racism, inequality…the expression of "race theory" is highly heterogeneous. Which one is the focus of this volume? We could, for instance, have chosen to focus on the polygenic theories in literature. We rather have decided to focus on all conscious construction efforts, all those that present themselves as "theories", as scientific constructions—even if it may be very different from one each other.

We do not claim to give an exhaustive overview of the many issues at stake in racial theories in general, such as the postcolonial, or racism, nor to present a historiography of the links between race and literature, but rather seek to explore the very specific way in which literature and conceptions dealing with race interact. As has already been emphasized, "race" and "racial theory" are very labile concepts. Their definition varies, as well as their reception. Any study of any text needs, as a result, a thorough reassessment and redefinition of what race means. We could maybe even go as far as to say that there is as many race theories as there are texts. It would be, therefore, impossible—and to no avail—to make a list, a catalogue, of the different concepts of race for each author, book, literary phenomenon or movement. Not only would such a catalogue be endless, it would also miss the key point, which is, we argue, to find in which way literature and race theories specifically dialogue one with each other. We believe that literature is not a simple mediation for scientific or pseudo-scientific concepts; literature has its specific dynamics. We hope this serves our readers as a springboard into an exciting topic with untapped potential for scholarly conversation across languages, cultures, traditions, and fields of study.

Recent scholarship has started to examine the relationship between race theories and literature. Most of these studies, however, focus either solely on a specific literature, or on a specific period, or belong more to historiography than to an aesthetic analysis. Because our aim is to understand the general issues at stake regarding race theory and literature, it was for us logical to present a volume spanning several literary traditions; and this is a specificity of the present volume that extends from the eighteenth century into the twentieth. These literary traditions differ from a geographical and cultural point of view (French, British, German, and French-Lithuanian literatures),

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[4] "Il n'y a pas plus une unique matrice de la race qu'il n'y a une seule idée de race, pas même une seule idée *moderne* de race." Claude-Olivier Doron, "Histoire épistémologique et histoire politique de la race", *Archives de philosophie* 8, vol. 81, 2018, p. 488. This is our own translation.

but also from the perspective of their genre (prose fiction, poetry, ethnographic literature, and essays).

While presenting the specific potential of literature in the conception and dialogue around race, each chapter of this volume accounts for the *dissemination* of theories on race, the role and modalities of the literary texts in the diffusion and transformation of racial theories, for the *criticism* of these theories through literary texts that urge readers to read imaginatively, and for the *intersections* between the literary and other fields, especially when and where theories of race are cultivated and flourish within creative projects.

Émile Bordeleau-Pitre's "A "Childlike or *Savage* Way of Seeing": Rethinking the Avant-Garde Through Racial Discourse in *Documents* (1929-1930)" questions the status of one literary phenomenon: the ethnographical revue *Documents*, edited by Georges Bataille, and which has until now systematically been described as avant-gardist. Thanks to his analysis of the racial theories that appear in it, Bordeleau-Pitre redefines this alleged avant-gardism by proposing to rather conceive it in terms of oppositional discourse. This allows us to understand how a work can be both aesthetically avant-gardist (*Documents* as a vibrant literary laboratory and a protest against institutional realism) and ideologically arrière-gardist (the racial ideology it perpetuates).

Chen Tzoref-Ashkenazi's chapter, "Language and Race in Schlegel and Coleridge," examines how, within one literary movement (namely European Romanticism), the racial constructs can greatly differ. He focuses on the views of races of Friedrich Schlegel (1772-1829) and Samuel Taylor Coleridge (1772-1834). Tzoref-Ashkenazi argues that the Romantic philosopher disavowed race as a biologically determined construct and more linguistically determined and that traces of Schlegel's position can be found in the works of the Romantic poet. In his readings and comparison of Schlegel's *Lectures on Universal History* (1805-6) and *On the Language and Wisdom of the Indians* (1808), as well as Coleridge's assorted writings, Tzoref-Ashkenazi delves into the intricate ways that language played as a defining characteristic of theorizing and understanding racial difference in Romanticism.

Pauline Moret-Jankus's chapter, "The Aesthetics of Race in Oscar V. de L. Milosz: Mysticism and Politics," emphasizes the fact that an author's race theory is rarely only "one theory". First of all, thoughts regarding race are often scattered in various texts. The texts that Moret-Jankus presents to the reader are works of Oscar Vladislas de L. Milosz (1877-1939): *Les Zborowski* (1913), folk tales and essays, and the poem "Psaume de l'Étoile

du Matin" (1936). She underscores the evolution in Milosz's race thinking, linked to the political status of Lithuania. Before Lithuania's independence, Milosz racial theory is that of a Lithuanian-Slavic race. It then evolves into a Lithuanian-Aryan race, and finally into a Lithuanian-Iberian/Hebrew race. Milosz's example shows further that both elements (race theory and literature) are strongly intertwined: the conception of race appears to be influenced by the literary form itself.

Both Sally Hatch Gray and Adam J. Toth's chapters emphasize literature as a privileged space for the criticism of racial theories: philosophical constructs can be questioned by the potential of the fictional text. Toth's "Gestus anstatt Geist: Kafka, Benjamin, and Brecht against Dialectical Race Theory" addresses the relationship between Austria-Hungarian author Franz Kafka's (1883-1924) "Beim Bau der chinesischen Mauer" ("The Great Wall of China," 1917/1930) and "Ein altes Blatt," ("An Old Manuscript," 1919), both of which are set in China, with theories about the Chinese developed in Georg Friedrich Wilhelm Hegel's (1770-1831) *Vorlesungen über die Philosophie der Geschichte* (*Lectures on the Philosophy of History*), given within the last decade of Hegel's life. Toth contends that, although Kafka may not have been fully aware of Hegel's lectures and their content, a discourse against Hegel's positions on the Chinese can be identified in the characterizations of the Chinese as portrayed by Kafka. Toth further postulates that this discourse can be used to reconcile some of the tension between postcolonial theory, which has increasingly deferred to neoliberal capitalism in its praxis, and cultural Marxism, which has within its own ranks, doubled-down on Eurocentric positions within theoretical praxis at large.

Gray's chapter, "On Specialization and the Dead Eye: Kant's Race Theory and the Problem of Perception Illustrated in Kleist's 'Betrothal in Santo Domingo'" cross examines the literary representations of ethnic otherness in the short story "Verlobung in St. Domingo" (1811) by Heinrich von Kleist (1777-1811) with Immanuel Kant's (1724-1804) various writings on race, with particular attention to Kant's essays on race and featured within the larger, philosophic work. Gray argues that Kleist's depiction of the Haitian Revolution (1791-1804) in the short story is a response to Kant's concept of "*Wahrnehmung*," which for Kant is the process of making sense of an experience. Kleist, according to Gray, grappled with this concept and used the short story to shed light on viewpoints of Kant's critical project. The static, anthropological bases for human differences in race, as understood within Kant's philosophical work, gets acted out by Kleist's characters, revealing the arbitrariness of these categories, as Gray argues. Incidentally, this thesis departs from the typical

separation of the Immanuel Kant, who taught anthropology by day from the one who wrote philosophy in his off time, ushering in German Idealism, to suggest that those two men are not only one and the same, but that the materials with which the former taught were actively employed in the latter's writings. Gray argues further that it is this philosophical potential of "fantasy" that, as she puts it, led Kleist to literature.

Virginie Yvernault's chapter, "Voltaire and Buffon: The Controversy on Race and 'Human Varieties'. Anthropologies, Politics and Enlightenment Historiography," looks at the concept of race in the late eighteenth century and, especially, the way in which historians highlighted the debate on race between Georges-Louis Leclerc, Comte de Buffon (1707-1788) and Voltaire (1694-1788). In this chapter, Yvernault takes the opportunity to define Buffon's and Voltaire's anthropologies and by extension their views on race or "human varieties" expressed in other texts that otherwise have different theses and ideological outcomes. This chapter additionally traces the origins of the debate between Buffon and Voltaire through second-hand accounts of historians on their disagreements. Yvernault demonstrates that the focus critics took on race in their interpretation of literary phenomena (here the Buffon-Voltaire controversy) is always already ideologically charged. Her chapter proves how the analyses of the nineteenth-century historians are a mirror of their own worries, rather than an "authentic" image of the so-called "controversy". Thus, she importantly emphasizes that studies of race and literature cannot be led without studies of reception.

As the issue of race continues to be frequently divisive and polarizing for those wishing to grapple with the topic, we wish for our readers to look towards this volume with the aspiration of addressing the tension that exists within the theorization of race and race's literary representations. To this end, we want to launch a dynamic discussion of these relations between philosophical understandings of race and literary representations of race. We hope that this project will generate further discussions of the topics presented in other academic fields, such as in Asian Studies and Latin American Studies.

CHAPTER ONE

A "CHILDLIKE OR *SAVAGE* WAY OF SEEING":
RETHINKING THE AVANT-GARDE THROUGH
RACIAL DISCOURSE IN *DOCUMENTS*
(1929-1930)

ÉMILE BORDELEAU-PITRE

Documents, the first journal edited by Georges Bataille, was a short-lived
publication, spanning a mere two years (1929-1930) and comprising a total
of fifteen issues. A marginal enterprise that reached only a limited
readership at the time of its publication, the magnitude of its subsequent
critical reception may at first seem surprising. "Almost everything has been
said about *Documents,*" writes Jean Jamin, "and much has been written
about the journal, for better or for worse."[1] And yet, the remarkably
numerous published works on the subject of *Documents* are somewhat
paradoxical: while they are characterized by a multiplicity of perspectives,
this is coupled with a relative discursive homogeneity. Indeed, though
descriptions of *Documents* have ranged from "a laboratory, a melting pot
[or] a rebellion [to] a 'frenzy,'" scholars have nevertheless been unanimous
in their classification of the periodical as "avant-garde."[2] Both reading and
writing about *Documents* generally involve perpetuating a critical tradition
that has designated its object of study as "avant-garde," as though this
designation were self-evident and required no further examination.

   The journal's eventual categorization as avant-garde (despite the fact
that none of its contributors claimed such an affiliation in the pages of the
journal) appears to have had a profound impact on the various studies on
the topic. It is worth noting that when referring to *Documents,* the term

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[1] Jean Jamin, "*Documents* revue. La part maudite de l'ethnographie," *L'Homme* 39,
no. 151 (1999): 262. In this chapter, unless otherwise stated, all translations are
mine.

[2] Jamin, "*Documents* revue," 262.

"avant-garde" is rarely used in a purely aesthetic sense. Largely described in terms of "transgression," "provocation" and "subversion,"[3] the journal is seen by scholars as having championed certain political characteristics of the avant-garde, embracing the radical and progressive ideas that supposedly characterized earlier avant-garde movements.[4] A "place where the spectacle of difference was documented in all its varied aspects," *Documents* made it possible, "more than any other avant-garde journal, to gain perspective on and take a step back from Western society's most ingrained prejudices, whether logocentrism, ethnocentrism or anthropomorphism."[5] The publication "celebrated the diversity of human communities, [...] rituals and practices";[6] it could also be a weapon "in defense of what society [chose] to exclude or oppress as 'formless.'"[7] For these scholars, *Documents* was a legitimate tool in the struggle against colonialism and racism.

Nevertheless, several epistemological problems arise from this qualitative leap from an aesthetic classification of *Documents* to a political one. I would argue that while the "avant-garde" classification does emphasize certain aspects of the journal (such as its close ties to surrealism, its break with tradition and its use of montage), it also results in others being overlooked, particularly its relationship to the dominant ideology and its ambiguous theorization on the concept of race. In this chapter, I will attempt to

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[3] See in particular Mary Drach McInnes, "Taboo and Transgression: The Subversive Aesthetics of Georges Bataille and *Documents*" (PhD diss., Boston University, 1994), and Eric Robertson, "'A Shameless, Indecent Saintliness.' *Documents* (1929-31); and *Acéphale* (1936-39)," in *The Oxford Critical and Cultural History of Modernist Magazines*, ed. Peter Brooker et al. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016), 247.

[4] The first seed of the avant-garde (in the modern sense of the word), namely neo-impressionism in 1886, was closely associated with the anarchist movement (David Cottington, *The Avant-Garde: A Very Short Introduction* [Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013], 98). These origins have inevitably colored certain interpretations of the avant-garde, which continue to see it as a left-wing revolutionary movement; see in particular Philippe Sers, *L'Avant-garde radicale: Le Renouvellement des valeurs dans l'art du XXᵉ siècle* (Paris: Les Belles Lettres, 2004). However, this idea of a culturally and politically militant (and primarily progressive) avant-garde is in fact partial and biased, incomplete and partisan (David Cottington, *The Avant-Garde*, 99; Stephen C. Foster, "Dada and the Constitution of Culture: (Re-)Conceptualising the Avant-Garde," in *European Avant-Garde: New Perspectives*, ed. Dietrich Scheunemann [Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2008], 64).

[5] Catherine Maubon, "*Documents*: la part de l'ethnographie," *Les Temps Modernes* 54, no. 605 (December 1998 - January-February 1999): 54.

[6] Robertson, "'A Shameless, Indecent Saintliness,'" 263.

[7] Brent Hayes Edwards, "The Ethnics of Surrealism," *Transition*, no. 78 (1998): 110.

demonstrate how arrière-garde (rearguard) and avant-garde are not necessarily opposing categories. Moving beyond the "temporal" interpretation to which these concepts are often confined, I propose instead a political, sociological and materialist interpretation of the avant-garde and arrière-garde categories. Central to this interpretation is the issue of race relations, and it is through this lens that we can shed light on the paradoxical arrière-gardism of a literary avant-garde.

Documents and the Break with Surrealism

From the beginning, the original subheading of *Documents*—"Doctrines Archéologie Beaux-Arts Ethnographie"[8]—served as an indication of the publication's particular eclecticism, which made it difficult to classify the journal according to conventional categories. Featuring texts by contributors from both cultural circles (for the most part dissident surrealists) and academia (archeologists, ethnographers, musicologists, numismatists and more), the journal was dedicated to contemporary art as well as recent archeological and ethnographical discoveries. Essays on popular culture were also published as of the fourth issue.

Documents emerged during a period of intense activity among modernist and art journals. In his study of Parisian art journals between 1905 and 1940, Yves Chevrefils Desbiolles writes that "the 1910s, 1920s and 1930s were [...] a time of exceptional editorial creativity in which journals of all aesthetic and ideological leanings played an essential role."[9] In his view, these journals "were both the trigger that brought about the aesthetic shift of our time and the authority that validated the underlying values of this revolution."[10] During this period, surrealism became one of the dominant avant-garde positions, championed by those such as André Breton in the journals *Littérature* (1919-1924), *La Révolution surréaliste* (1924-1929) and *Le Surréalisme au service de la révolution* (1930-1933).[11] By contrast, the *Nouvelle Revue française* (1909-1943) shifted its editorial approach to straddle classic and contemporary, acknowledging surrealist ideas while

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[8] As of the fourth issue, "Doctrines" was replaced by "Variété."

[9] Yves Chevrefils Desbiolles, *Les Revues d'art à Paris 1905-1940* (Aix-en-Provence: Presses universitaires de Provence, 2014), 25.

[10] Chevrefils Desbiolles, 25.

[11] Raymond Spiteri, "'What Can the Surrealists Do?' *Littérature* (1919-24); *La Révolution surréaliste* (1924-9); and *Le Surréalisme au service de la révolution* (1930-3)" in *The Oxford Critical and Cultural History of Modernist Magazines*, ed. Peter Brooker et al. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016), 243.

also attempting to downplay their significance.[12] However, as Breton's brand of surrealism threatened to become a club governed by strict rules of admission, and expulsion followed expulsion, another type of dissidence emerged from the surrealist avant-garde itself. In these turbulent times, change rarely came about harmoniously or incrementally,[13] and it was amid a tumultuous break with surrealism that *Documents* first appeared on the journal scene.

Documents was financed by Georges Wildenstein, who was already the editor of *La Gazette des Beaux-Arts*. Wildenstein likely saw the publication's initial mandate in rather institutional terms: the newly-founded journal would be a version of the *Gazette* which would incorporate primitive art and assign it economic value. Presumably, it would also compete with Christian Zervos' *Cahiers d'art*, a highly successful journal at the time.[14] Wildenstein, who owned one of the foremost commercial galleries in Paris, intended the *Gazette* to be an intersection between learning and commerce, art dealers and academics; it is highly likely that he harbored similar aims when he agreed to provide the necessary funds to establish *Documents*.[15] The journal's original editorial board was comprised mainly of museum professionals, including Jean Babelon (Cabinet des Médailles at the Bibliothèque Nationale), Georges Contenau (Musée du Louvre), Georges Henri Rivière (Musée d'Ethnographie du Trocadéro in Paris) and Paul Rivet (described as a professor at the Muséum National d'Histoire Naturelle). Also included in the list of contributors were three art historians and recognized members of the establishment, Erwin Panofsky, Fritz Saxl and Pietro Toesca, although they did not in fact contribute any articles to the journal.[16]

The gulf between these hypothetical commercial ambitions and the reality of *Documents*, however, was rapidly made apparent by the contrast between the journal's content and advertising. At the end of each issue, an

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[12] Anne-Rachel Hermetet, "Modern Classicism. *La Nouvelle Revue française* (1909-43) and *Commerce* (1924-32)," in *The Oxford Critical and Cultural History of Modernist Magazines*, ed. Peter Brooker et al. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016), 109-110.

[13] Peter Brooker, "Introduction," in *The Oxford Critical and Cultural History of Modernist Magazines*, ed. by Peter Brooker et al. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016), 30.

[14] Dawn Ades, *Dada and Surrealism Reviewed* (London: Arts Council of Great Britain, 1978), 229.

[15] Dawn Ades, "Beaux-Arts," in *Undercover Surrealism*, ed. Dawn Ades and Simon Baker (Carnbridge: MIT Press, 2006), 52.

[16] *Documents* 1, no. 2 (Paris: Jean-Michel-Place, 1991), not paginated.

entire page was devoted to promoting a collection "dedicated to the Great Artists and Great Art Schools of France" and directed by the journal's financier. When this advertisement is read in the context of the journal, it cannot help but highlight (likely despite its creators' intentions) the extent of the rift that had emerged between Georges Wildenstein—specifically his cultural nationalism and reverence for "great" art—and what the *Documents* project eventually became: a journal at war not only with classical aestheticism, but with idealism as well. And yet, our knowledge of the nature of the project is entirely second-hand. In what is probably the letter most frequently cited by historians to define *Documents*, Pierre d'Espezel[17] wrote to Georges Bataille on 15 April 1929:

> From what I have seen so far, the title you have chosen for the journal hardly seems justified, except in the sense that it "Documents" your state of mind. That is a lot, but it is not quite enough. We really must return to the spirit that inspired the initial project for the journal, when you and I spoke about it to Mr. Wildenstein.[18]

This letter has influenced many an interpretation of *Documents*; if the journal is indeed the sum of many "documents" on Georges Bataille's state of mind, it becomes tempting to see it as the work of Bataille alone, rather than that of a community of contributors. And yet, to understand the complexity of the tensions within *Documents*, it is important to emphasize the collective nature of the publication and to identify its various breaks: a break with a certain idea of the "art establishment," as exemplified by the dispute between Bataille and Wildenstein; a break with two avant-garde artistic movements, surrealism (in which Michel Leiris, Robert Desnos, Jacques-André Boiffard, Roger Vitrac and Jacques Baron were all involved to varying degrees) and—to a lesser extent—German expressionism (Carl Einstein);[19] and a break with many contributors' fields of study, including archeology (Georges Bataille studied numismatics at l'École des chartes), art history (Carl Einstein received classical training as an art historian under

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[17] One of Georges Bataille's colleagues at the Cabinet des Médailles, d'Espezel was himself the editor of several specialized journals (all institutional in form) including *Aréthuse* and *Cahiers de la république des lettres*, in which Bataille's first articles were published. It was also d'Espezel who put Georges Bataille and Georges Wildenstein in contact and served as an intermediary between them.

[18] Georges Bataille, *Œuvres complètes I. Premiers écrits 1922-1940* (Paris: Gallimard, 1970), 648.

[19] For a nuanced look at German expressionism as avant-garde and its limits, see Richard Murphy, *Theorizing the Avant-Garde. Modernism, Expressionism, and the Problem of Postmodernity* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999).

Heinrich Wölfflin) and ethnography (such as Marcel Griaule, André Schaeffner, Georges Henri Rivière and Michel Leiris, who were critical of the aestheticizing side of the discipline as it was defined at the turn of the century).

There are very few primary sources that describe the journal's daily operations or division of labor, a fact which contributes to the mystery—if I may say so—surrounding *Documents*, as well as to speculation about the relationships between contributors and the extent of their contributions to the publication. Various journal entries written by Michel Leiris and published years later provide his personal perspective on the concerns surrounding the organization of the periodical;[20] however, his article paying tribute to Bataille—and published more than thirty years after the journal's final issue—paints an even more explicit portrait of *Documents* and the tensions between its contributors:

> The contributors came from many different backgrounds, with writers of the avant-garde most of them ex-surrealists gathered around Bataille rubbing shoulders with representatives from a variety of disciplines (art history, musicology, archeology, ethnology, etc.), some of them members of the Institut de France or high-level professionals in museums or libraries. It was a truly "impossible" mixture, less because of the diversity of the disciplines and of the *indisciplines* than because of the contrast between the men themselves, some of them very conservative-minded [...], while the others [...] strove to use the journal as a war machine against received ideas.[21]

Documents and the Limits of Its Avant-Garde Status

Since the publication of *Documents*, scholars have generally classified the journal as "avant-garde," although none of its creators ever described it as such. In her study examining the network of literary periodicals in immediate post-war Belgium, Daphné de Marneffe refers to this phenomenon as *"clichage"* ("stereotyping").[22] Through critical consensus, *Documents*, a periodical of "ruptures," has become known as an "avant-garde" publication; and yet, with its specific and distinct temporality, it is

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[20] See in particular Michel Leiris, *Journal 1922-1989* (Paris: Gallimard, 1992), 142, 188-189 and 200.

[21] Michel Leiris, "De Bataille l'impossible à l'impossible *Documents*," in *Brisées* (Paris: Gallimard, 1992), 293.

[22] Daphné de Marneffe, "Entre modernisme et avant-garde: Le réseau des revues littéraires de l'immédiat après-guerre en Belgique (1919-1922)" (PhD diss., Université de Liège, 2007), 27-29.

difficult to reduce a journal to a single encompassing characteristic, vague though it may be. Periodicals "evolve at every level," both as a "textual reality" (with regard to its format, page count, and publishing frequency, "based on its relationship to the public and to current events") and "in terms of its content" ("conception, development, and the removal of sections, based on the interests it displays and the way in which it positions itself vis-à-vis different cultural and political spheres").[23] In contrast to this constant evolution, *clichage* describes the phenomenon whereby researchers classify "a journal in terms of 'external' criteria, such as aesthetic orientation or political leanings, which places the journal in artistic (or literary) and political spheres from the outset."[24] Often the "object of a retrospective illusion," the avant-gardism of a publication can be read as a synecdoche whereby a part is used to represent the whole, preserving "the journal in a state that is frequently only temporary [and] eternalizing either the starting point or the culmination of a process."[25] This would appear to be the approach used by the majority of scholars to categorize *Documents*.

Attributing *Documents* as a "work"—either explicitly or implicitly—to the "young avant-garde writer Bataille of 1930"[26] and reducing his motives to a struggle between idealism and materialism ignores the collective reality of the journal and the heterogeneity of its contents.[27] Furthermore, it imposes an artificial coherence on the periodical, a coherence which has made the avant-garde *clichage* of *Documents* possible for researchers, starting with James Clifford's 1981 article on "ethnographic surrealism" in *Documents*.[28] However, *Documents* is neither exclusively the work of Bataille, nor a unified work; rather, it maintains a complex relationship to the avant-garde through its skillfully sustained dialogism (in the Bakhtinian sense of the word), which is magnified by its very medium, the journal. Like the novel, which Bakhtin sees as a system organized by an author in which various types of speech collide and multiple voices are informed by one another,[29] *Documents* as a journal is the *literal* product of converging voices of multiple authors (often with diverging viewpoints) and the juxtaposition

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[23] Marneffe, "Entre modernisme et avant-garde," 28.

[24] Ibid.

[25] Ibid., 29.

[26] Georges Didi-Huberman, *La Ressemblance informe ou le gai savoir visuel selon Georges Bataille* (Paris: Macula, 1995), 203.

[27] Robertson, "'A Shameless, Indecent Saintliness,'" 245.

[28] James Clifford, "On Ethnographic Surrealism," *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 23, no. 4 (October 1981).

[29] Mikhail Bakhtin, *The Dialogic Imagination*, trans. Caryl Emerson and Michael Holquist (Austin: Texas University Press, 1981), 371.

of paintings and photographs by multiple artists (without regard to consistency of period, genre or movement). It is impossible to get a sense of *Documents* as a whole by studying individual fragments of discourse and the way in which each one articulates its own voice, or the manner in which a subjective belief system or general opinion is diverted.[30] Instead, the sense of *Documents* as a whole arises from the tensions—and even open conflicts—between texts and images, which reveal a wide variety of scenes of enunciation and paradoxically demonstrate a kind of unity through juxtaposition. *Documents* provided an opportunity to bring together—to quote Leiris once more— this "truly 'impossible' mixture"; as a journal, it was a stage that united, through the "contrast between the men themselves," this unlikely "diversity of disciplines—and of *indisciplines*."[31]

Has the characterization of *Documents* as avant-garde made it difficult to assess certain aspects of the journal? Has it led to certain characteristics, contradictions or paradoxes being overlooked? Most importantly, is *Documents* truly an avant-garde journal? Under what conditions is it possible to classify it as such? When one considers the numerous papers that have been written about the publication, it is difficult to provide a satisfactory response to these questions, at least without reiterating commonly accepted assumptions. Almost none of the studies on *Documents* address the concept of avant-garde from a theoretical standpoint, nor do they examine the relationship between avant-garde theorization and the journal. Aside from examining the publication's origins (the men behind *Documents* were mainly dissident surrealists) and its use of specific techniques (such as montage), the rare studies that do touch on the concept of avant-garde do not provide a systematic analysis of *Documents*, instead adopting a partial perspective and addressing a specific aspect of the journal.[32] Most significantly, they do not propose to question—or at least problematize— the category itself.

Nevertheless, this type of interpretation, which focuses solely on the idea of rupture, has many weaknesses; after all, as Rosalind E. Krauss argues, innovation and repetition are interdependent in art, or even the condition for

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[30] Ibid., 305.

[31] Michel Leiris, "De Bataille l'impossible," 293.

[32] See Rosalind E. Krauss, "No More Play," in *The Originality of the Avant-Garde and Other Modernist Myths* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1986); Mara de Gennaro, "The World 'Outside of Fiction': Georges Bataille and Surrealist Photography Sculpture," in *European Avant-Garde: New Perspectives*, ed. Dietrich Scheunemann (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2008).

one another.[33] The antagonistic stance of *Documents'* avant-garde towards tradition and the public,[34] its "oppositional discourse"[35] and its "aesthetic extremism," all embodied by its "artistic negativism,"[36] unfolded within a framework shaped—rather paradoxically—by conformism. The journal was, after all, financed by Georges Wildenstein, quintessential heir to a historical artistic tradition. In this respect, *Documents* differed greatly from previous surrealist and abstract art journals, which were largely self-financed.[37] Pierre d'Espezel's letter to Bataille has often been used as evidence of a break with this model, and yet scholars frequently neglect to examine the ways that *Documents* served commercial and institutional interests.[38] Yve-Alain Bois describes the unoriginal manner in which *Documents* embodies the "modernist paradigm"; in his view, the "most immediate" and "institutional" explanation is that "regardless of the journal's radicality, and despite its financial backer Wildenstein's indulgence of its whims, art still remained an exclusive domain in *Documents* (and it was art that kept the journal going)."[39] A peculiar cabinet of curiosities, *Documents* was to some extent heir to a periodical tradition that predates the modernist movement with which *Documents* is generally associated. Indeed, the encyclopedic convergence of international scientific, literary and artistic knowledge in periodicals goes back to the Enlightenment.[40] The advertisements, which announced the publication of *Documents* ("Truly

[33] Rosalind E. Krauss, "The Originality of the Avant-Garde," in *The Originality of the Avant-Garde and Other Modernist Myths* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1986), 166.

[34] Renato Poggioli, *The Theory of the Avant-Garde*, trans. Gerald Fitzgerald (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1968), 30.

[35] Richard Murphy, *Theorizing the Avant-Garde*, 49-73.

[36] Matei Calinescu, *Five Faces of Modernity: Modernism, Avant-Garde, Decadence, Kitsch, Postmodernism* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1987), 116-120 and 140.

[37] Chevrefils Desbiolles, *Les Revues d'art à Paris*, 96 and 115-116.

[38] "One only needs to flip through the *Documents* collection in chronological order to see that after a cautious start, emphasis was placed on articles that appeared to demonstrate the original open-mindedness of a publication which, for the most part, was not able to avoid the usual expectations of an art journal." (Michel Leiris, "De Bataille l'impossible," 294).

[39] Yve-Alain Bois, "Kitsch," in *L'Informe: Mode d'emploi*, ed. Yve-Alain Bois and Rosalind Krauss (Paris: Centre Georges Pompidou, 1996), 108.

[40] *Le Magazin encyclopédique* (1795-1816), which covered "Letters, Science and Art," was "the repository for all discoveries made in France and abroad"; the *Nouvelles de la République des lettres et des arts* (1778-1788) sought to "make all scientific, literary and artistic objects known in countries with which it is possible to build a relationship," welcoming submissions "in German, English, Spanish, Italian, Latin and French" (Chevrefils Desbiolles, *Les Revues d'art à Paris*, 31).

irritating works of art that have not yet been classified, and some eclectic productions overlooked until now"),[41] as well as the heterogeneous nature of the works featured in the journal, also bear a strong resemblance to another journal, *Cabinet de l'amateur et de l'antiquaire*, from the nineteenth century:

> amid items of all kinds and qualities   the only requirement being that they must be different from those of our time and country   take pleasure in inhaling the faint historical or ethnographic scent that they emit, collect enamels and ivories from the Middle Ages, Voltaire's walking sticks and the […] weapons of American savages.[42]

This interest in the "relationship between art, science and primitive art" was already present in Gabriel Mourey's *Les Arts de la Vie* as well.[43] While ethnography was not a feature of the journal, the "renewal of art" through science echoes the texts of *Documents* in many respects. Closer in time to *Documents*, *La Révolution surréaliste* (first published in 1924, and inspired by Éditions Masson's *La Nature*) had already seized upon the idea of a so-called avant-garde journal mimicking the austere editorial structure of scientific journals.[44] It is also interesting to note that the editorial board of *Documents* included several museum curators. While the Georges-Henri Rivière and Paul Rivet's work at the Musée du Trocadéro (and subsequently at the Musée de l'Homme) admittedly allowed for fewer freedoms than other contemporary exhibitions, the fact remains that these *Documents* contributors pursued commercial and rationalistic aims and promoted the ideology of dominant groups at the former museum; most notably, they successfully laid claim to "the monopoly of genuine discourse over the objects of Others."[45]

This leads us to a closer examination of the publication's relationship to the dominant ideology, which raises questions about its oppositional discourse. Studying *Documents* as a monograph or through the lens of individual contributors (examining texts by Bataille, Leiris or Einstein in insolation, for example) results in a fundamental aspect of the journal being

[41] Michel Leiris, "De Bataille l'impossible," 293.
[42] Chevrefils Desbiolles, *Les Revues d'art à Paris*, 40.
[43] Catherine Méneux, "*Les Arts de la Vie* de Gabriel Mourey ou l'illusion d'un art moderne et social," in *Les Revues d'art: Formes, stratégies et réseaux au XXe siècle*, ed. Rossella Froissart Pezone and Yves Chevrefils Desbiolles (Rennes: Presses universitaires de Rennes, 2011), 61.
[44] Chevrefils Desbiolles, *Les Revues d'art à Paris*, 92.
[45] Benoît de l'Estoile, *Le Goût des Autres: De l'Exposition coloniale aux Arts premiers* (Paris: Flammarion, 2010), 266.

overlooked: the collective behind it. When the collective is overlooked, a more in-depth examination of its interests becomes impossible. And yet, numerous examples from art history demonstrate that the interests of a group of producers are highly relevant for researchers, perhaps even more so in the case of so-called avant-garde groups, whose breaks with tradition often receive more scholarly attention that their conservatism.[46] In this respect, *Documents* serves as a case in point. Studies on subject of *Documents* tend to focus on its anticonformism, overlooking the fact that the group behind it occupied a triply dominant position due to its members' class, sex and race. The homogeneity of the group is not unusual: "the objective affinity that unconsciously unites the practices of one group and pits them against those of another can be explained [...] by the fact that the affinity of habitus between agents is, in practice, the basic principle behind groups."[47] What is more surprising is the near-absence of reflexivity among scholars on the topic of this triple domination as it relates to the journal's avant-garde status. In the following sections, I will specifically examine the issue of race relations in *Documents* before proposing another way of looking at the relationship between avant-garde and arrière-garde in the publication.

Intratextual and Extratextual Racial Discourse

Although this fact has largely been overlooked by scholars, *Documents* was a scene of enunciation for one race in particular: the White race.[48] While more than one contributor seems to have subscribed to the idea of

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[46] One example is the case of the New York School and abstract expressionists. In *Abstract Expressionism: Other Politics* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1999), art historian Ann Gibson shows how these artists contributed to universalizing through their work and through interpretations of it "a single identity position": "white male heterosexuality." According to Gibson, this consisted in "subsum[ing] other identities" (of women and so-called primitive societies) within their "single transcendent one."

[47] Anna Boschetti, *Sartre et "Les Temps Modernes"* (Paris: Minuit, 1985), 199.

[48] In this chapter, I use the term "race" as defined by Colette Guillaunin in *L'idéologie raciste* (Paris: Mouton et Co, 1972). I am not interested in establishing the existence of physical race or not, as society's "perception of race does not give it any importance: it creates this reality unconsciously to the same extent that it does consciously" (Guillaunin, *L'idéologie raciste*, 8). I am more concerned with the sociological perspective on race, specifically the way in which it divides society into groups and establishes power relationships between them. Race is thus the product of racialization in the same way that the man/woman binary is a product of "sexing": see Monique Wittig, *La Pensée straight* (Paris: Amsterdam, 2013).

Documents as an anticolonial enterprise[49]—as have many of those who have studied it—the assertion that the journal would go so far as to attack the interests of its own racial group is an overly generous one. In addition to their work on *Documents*, several of the journal's contributors were involved in organizing the Mission Dakar-Djibouti, notably funded by the Ministère des Colonies.[50] The organizers of the expedition—which was announced with much fanfare in a text written by Michel Leiris for the journal's seventh issue[51]—made no secret of being very much in line with the spirit of the 1931 Colonial Exhibition.[52] In his "Summary Instructions for Collectors of Ethnographic Objects," written shortly before the expedition, Leiris paints a humanist portrait of colonization and places ethnography at the service of the colonial enterprise:

> Not only is ethnography invaluable for studying prehistoric man recreating his environment as well as modern man, it makes a vital contribution to colonial methods, informing legislators, government officials and settlers about the customs, beliefs, laws and techniques of the indigenous populations, making a more fruitful and humane collaboration with the latter group possible, and bringing about a more rational exploitation of natural resources.[53]

This was echoed in the pages of *Documents*, where the contributors' views on issues of race were much more ambiguous than they claimed. Perpetuating the illusion of a savage vision of the world, a "way of seeing" shared by "primitives" and children,[54] these individuals saw ethnography as

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[49] See for example Marcel Griaule, "Un coup de fusil," in *Documents* 2, no. 1 (Paris: Jean-Michel-Place, 1991), 405-414.

[50] Anonymous, "Communiqué de presse," in *Cahier Dakar-Djibouti*, ed. Éric Jolly and Marianne Lemaire (Paris: Les Cahiers, 2015), 82.

[51] Michel Leiris, "L'œil de l'ethnographe," in *Documents* 2, no. 1 (Paris: Jean-Michel-Place, 1991), 405-414.

[52] Anonymous, "Communiqué de presse," 82.

[53] Anonymous, "Instructions sommaires pour les collecteurs d'objets ethnographiques," in *Cahier Dakar-Djibouti*, ed. Éric Jolly and Marianne Lemaire (Paris: Les Cahiers, 2015), 173. Although these instructions were written anonymously, Georges Henri Rivière's correspondence reveals that Michel Leiris was indeed the author. See Anonymous, "Instructions sommaires pour les collecteurs d'objets ethnographiques," 169.

[54] Georges Bataille, "Cheminée d'usine," in *Documents* 1, no. 6 (Paris: Jean-Michel-Place, 1991), 332.

the savior of heterogeneity.[55] Denis Hollier describes a meeting between *Documents* contributor Marcel Griaule and a painter of Ethiopian origin who was studying painting in Paris, Agnagnahou Engeda.[56] While this painter seems to have inspired the future ethnographer's passion for studying Ethiopian society, his work never appeared in *Documents*, as it was most likely incompatible with the journal's exaltation of difference and the *informe* (formless). Nor were the men behind *Documents* interested in the perspective of the societies being studied[57]; they were much more concerned with primitivism and its "job" as a weapon against idealism and humanism in Western society, in a philosophical sense.[58] In my view, we must also study this largely neglected aspect of the publication in order to examine the group behind *Documents* and their break with the surrealism of André Breton, whose anticolonial views—particularly through his staunch opposition to the 1931 Colonial Exhibition—were much more clearly articulated.

The conformist nature of this racial discourse has not prevented certain scholars from arguing that the rhizome of surrealists and ethnologists behind *Documents* came together "to denounce ethnocentrism, racism and colonialism."[59] Brent Hayes Edwards has also revealed the way in which certain critical readings repeat these ideas involuntarily, using the categories associated with primitivism in *Documents*.[60] The scholars who become so familiar with the texts they study often come to emulate the writers they so admire, sometimes even consciously. This is particularly true of articles about Georges Bataille's work on *Documents*. In particular, John Westbrook calls attention to the attitudes of several self-proclaimed postmodernist and poststructuralist theorists, who argue that it is only

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[55] Denis Hollier, "The Question of Lay Ethnography," in *Undercover Surrealism*, ed. Dawn Ades and Simon Baker (Cambridge: MIT Press, 2006), 63.

[56] Hollier, "Ethiopia," in *Undercover Surrealism*, ed. Dawn Ades and Simon Baker (Cambridge: MIT Press, 2006), 140-141.

[57] Simon Baker, "Variety (Civilizing 'Race')," in *Undercover Surrealism*, ed. Dawn Ades and Simon Baker (Cambridge: MIT Press, 2006), 67.

[58] Krauss, "No More Play," 64.

[59] Jacques Meunier, "Les pois sauteurs du Mexique," in *Écrits d'ailleurs: Georges Bataille et les ethnologues*, ed. Dominique Lecoq and Jean-Luc Lory (Paris: Maison des sciences de l'homme, 1987), 209. The author also makes the mistake of likening the dissident group behind *Documents* to André Breton's movement, claiming that its members called for the colonies to be evacuated during the Colonial Exhibition. As we have seen previously, the texts of *Documents* were actually in line with the aims of the 1931 Colonial Exhibition, as revealed by plans for the Mission Dakar-Djibouti.

[60] Edwards, "The Ethics of Surrealism," 110-111.

possible to read Bataille with Bataille and write about Bataille in his own words—using his own categories.[61]

In light of the "objective facts" mentioned previously, one can understand the epistemological inconsistencies of these interpretations, most of them stemming from the unnuanced qualitative leap from aesthetic avant-garde to political avant-garde. One of the major issues raised by such interpretations of *Documents* is the failure to problematize the category at issue. Evoking as it does a "language of rupture"[62] with particularly "antagonistic" methods in cultural and academic circles,[63] the avant-garde is seen by literary critics—certainly since the latter half of the twentieth century—as an artistic category that encompasses "all the new schools" and whose aesthetic agenda is defined "by [its] rejection of the past and by the cult of the new."[64] Even now, it is rare to examine the concept of the artistic avant-garde as distinct from the political avant-garde.[65] It is thus clear that in texts that herald *Documents* as a tool to combat racism and ethnocentrism, the term "avant-garde" is never clearly defined; at most, it is described according to characteristics traditionally associated with historical avant-garde movements (such as the use of montage or resistance to the norm). And yet, both the racial discourse present in *Documents* and the scholarly texts that proclaim its "progressivism" demonstrate the need for a common aesthetic and political base on which to define the concept of "avant-garde." To do so, I suggest that we consider the avant-garde not in terms of time (or newness), but in terms of how it relates to different sites of struggle. In short, I propose that we consider the avant-garde in terms of its oppositional discourse.

Avant-Garde and Oppositional Discourse

In order to appreciate the ambiguity of *Documents*' avant-gardism, particularly given the inconsistencies of its racial discourse, two steps are necessary. First, we must nuance the polarization between avant-garde and

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[61] John Westbrook, "Reinventions of the Literary Avant-garde in Interwar France: *Documents* Between Surrealism and Ethnography" (PhD diss., New York University, 2001), 69-70.

[62] Marjorie Perloff, *The Futurist Movement* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2003).

[63] Poggioli, *The Theory of the Avant-Garde*, 30-40.

[64] Calinescu, *Five Faces of Modernity*, 117.

[65] See in particular Vincent Kaufmann, "L'arrière-garde vue de l'avant," in *Les Arrière-gardes au XXe siècle: L'autre face de la modernité esthétique*, ed. William Marx (Paris: Presses universitaires de France, 2004), 23-35.

arrière-garde, as William Marx invites us to do;[66] after all, according to its original military usage, the avant-garde (vanguard) and arrière-garde (rearguard) worked in partnership within the same army. Using this original definition as a starting point, I propose to shed light on the common goals shared by these "factions" when they are no longer seen as diametrically opposed. Second, we must question a common preconceived notion about the avant-garde (and arrière-garde) that is rooted in the metaphorical sense of the term, which holds that avant-garde is synonymous with new. I suggest that we rethink the notions of avant-gardism and arrière-gardism: no longer should they primarily be framed in terms of the "problem of time,"[67] or the illusion of specific time (namely progress); nor should they invariably be seen as the "prelude to a future revolution in the arts"[68] or as a "literal origin, a beginning from ground zero [or] a birth."[69] In other words, we should no longer think of avant-garde and arrière-garde according to the temporal concepts of prospection and retrospection.[70] I propose instead to decentre this idealistic reading (based on the artists' notion of their place in an imaginary chronology) and move towards a more political reading (based on the struggles and conflicts at the heart of avant-garde and arrière-garde works and within their social context). Returning once more to the original military sense of the terms arrière-garde and avant-garde, which implicitly conveys the idea of a battle, we can infer that both arrière-garde and avant-garde works are "fighting" arts; this is as true of the first category as it is of the second. They share common aims and explore views, objectives and uncharted territory. We therefore shift from a "temporal value" to a "spatial value," in contrast to the "orthodox narrative" of art history.[71] I am therefore not so much interested in reflecting on time as I am in specifically examining the struggle for discursive legitimacy in various avant-garde theories, a struggle that revolves around the notion of oppositional discourse.

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[66] William Marx, "Introduction. Penser les arrière-gardes," in *Les Arrière-gardes au XXe siècle: L'autre face de la modernité esthétique*, ed. William Marx (Paris: Presses universitaires de France, 2004), 9.

[67] Calinescu, *Five Faces of Modernity*, 9.

[68] Poggioli, *The Theory of the Avant-Garde*, 72.

[69] Krauss, "The Originality of the Avant-Garde," 157.

[70] See in particular Laurent Mattiussi, "Rétrospection et prospection, de Mallarmé à Heidegger," in *Les Arrière-gardes au XXe siècle: L'autre face de la modernité esthétique*, ed. William Marx (Paris: Presses universitaires de France, 2004), 37-49.

[71] Antoine Compagnon, *Les Cinq Paradoxes de la modernité* (Paris: Seuil, 1990), 54.

If avant-garde works do indeed form oppositional discourses and seek to overthrow norms, then tradition should no longer be viewed as a relic of the past, but as the product of a power relationship between dominant and dominated groups. For example, the "institution art," as conceptualized by Peter Bürger,[72] is not simply a historical monument whose very foundations must be destroyed to make way for the "new"; rather, it is a site of struggle for aesthetic dominance. In this conceptualization, being part of the avant-garde—-in other words, challenging an established and dominant norm— necessarily involves occupying a dominated position in a given field, a position which one seeks to change (although the situation is not necessarily one of total and unequivocal domination). On the other hand, being part of the arrière-garde—-in other words, seeking to preserve an established and dominant norm—involves occupying a dominant position in a given field (again, this situation can be nuanced). The latter position is not a passive one; it is just as "active" as the avant-garde position, in that it is the product of a struggle and both perpetuates and reaps the benefits of its power relationship. For this reason, when analyzing *Documents*, I do not see the avant-garde as an explicit means to categorize itself as a group.[73] As mentioned previously, there is no manifesto or letter of intent in *Documents* that claims an affiliation with the avant-garde. It should also be noted that the avant-garde and arrière-garde positions are neither inherent nor given. Being avant-garde does not in itself entail embodying specific characteristics (such as experimentalism, the rejection of orthodoxy, or originality of approach); instead, its relationship to them evolves over time. Additionally, since power relationships play out in many different fields and on many different fronts, it is possible—and perhaps even probable—-for a work to be both avant-garde (on one front) and arrière-garde (on another), and to occupy both a dominated position in one field and a dominant position in another.[74]

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[72] Peter Bürger, *Théorie de l'avant-garde*, trans. Jean-Pierre Cometti (Paris: Questions tbéoriques, 2013).

[73] This mirrors Truffaut's article in which he describes "a certain tendency on the part of French cinema," which made up the cinematic arrière-garde, to tacitly position itself as the avant-garde of French cinema. See Jean-Pierre Esquenazi, "Arrière-gardes et Nouvelle Vague: Le cinéma 'qualité France,'" in *Les Arrière-gardes au XXe siècle: L'autre face de la modernité esthétique*, ed. William Marx (Paris: Presses universitaires de France, 2004).

[74] A field "can be defined as a network, or a configuration of objective relationships between positions. These positions are objectively defined in their existence and in the determinations they impose upon their occupants, agents or institutions, by their current and potential situations (situs) in the structure of the distribution of various types of power (or capital), the possession of which commands access to specific

When we consider the multiple perspectives and power relationships underlying the concepts of "tradition" and "rupture," what seems to be a contradiction (being part of the avant-garde and arrière-garde simultaneously) is in fact entirely possible; an avant-garde discourse (against a dominant group in the aesthetic field, for example) can also be used to support an arrière-garde position (by reinforcing conformism in other fields where one occupies a dominant position, as in the case of racial discourse).[75] The classic avant-garde technique of photomontage can, for instance, support either liberal positions or fascist ones:

> "Application" [of an avant-garde technique] is also a power structure and it should come as no surprise that the use of photomontage freely crossed political, aesthetic and ideological lines. It could equally serve Dada and the German liberal left, the utopian De Stijl artists, the "scientific communism" of the Russian constructivists, and subsequently, and in a way that entirely severed any relationships between photomontage in its defining purposes and in its application, the German and Italian Fascists.[76]

When we examine *Documents* in terms of its racial discourse within the various avant-garde theories, it is possible to shed light on this particular dynamic, notably with regard to the publication's relationship to realism. On one hand, by exposing traditional realism's tendency to veil (specifically realism as it was understood in nineteenth-century literature), the writers behind *Documents* attempted to reveal its constructed nature. This is the main reason that the journal is associated with the surrealist movement: namely, its contribution to the attack on realism led by the so-called historical avant-gardes, an attack based on both technological evolution[77] (the invention of photography and cinema) and an ideological critique of

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profits that are at play in the field, and, at the same time, by their objective relationships to other positions (domination, subordination, homology, etc.)" (Pierre Bourdieu and Loïc J. D. Wacquant, *Réponses* [Paris: Seuil, 1992], 72-73).

[75] The case of certain symbolist writers who railed against artistic institutions in "small journals" at the end of the 19th century, and yet still demonstrated considerable anti-Semitism when it came to the art market or collectors, is an example of this. See Françoise Lucbert, *Entre le voir et le dire: La critique d'art des écrivains dans la presse symboliste en France de 1822 à 1906* (Rennes: Presses universitaires de Rennes, 2005), 107.

[76] Stephen C. Foster, "Dada and the Constitution of Culture," 55.

[77] Dietrich Scheunemann, "On Photography and Painting: Prolegomena to a New Theory of the Avant-Garde," in *European Avant-Garde: New Perspectives*, ed. Dietrich Scheunemann (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2008), 19.

the notion of reality.[78] On the other hand, however, it should be noted that the "anti-realism" of *Documents* was not only based on a strategy of rupture; in place of traditional realism, the publication proposed another, materialist realism[79]—also referred to as aggressive realism[80]—not unlike the notion of *Kinostil* promoted by expressionist writer Alfred Döblin. From an avant-garde point of view, the type of realism present in *Documents* was highly ambiguous. By adopting the same naturalness as traditional realism, *Documents* also reproduced the same hierarchies---often inadvertently. Many of the texts in *Documents* demonstrate the way in which the journal's form of realism took advantage of the "work" of dominated groups, primarily from so-called primitive societies. Relegated to a secondary role, these groups were used to highlight the *informe* side of man, without ever enjoying the privilege of being classified as human beings themselves. Moreover, the particular realism of *Documents*—at once aggressively realist (materialist) and anti-realist (anti-idealist)—fails to provide any oppositional discourse to counter its own racial conformism. *Documents* is therefore an illustration of the way in which avant-garde and arrière-garde can co-exist organically: the journal's avant-gardist aesthetic vision (attacking traditional realism) is used to serve an ideological arrière-garde (perpetuating racist ideology).

The opposite is also true: an arrière-garde discourse can support an avant-garde position.[81] In order to understand a work's joint avant- and arrière-gardism, it is not enough to subscribe to "the postmodemist program," which invites us to "go against the grain of history and blur aesthetic boundaries," reinterpreting historical avant-garde movements "ironically, in the same way as the arrière-garde."[82] Rather, we must focus on the elements that make up a work's oppositional discourse, paying particular attention to what they are for and against. At the same time, we must avoid the temptation to use this as a basis for classifying the work

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[78] Murphy, *Theorizing the Avant-Garde*, 270.

[79] See for example Georges Ribemont-Dessaignes, "Giorgio de Chirico," in *Documents* 2, no. 6 (Paris: Jean-Michel-Place, 1991), 337-338; Michel Leiris, "Toiles récentes de Picasso," in *Documents* 2, no. 2 (Paris: Jean-Michel-Place, 1991), 64; and Robert Desnos, "La Femme 100 têtes, par Max Ernst," in *Documents* 2, no. 2 (Paris: Jean-Michel-Place, 1991), 238.

[80] Vincent Debaene, "Les surréalistes et le musée d'ethnographie," *Labyrinthe atelier interdisciplinaire*, no. 12 (2002): 79.

[81] For example, see Michel Décaudin, "Avant-garde politique, arrière-garde poétique: Autour de *L'Effort libre*," in *Les Arrière-gardes au XXᵉ siècle: L'autre face de la modernité esthétique*, ed. William Marx (Paris: Presses universitaires de France, 2004), 103-115.

[82] William Marx, "Introduction," 18.

entirely in terms of "rupture" or "tradition." Above all, understanding the "arrière-gardism" of an avant-garde work involves examining the way that anticonformism (for example, aesthetic anticonformism) can still demonstrate the same conformism as dominant groups (Whites, for example). This fluid way of conceptualizing the avant-garde, which rejects the teleological tendencies of art history in general and genetic historicism in particular,[83] makes it easier for researchers to define what the avant-garde truly is through the lens of oppositional discourse. It also sheds new light on the prospect of a neo-avant-garde or contemporary avant-garde. Finally, it makes it possible to more accurately analyze the avant-gardism of so-called avant-garde works. In the case of *Documents*, this interpretation of the avant-garde allows us to deconstruct the trap that consists in extolling the journal's progressivism—particularly its supposed rebellion against colonialism and racism through the emerging discipline of ethnography—on the basis of its supposed affiliation with avant-garde movements.

Conclusion

This chapter aims to justify a closer examination of the "avant-garde" category and the objects that have been classified as such—sometimes in spite of their creators, as in the case of *Documents*—through the prism of racial discourse. In order to find common ground between genuine avant-garde characteristics, it is necessary to re-examine the various theories of the avant-garde as a concept. More than the idea of rebellion or innovation, oppositional discourse is—in my view—an important criterion that should be used to analyze the extent to which a work is avant-garde. Not only does oppositional discourse invite us to examine the various sites of struggle encompassed by artistic works, it also reveals the way in which avant-gardist and arrière-gardist discourses can coexist within the same work. With regard to *Documents*, racial discourse—and its various implications—can be used to shed light on the publication's conformism to the contemporary dominant ideology, which is overlooked in superficial readings of its avant-gardism. Rejecting the idea of an all-out struggle against racism and ethnocentrism in *Documents*, this article emphasizes the continuity between Georges Bataille's journal and the discourse surrounding colonialism in the first half of the twentieth century. The relationships between the creators of *Documents* and colonialism thus make it possible to rethink the avant-garde in *Documents* through a paradoxical lens: that of its arrière-gardism.

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[83] Compagnon, *Les Cinq Paradoxes de la modernité*, 47-78.

CHAPTER TWO

LANGUAGE AND RACE IN SCHLEGEL AND COLERIDGE

CHEN TZOREF-ASHKENAZI

Introduction

[…] these racial teachings, twisted and distorted into a unique privilege of the Teutons and justification for their monopoly on the human race, and which ultimately became a hunting licence for the most atrocious crimes against humanity, have their roots in German Romanticism… Both linguistically and in its literature, German Romanticism had established a connection with the Indian prehistory of Germanic civilization and an Aryan common ground between the different European peoples. [1]

These words of the German-Jewish philologist and survivor of the Holocaust, Victor Klemperer, written in 1947, belong to a long tradition of considering German Romanticism as a joint culprit in and precursor of the crimes committed by Nazi Germany. While the association of German Romanticism with the political right that emerged from about 1830 and remained dominant until after the Second World War has been greatly modified during the last five decades, as more recent scholarship began to emphasize the modernizing side of German Romantic literature, philosophy and aesthetic theory, especially those of Early Romanticism,[2] the work

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[1] Victor Klemperer, *The Language of the Third Reich*, trans. Martin Brady (London: Athlone, 2000), 137-8.

[2] Elizabeth Millán-Zaibert, *Friedrich Schlegel and the Emergence of Romantic Philosophy* (Albany: SUNY Press, 2007); Frederick Beiser, *The Romantic Imperative: the Concept of Early German Romanticism* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2003); Ernst Behler, *German Romantic Literary Theory* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993); Beiser, *Enlightenment, Revolution, and Romanticism: the Genesis of Modern German Political Thought, 1790-1800* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1992); Behler, *Unendliche Perfektibilität: europäische*

engaged with tracing of the roots of Aryan racism to the fascination of German Romanticism with India is growing rapidly. Friedrich Schlegel's *Über die Sprache und Weisheit der Indier* (*On the Language and Wisdom of the Indians*) (1808), which is also referred to by Klemperer, has played a central role in this debate. Schlegel's modestly sized book has been viewed not only as an important milestone in the development of Indology and historical-comparative linguistics but also, by some, as a significant contribution to the notion of Aryan race and a form of racism based on language.[3]

On the other side of the Channel, British-Romantic authors have traditionally received more gentle treatment in this respect, but recent decades have seen them, too, being censured for their share and support for racism and colonialism.[4] Samuel Taylor Coleridge was certainly among those who have been portrayed as major supporters of colonialism and nationalism, and his speculations on race have also drawn some attention, although not on a scale comparable to the literature on Schlegel's alleged

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Romantik und französische Revolution (Paderborn: Schöningh, 1989); Behler and Jochen Hörisch, eds., *Die Aktualität der Frühromantik* (Paderborn: Schöningh, 1987).

[3] Maurice Olender, *The Languages of Paradise: Race, Religion, and Philology in the Nineteenth Century*, trans. Arthur Goldhammer (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1992), 7-8; Edward Said, *The World, the Text, and the Critic* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1983), 264; Léon Poliakov, *The Aryan Myth: a History of Racist and Nationalist Ideas in Europe* (London: Chatto, 1974), 191; Sebastiano Timpanaro, "Introduction: Friedrich Schlegel and the Development of Comparative Linguistics in the 19th Century", trans. J. Peter Maher, in Schlegel, *Ueber die Sprache und die Weisheit der Indier: ein Beitrag zur Begründung der Altertumskunde*, ed. E. F. K. Koerner (Amsterdam: Benjamins, 1977), xi-lvii; Sheldon Pollock, "Deep Orientalism? Notes on Sanskrit and power beyond the Raj", in *Orientalism and the Postcolonial Predicament: Perspectives on South Asia*, ed. Carol A. Breckenridge (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1993), 76-133.

[4] Peter Kitson, *Romantic Literature, Race, and Colonial Encounter* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007); Michael Franklin, ed., *Romantic Representations of British India* (London: Routledge, 2006); Nigel Leaske, *British Romantic Writers and the East* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004); Tim Fulford and Peter Kitson, eds., *Romanticism and Colonialism: Writing and Empire, 1780-1830* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998); Saree Makdisi, *Romantic Imperialism: Universal Empire and the Culture of Modernity* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998); Sonia Hofkosh and Alan Richardson, eds., *Romanticism, Race, and Imperial Culture* (Bloomington, Ind.: Indiana University Press, 1996).

racism.[5] Yet while Schlegel has been portrayed by his critics as a precursor of a new kind of racism that is based on language rather than bodily shape or colour, in Coleridge's case emphasis has been laid on his adherence to the older pattern (that was actually quite new at the time), one that is grounded in the theories of natural historians and is engaged with the body rather than language. This chapter aims at a thorough comparison of the views Schlegel and Coleridge held on the subject of race and shows the many points they share, despite their many differences. It argues further that while Coleridge was indeed especially interested in racial theories as they were formulated by natural historians, a certain relationship between language and race that is not unlike Schlegel's was not entirely absent from his thought.

Two important motifs that characterize both Schlegel's and Coleridge's ideas on race are scientism and theology, and the attempt to reconcile them. According to Sheldon Pollock, scientism is what characterizes the philological method suggested by Friedrich Schlegel in his India book and it rendered his philology dangerous.[6] For Sebastiano Timpanaro, Schlegel's frequent use of biological metaphors in his typology of language was among the most problematic features of his approach.[7] Coleridge scholars have also pointed to the central role played by contemporary scientific theories in his speculations on race. His views on race are strongly related to his attempt to develop a biology that is not based on materialist and mechanistic principles, and the attempt at a reconciliation between biology and theology can be seen as the most important context of his engagement with the concept of race.[8] According to Peter Kitson, "of the canonical Romantic

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[5] David Vallins, ed., *Coleridge, Romanticism, and the Orient: Cultural Negotiations* (London: Bloomsbury Academics, 2013); David Haney, "Coleridge's 'Historic Race': Ethical and Political Otherness", in Donald Wehrs and Haney, eds., *Levinas and Nineteenth Century Literature,* (Newark: University of Delaware Press, 2009), 61-88; Peter Kitson, "Coleridge and 'the Ouran utang Hypothesis'": Romantic Theories of Race," in *Samuel Taylor Coleridge and the Sciences of Life,* ed. Nicholas Roe, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), 91-116; Tim Fulford, "Theorizing Golgotha: Coleridge, Race Theory, and the Skull Beneath the Skin," in Roe, *Sciences of Life,* 117-133; Patrick Keane, *Coleridge's Submerged Politics: the Ancient Mariner and Robinson Crusoe* (Columbia, Mo: University of Missouri Press, 1994), 57-66; J. H. Haeger, "Coleridge's speculations on race," *Studies in Romanticism* 13 (1974): 333-57.

[6] Pollock, "Deep Orientalism?", 80-4.

[7] Timpanaro, "Introduction", xxxv-xxxvii.

[8] Trevor Levere, *Poetry Realized in Nature: Samuel Taylor Coleridge and Early Nineteenth Century Science* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981), 114-

poets he was the most scientifically aware about competing theories of human difference".[9] Theology was also of prime importance to Schlegel's philological Orientalism.[10] In this sense, both Schlegel and Coleridge belong to the context of the theological discussion of race, recently emphasized by Colin Kidd and David Livingstone.[11]

The change in racial attitudes around 1850 that is much discussed in the literature on the history of racism bears on this chapter only indirectly, to the extent of the need to determine whether positions held by Schlegel and Coleridge, both of them dead by 1835, should be considered as racist or proto-racist. An important distinction, discussed by Todorov, is between racialism as a theory of race drawing a correlation between biological and cultural features that leads to belief in the hierarchy of races, on the one hand, and racism as any hostility toward people of different origins, on the other hand.[12] As research has pointed out, it is perfectly possible for thinkers to develop racialist theories without being particularly racist in personal relations or political views relating to current affairs. Therefore my analysis will refer to racialist elements in the thought of Schlegel and Coleridge rather than to racism in the broad sense. Todorov's definition of racialism is, however, too narrow for a discussion of race in language theory because of the stress it lays on biological differences as determinants of cultural differences. Race in language theory usually better corresponds to what Todorov refers to as the culturalism that he identifies as having appeared from 1850 and other scholars trace to the Early Modern period. The analysis in this chapter will discuss whether Schlegel's and Coleridge's theories on race can be identified as racialist in the narrow biological or broader culturalist sense.

5; Haeger, "Coleridge's Speculations on Race", 354; Kitson, *Romantic Literature, Race and Colonial Encounter*, 40-3.

[9] Kitson, "Coleridge and 'the Ouran utang hypothesis'", 91.

[10] Suzanne Marchand, *German Orientalism in the Age of Empire: Religion, Race, and Scholarship* (Washington DC: German Historical Institute, 2009), 58-65.

[11] Colin Kidd, *The Forging of the Races: Race and Scripture in the Protestant Atlantic World, 1600-2000* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006); David Livingstone, *Adam's Ancestors: Race, Religion, and the Politics of Human Origins* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2008).

[12] Tzvetan Todorov, *Nous et les autres: La réflexion française sur la diversité humaine* (Paris: Éd. du Seuil, 1989), 113-7.

Schlegel: Language as Alternative to Body

Schlegel's attitude to race is peculiar, in that he increasingly puts in question the concept of a biological race as it was developed by natural historians, proposing a radical alternative based on language. Schlegel began his attempts at trying to trace the origin of European civilization to India soon after arriving in Paris in 1802. The idea of India as the origin of European civilization is already hinted at in his essay *Journey to France*, published in 1803, and became more pronounced with his famous announcement in a letter to Ludwig Tieck:

> Here is really the origin of all the languages, all the thoughts, all the poems of the human spirit; everything without exception originates from India. I have an entirely different view and insight since I can draw from this source.[13]

This enthusiastic declaration was inspired by Schlegel's Sanskrit studies in Paris with the British orientalist Alexander Hamilton. Earlier, during the 1790s, Schlegel had already been interested in India as a possible source of inspiration for poetry and mythology, drawn among others from Johann Gottfried Herder, but in that context he associated India with a rather vague concept of the Orient and did not regard it as an ultimate origin. His new enthusiasm was related to his new search for religious inspiration following his sense of alienation resulting from the collapse of the Romantic circle after the death of Novalis and his encounter with the modernity of Paris. Schlegel had already developed an interest in religion during the Athenaeum years, but what was at that time aimed at the creation of a new religion, now became oriented towards the origins of religious tradition. Tracing the origin of civilization to India was not necessarily a conservative enterprise. In fact, it drew on an Enlightenment search for the origins of civilization that, in moving beyond the limited frame of the Old Testament, represented a widening of the cultural horizons of Europe as it was portrayed by Raymond Schwab.[14] Certainly, in tracing the origin of all languages to India, Schlegel alludes both to an ancient search for the divine language of Adam and to a modern cosmopolitan view of humanity that combined diversity with unity. Soon, however, the exclusive elements gained more

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[13] Edgar Lohner, ed., *Ludwig Tieck und die Brüder Schlegel, Briefe*, (Munich: Winkler, 1972), 135-6. Translations are mine, unless otherwise specified.
[14] Raymond Schwab, *The Oriental Renaissance: Europe's Discovery of India and the East, 1680-1880*, trans. Gene Patterson-Black and Victor Reinking (New York: Columbia University Press.)

weight without entirely eliminating the universalist approach. Already in 1804, in his *Lectures on the History of European Literature*, he limited the scope of civilization to Europe and Asia, including North Africa, thus excluding other parts of the world, saying that "initially it has to be remarked that of all inhabited parts of the world only Europe and Asia are interesting as far as science and art are concerned." [15] Further on Schlegel defined civilization (*Bildung*) as the state of a nation having a share in the Original Revelation: "When speaking of an entire nation, *Bildung* means nothing else than that it shares in the oldest original Revelations and poetries through origination and tradition and has its own mythology and scripture originating from them" (KA 11:127).

This limitation of the sphere of civilization was soon extended to the sphere of language. In the *Lectures on Universal History*, delivered in Cologne in 1805-6, Schlegel presented the earliest version of his historical-comparative linguistics, aimed at tracing the origin of the Germanic tribes to India and putting them on equal level with the ancient Greeks and Romans. Although Schlegel was already well on his way to accept Catholicism at the time these lectures were given,[16] the preliminary paragraphs of the lectures betray his struggle with a continuing attachment to secular (but not atheist) Enlightenment thought and German Protestant biblical historical criticism. Unlike the more famous theses of *On the Language and Wisdom of the Indians*, written manifestly in support of orthodox Christianity, here the Old Testament is declared to be an unreliable source for writing history as much of its stories should be seen as purely allegorical: "the most correct approach would be to regard all these things that were seen as historic as merely symbolic and allegorical" (KA 14:10). On this basis he concludes that "considering all the circumstances, the chronology of the age of the human race that is derived from the Old Testament is really false" (KA 14:10). Considerations related to physical nature lead him not only to conclude that the world and the human race are much older than traditional chronology suggests, but also to accept a polygenic view, with different kinds of people having been created in different locations with different natural characteristics without being any less human for that reason. He argued that "it would correspond to the

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[15] Ernst Behler et al., eds., *Kritische Friedrich-Schlegel-Ausgabe* (Paderborn: Schöningh, 1958-), (KA) 11:15. Subsequent references to this edition will appear in the text.

[16] Compare the statement from the philosophical lectures given shortly earlier: "The interpretation of the Revelation, its history and sources with all the knowledge and resources relating to it belong only to the Church itself and to its theologians". KA 13:62.

analogy with nature to assume that many people were created at once in different places, and that the great characteristic variety that Nature mixes in all animals and plants in each continent, the identity of species notwithstanding, would extend to its highest creation, man" (KA 14:12). But he nevertheless rejects these physical considerations as a basis for the classification of people. The natural differences between the inhabitants of different continents are not sufficient, and only language can serve this purpose, as only it can point to the common origin of peoples. This is based on a rejection of nature as a meaningful factor in history. For Schlegel, physical distinctions between people do exist, and they are not entirely insignificant, but "actually the physical-geographical aspects of man hardly belong to universal history" (KA, 14:17). While at first it is not clear whether by classification genealogy or typology is meant, this becomes clear as soon as he starts his discussion of language, making clear that genealogy is also typology. He relates his language classification to the debates on the origin of language, whether it is human or divine, explaining that both exist, with one divine language serving as the genealogical basis of all 'noble languages', including Sanskrit, Greek, Latin and German as well as their derivatives. All other languages, he argued, lacked any genealogical connection but shared one kind of grammar resulting from their being the product of human reason, which is of one kind:

> Among the Americans and Africans, as far as they are known, and also among the Tatar nations in Asia we find not only that their languages are not related to the noble European and Asiatic languages but also that their grammar and speech are completely different and finally that these languages do not have anything in common and cannot be derived from any common origin, and still most of them have only one kind of grammar, because human reason, when left alone, tends to follow one and the same rule. [KA, 14:14]

The linguistic connection shows the Asiatic origin of most European peoples, while all other peoples in the world should be seen as original inhabitants (*Urbewohner*). Ethiopians, Native Americans, and the Scythians and Tatars in Asia are explicitly referred to as original inhabitants. Of these, the Ethiopians are those whose character is the most physical and least moral, i.e. they are those most remote from civilization. Two European peoples, the Celts and Basques, take an intermediate position in that further inquiry may eventually show their Asiatic origin, whereas this is categorically denied for other populations of the world not belonging to the Indic stock (KA, 14:17). The so-called original inhabitants also include the Egyptians, who should be regarded as a separate African race (KA, 14:20).

The Jews are related to the Syrians, Phoenicians and Chaldeans and belong to the widespread stock of Arabs, and they are also referred to as a Tatar nation (KA, 14:32). Thus, we see Schlegel merging cosmopolitanism and particularism, downgrading Jews, Egyptians and Celts along with most of the world's inhabitants while insisting on the humanity of all, and ennobling most Europeans by tracing their origin to the Indic stock.

This was certainly a racial position, distinguishing between people according to their noble or non-noble origin, although in the terms of its time the racism of the theory is moderate. Above all, despite representing a polygenetic view, Schlegel explicitly discards the gradation theory that posited a gradual passage from high apes to Europeans, with especially Africans representing an intermediate kind.[17] This theory was represented among others by Petrus Camper's notion of the face angle in his *Über den natürlichen Unterschied der Gesichtszüge in Menschen unterschiedlicher Gegenden* (1792), Charles White's *Account of the Regular Gradation in Man* (1799) and in Germany by Samuel Sömmerring's *Über die körperliche Verschiedenheit des Negers vom Europäer* (1785). But there is some ambivalence here as he portrays Africans as less suitable for spiritual civilization and even as having some things in common with both the ape and the lion (KA, 14:15). Significantly, Schlegel rejects the notion of a biological race as a meaningful basis for classification. He explains this by the need to show the Asiatic origin of most Europeans, regardless of the physical differences between them and some Asians. But since Europeans were already classified with West Asians as Caucasians by Johann Friedrich Blumenbach and others, this was perhaps not the only reason for his rejection of the accepted classification. Apparently, the decisive consideration was theological: placing spirit, as represented by language, above nature, and supplying a divine origin to European civilization, transmitted through language. Within this European civilization, the Germans are accorded a favoured position as belonging to the noble stock, while Celts, associated among others with the French, are downgraded as a people whose Asiatic origin is at least doubted, although not strictly denied. There is also an anti-Semitic strand here, inspired by the negative attitude to the historical component of the Old Testament among Protestant theologians such as Johann David Michaelis. Yet in the genealogical framework that Schlegel presents here, purity of origin does not take prime importance, and Schlegel does not hesitate to explain the great number of Germans migrating from India to northern Europe by suggesting that they had mingled with other peoples along the way: "One can see that they must

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[17] Kitson, "Coleridge and 'the Ouran utang hypothesis", 97-9.

have incorporated or assimilated through subjugation many nations on this way; this is shown by the spread of their language but also by the language itself through the traces of foreign languages" (KA, 14:24). This explanation suggests that it is possible to join a nation by taking its language. The most important issue at stake is national heritage that must be of ancient origin, not the physical origin of the people themselves.

Schlegel's prime political project here was the construction of a German national community tracing its origins back to a divine source. German authors in the eighteenth century turned to the ancient Germanic tribes and to the myth of Arminius' war against the Romans as a way of negotiating the tension between culture and nature and the position of Germany vis-à-vis French cultural domination.[18] This construction, derived from Tacitus's *Germania* and developed by German humanists from the sixteenth century, was politicized in the wake of the Napoleonic wars by authors such as Johann Gottlieb Fichte and Ernst Moritz Arndt. For Schlegel it was important to emphasize their share in the common European-Christian heritage, placing it on a level at least equal to the Latin tradition.[19] An additional important objective was tracing the origins of European feudalism to the divine origin of civilization by portraying the division of Indian society into castes as the origin of the division of European society into social orders, emphasizing that it was transmitted to Medieval Europe by the Germanic tribes that had preserved it, while in Greece and Rome it had quickly deteriorated and was replaced by republican institutions leading to despotism (KA, 14:19, 28, 62-3 71). The linguistic connection thus served to trace Europe's traditional political institutions to divine origins, as this was also done by Joseph de Maistre and Louis de Bonald. The exclusion and degradation of other peoples was meant to serve the elevation of the Germans and was not an aim in itself, but this does not undermine its racialist implications.

In his book *On the Language and Wisdom of the Indians*, published two years after the lectures of universal history, Schlegel's approach is much closer to orthodox Christianity. This book appeared almost simultaneously with his conversion to Catholicism, and the theological and philosophical concerns played a much more pronounced role than in the lectures discussed

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[18] Renate Stauf, "Germanenmythos und Griechenmythos als nationale Identitätsmythen bei Möser und Winckelmann" in *Arminius und die Varrusschlacht: Geschichte – Mythos – Literatur*, eds. Rainer Wiegels and Winfried Woesler (Paderborn: Schöningh, 1995), 309-22.

[19] Chen Tzoref-Ashkenazi, *Der romantische Mythos vom Ursprung der Deutschen: Friedrich Schlegels Suche nach der indogermanischen Verbindung*, trans. Markus Lemke (Göttingen: Wallstein, 2009), 134-6.

above. In this book, too, Schlegel regards language as the most important means for tracing the origins of peoples, followed by the use of metals and the domestication of animals (KA, 8:265-7). He emphasized that "the physical differences between the races of mankind are not, at least as far as they have developed up to now, of great historical significance" (KA 8:267). Nevertheless, Schlegel abandons in this book the explicit polygenism of the lectures without adopting a clear-cut monogenetic view.

In the language section, he develops the argument that the affiliation of languages can only be determined on the basis of the "inner structure", that is comparative grammar, showing the affiliation of Sanskrit, Greek, Latin, and German (KA, 8:137). He distinguished further between two kinds of language, those affiliated with Sanskrit, sharing a common origin and a basically common grammar, and all other languages having far greater grammatical diversity and lacking any genealogical connection between them. This distinction, according to Schlegel, is the most basic division of human languages:

> Modifications of meaning are shown either by internal change of the root through inflection; or by an added word, that already on its own signifies phrality, past tense, a future condition or any other relation of this kind; and these two simple cases characterize the two main genres of all languages. [KA 8:153]

In Sanskrit "the structure of the language is constructed organically through inflection or internal changes or bending of the root", and this quality characterizes its derivative languages to ever decreasing degrees. Thus Greek is less inflectional than Sanskrit, Latin less than Greek, with modem European languages gradually substituting the use of auxiliary verbs and prepositions to real inflection (KA 8:147). In languages not affiliated to Sanskrit, grammatical variations are signified through particles and suffixes, a form of grammatical construction that Schlegel defines as mechanical (KA, 8:149, 153). But these, too, have a hierarchical order. At the bottom is Chinese, where all variations are indicated by independent particles, followed by Basque, Coptic, and Amerindian languages using suffixes. Upper still are the Semitic languages using suffixes that have become indistinguishable from the words to the point that they seem to represent inflection (termed "agglutinating" by August Wilhelm Schlegel). Finally in Celtic (actually belonging to the Indo-European family) there are only traces of suffixes, and variation is constructed mainly through auxiliary verbs and prepositions as in modem languages. These differences represent degrees in the complexity and beauty of these languages. While organic

languages degenerate with time, mechanical languages can improve and become more sophisticated:

> The progress of the mere grammatical art and formation in the two genres of language is entirely reverse. The language formed by affixes is at first artless but becomes increasingly artistic..., in the languages formed by inflection, on the other hand, the beauty and art of the structure is gradually lost through the tendency to simplify things. [KA, 8:163]

The unbridgeable gap between organic and mechanic languages that always remains results from their origin: the mother language of the organic languages

> was not created out of physical cries or experiments with speech imitating sounds or playing with them, to which only gradually some reason and intelligent form were added. Rather... from the start there was the clearest and most intimate reflection. [KA, 8:169]

This linguistic typology served Schlegel to support several arguments developed in the following chapters of the book. The most important of these was the thesis that European civilization had originated from an original revelation in India, only traces of which were preserved in the surviving Indian philosophical and theological writings. Schlegel argued that Sanskrit itself was not the original language of this revelation, but the one closest to it, and the mother language of all other languages affiliated with it (KA 8:173). The inferiority of non-Sanskritic languages, being the product of human reason, compared to organic languages that are ultimately of divine origin, correlates to the failure of reason in understanding the divine message when unassisted by providence that had given rise to polytheism and pantheism (KA, 8:199-253). Further, he argued that this civilization had spread from India either through colonies of priests carrying the divine message to barbarian peoples, or through migrations of whole peoples preserving ancient memories of their religion and political institutions. These two kinds of transmission can be determined by language. Thus Egypt, China, Mexico, and Peru, countries whose languages were not affiliated with Sanskrit, must have received their religious ideas through priests, while Germans and Greeks had migrated from India *en masse*, eventually giving birth to most European peoples. Of these last two migrating nations, the Germans represent the better one, motivated by more elevated religious ideas and also preserving their institutions better than the Greeks did (KA 8: 273-93). Yet this does not mean that every German living today is descended from India, since as he already said in the *Lectures of*

Universal History, here too Schlegel explains the possibility of such a large people as the Germans migrating from India in such a remote period by their having intermingled with many smaller peoples on the route leading from India to Europe (KA 8:275). Such mingling can also explain the similarity of Celtic, Slavonian and Armenian languages to the languages affiliated with Sanskrit (KA, 8:181-189), and was among the factors leading to the unavoidable deterioration of organic languages (KA 8:173).

Schlegel's thesis of Sanskrit being the mother language of Indo-European family was inspired by William Jones' contention that Sanskrit was "more perfect than the Greek, more copious than the Latin, and more exquisitely refined than either", although Jones did not consider Sanskrit to be the mother language of Greek and Latin but rather speculated that all three had developed from a more ancient source.[20] The idea that Sanskrit was the mother language of the entire family did not last long in historical-comparative linguistics and was already discarded by Franz Bopp. Yet the strong attachment of the Germans with a superior kind of language of especially ancient origins became an integral part of German ethnic nationalism in the nineteenth century. The relegation of Semitic languages to the non-organic family was later influential in the development of the anti-Semitic brand of Aryan racism.

Considering Schlegel's own intentions, however, it is clear that the degradation of Hebrew was not one of the aims of his problematic linguistic typology. Unlike the *Lectures on Universal History,* in *On the Language and Wisdom of the Indians,* Hebrew and the Hebrews are not treated with malice. On the contrary, Hebrew and Arabic are portrayed as the best of their group of non-organic languages to the degree that they can almost be regarded as organic (KA, 8:157). He further praised their beauty, rhetorically asking: "who could deny the high art, the dignity and sublime power of the Arabic and Hebrew language?" (KA, 8:163) Timpanaro pointed to Bopp's recognition that Hebrew and Arabic were no less inflectional than the Indo-European languages.[21] But Schlegel's definition of organic languages was not just typological. It was primarily a genealogical definition, and Schlegel was justified in having no doubt that Semitic languages did not belong to the languages affiliated with Sanskrit.

That Schlegel excluded these languages from the organic group also had serious theological grounds. It was important for Schlegel to separate the mythological and philosophical tradition whose roots he traced to India from Christian tradition originating in the Old Testament. By this point he

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[20] William Jones, *The Works of Sir William Jones* (London: Robinson, 1799), 1:26.
[21] Timpanaro, "Introduction", xxvi.

strongly objected to the view, represented among others by Schelling, and with which he himself had launched on his Sanskrit studies in 1803, that Christianity owed more to the tradition originating in India than to Judaism. In the *Lectures on the Method of Academic Study* (1803), Schelling argued that the ancient tradition of Idealism that he traced to India had reached fulfillment in Christianity. He opposed this tradition to Greek Realism, minimizing Judaism's role in the process.[22] Schlegel argued in *On the Language and Wisdom of the Indians* that Christianity can only be understood as the teaching that was presented first in the Old and later, in greater clarity, in the New Testament, with Indian and other Oriental systems serving by their errors only to prove the truthfulness of the old biblical teaching. He went in his book to the defense of the Jews against allegations, popular in German Protestant theology, that their isolation represented narrow-minded provincialism, arguing that it had been necessary to guard the chosen people against the distortion of the original revelation that were widespread in the neighbouring countries:

> Many unjustified reproaches made against the prophets of God among the Hebrews that considered as provincialism the fact that they rejected everything else and kept their teaching and their people so firmly apart, would dissolve of its own if the situation of the oriental peoples of that time would have been appreciated. It would then have been realized how necessary this firmness and separation must have been. [KA, 8: 297-9]

In this context, the linguistic separation between Jews and Pagans that he portrayed cannot be regarded as motivated by anti-Semitism.

There were, however, other groups of peoples whose treatment by Schlegel can be characterized as racialist, or at least culturalist. These included Celts and Slavs, whom Schlegel clearly separated from noble European peoples on the basis of linguistic difference, albeit acknowledging the strong similarities of their (actually Indo-European) languages to the organic ones. Another such group were Amerindians. Schlegel devoted considerable space in his discussion of non-organic languages to the grammatical structure of Amerindian languages, regarded by him as the prototype of this kind of languages, being constructed mainly through suffixes that always preserve their own meaning independently of the word to which they are attached. In analyzing these languages, of which he specifically referred to Andean Quechua, Mexican Otomi, Cora, Huastec, Mixtec, and Totonac, he relied on materials received from Alexander von

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[22] Friedrich Wilhelm Joseph von Schelling, *Vorlesungen über die Methode des akademischen Studiums*, (Hamburg: Meiner, 1990), 92.

Humboldt, whom he explicitly thanked for his help in a note to the chapter
on the two kinds of language (KA 8:153). Humboldt himself also mentioned
that Schlegel had used his materials on Amerindian languages, and Jürgen
Trabant speculates that getting to know these languages drew Schlegel's
attention to the great difference between the grammar of Amerindian and
Indo-European languages and played a significant role in the development
of his linguistic theory and in his decision to base comparison between
languages on grammar instead of on vocabulary, as was customary at the
time.[23] Yet while studying the grammars of several Amerindian languages
certainly widened Schlegel's scope and supplied important materials for his
language typology, it is unlikely that what Schlegel learned from them was
the decisive factor in the development of his typological theory. The
eighteenth century knew several other language typologies based on
grammar, such as Nicolas Beauzée's distinction between *langues analogues*
and *langues transpositives* and Adam Smith's distinction between original
and compounded languages that also included a component of historical
development.[24] Most important is of course William Jones, who had already
seen grammar as the central point of similarity between Sanskrit, Greek,
Latin, and German. Frans Planc has argued that the decisive influence on
Schlegel may have come from Alexander Hamilton, Schlegel's Sanskrit
teacher in Paris in 1803, whose own ideas on language comparison were not
so different from Schlegel's and could also have drawn his attention to
Smith's ideas.[25]

Trabant is correct in pointing to the contrast that Schlegel draws between
what he saw as savage America and civilized Asia. That contrast is evident
in his discussion of physical differences between Amerindians and Asians,
and he explicitly says that no history would have developed in America and
the southern parts of Africa without the influence of civilized Asian peoples
(KA, 8:273). But another important contrast involving America appears in
Schlegel's *Lectures on Modern History*, delivered in Vienna in 1810, where
he says that the obvious affinity of the Gothic language to Sanskrit, Persian,
and Greek makes it

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[23] Jürgen Trabant, "Indien vs. Amerika. Über Friedrich Schlegels Sprache und
Weisheit der Indier", in *Rassedenken in der Sprach- und Textreflexion*, ed. Philipp
Krämer (Paderborn: Fink, 2015), 27-46.
[24] R. Robins, "The History of Language Classification", in *Current Trends in
Linguistics,* ed. Thomas Sebeok, vol. 11 (The Hague-Paris, Mouton, 1973), 3-43.
[25] Frans Plank, "What Friedrich Schlegel Could Have Learned from Alexander
("Sanscrit") Hamilton'", *Lingua e Stile* 22 (1987): 367-84.

scarcely possible for us to conceive that the ancient Germans are to be put on a level with the savage Americans or with the Caffires. And we can the less do so, as in the present day the languages of those savages have been accurately described, and are sufficiently known to enable us to institute a comparison, and to convince ourselves how great is the difference.[26]

This is clear indication for the significance for Schlegel of using language comparison as a means to distinguish the ancient Germans from non-European peoples regarded as savages, and to put them on one level with the ancient civilized nations of Asia and Europe. Comparing ancient Germanic peoples with Amerindians was common in eighteenth-century Germany.[27] But this was not the kind of historical model for the origins of the German nation that Schlegel approved of. His strategy is deeply troubling, involving strong racialist implications, and there are also traces of biological racialism in his theory. These biological components of Schlegel's racialism are much weakened by the insistence on the role played by the intermingling of peoples, but they are not eliminated by it. In any case, they are not central for the theory that is, in its essence, a culturalist alternative to biological racialism. Yet culturalism can be just as dangerous as biological racialism,[28] and the subsequent history of the idea of an Aryan race showed that the two cannot always be kept apart.[29]

Language in Coleridge's Racial Theology

Coleridge's understanding of both language and race was profoundly different from Schlegel's, and yet it is possible to point out illuminating similarities. Coleridge's interest in language belonged to a diametrically different tradition from the one Schlegel participated in developing. The history of languages and the relationship between them interested him only to a limited extent. Instead, his interest in language was concentrated on a search for natural language and the relationship between language and ideas and between language and the world. Above all, his was interested in

[26] Schlegel, *A Course of Lectures on Modern History*, trans. Lindsey Purcell and R. H. Whitelock (London: Bohn, 1849), 75. German original: KA, 7:85.

[27] Karl H. L. Welker, "Altes Sachsen und koloniales Amerika: Naturrechtsdenken und Tacitusrezeption bei Justus Möser", in *Arminius und die Varusschlacht*, 323-44.

[28] Christopher Hutton, "Phonocentrism and the Concept of Volk: the Case of Modern China", in *Ideas of Race in the History of the Humanities*, 273-95.

[29] Tuska Benes, "From Indo-Germans to Aryans: Philology and the Racialization of Salvationist National Rhetoric, 1806-30", in *The German Invention of Race*, eds. Sarah Eigen and Mark Larrimore (Albany, NY: SUNY Press), 167-81.

language as representing the structure of the mind. Much of his engagement with language was influenced by his engagement with the materialist linguistic philosophy of John Home Tooke, and he was also heavily influenced by Tooke's etymological methods. Philology and the philosophy of language in England in the beginning of the nineteenth century were dominated by Horne Tooke's ideas, presented in his work *Epea Peroenta or the Diversion of Purely* (1786-1805). Under the influence of the philosophy of John Locke, Tooke reduced all the words to nouns and verbs and ultimately to things in the world, arguing that each word had only one original and correct meaning. He made extensive use of daring etymologies aiming to show the origin of verbs, prepositions, and adjectives in the abbreviation of nouns referring to material objects. His approach to the development of language was ambivalent, regarding the process of abbreviation as a corruption of original meanings but simultaneously as leading to more efficient means of expression.[30]

Coleridge was at first attracted to Home Tooke's political radicalism and later as a philosopher of language.[31] After an initial stage of enthusiasm his engagement with him became more critical, and he tried to give an Idealist turn to Home Tooke's materialist philosophy of language. This is the apparent significance of the wish he expressed in a letter to William Godwin on 22 September, 1800, to philosophize Home Tooke's theory of language and to "destroy the old antithesis of *Words & Things,* elevating, as it were, words into Things, & living Things too", implying that words are much more than just arbitrary signs for material objects. Instead, he tried to relate language to thought or ideas and ultimately to relate human language to spiritual inspiration.[32] Horne Tooke's continuing influence on Coleridge's view of language was shown in later years in his extended use of Tooke's daring etymologies. Such was his etymology of the word *mind* from the verb *mow* (CL 2:696), and even more strikingly of the word *thing* from the verb *think*, where he inverted Home Tooke's etymology of *think* from *thing*, that

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[30] Hans Aarsleff, *The Study of Language in England* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1967).

[31] The following paragraph is based on James McKusick, *Coleridge's philosophy of Language* (New Haven, Mass.: Yale University Press).

[32] Samuel Taylor Coleridge, *Collected Letters*, ed. Leslie Griggs (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1956-1971) (CL), 1:625-6. See also the earlier letter to Godwin from 21 May, 1800, where Coleridge characterizes words as "outward & visible signs, that both shew and vivify the inward & spiritual grace", CL 1:588. Subsequent references to this edition will appear in the text.

was based on the principle of tracing verbs to material objects.[33] Drawn from Schelling's idealist philosophy, he increasingly adopted the view that all language begins with the verb substantive indicating the notion of being (to be, and especially the first singular form *I am*), associated with the Hebrew construction of the name of God. Yet Coleridge modified this view, arguing that this is not the historical beginning of language but its philosophical and logical basic element, connecting verb and noun and thus resolving the debate among philologists and philosophers of language, which comes first.[34] He also remained attached to Tooke's principle that every word must have only one correct meaning (CN 2:2629; CN 4:5136 f135). A central element of this view was his theory of desynonimization, i.e. the theory that the progress of language as civilization grows involves a process by which words acquire multiple similar but not identical meanings that are then separated with a different word attached to each meaning. Coleridge attributed this process at times to the unconscious work of the common sense of the people but more often to conscious work by great thinkers and poets (CC 7,1:82-4; 7,2:54; CN 3:3312, 3549) and this theory also lead him to interest in the history of language, although he remained relatively uninterested in the history of different languages and still less in the historical connections between them (CC 7,2:53; CL 3:58; CN 1:1646 CN 4:5136 f133). Thus Coleridge's view of language was profoundly different from Schlegel's. He was absorbed in the theory of general grammar, was interested in language mainly as a reflection of the laws of the mind and as a system of signs that can be related and connected to a divine language of nature but is still a human product. While sharing the Romantic rejection of the Lockean view of language as a system of arbitrary signs and the equally Romantic notion of language as expressing the spirit of the people, he also viewed the development of language as a progressive process of growth involving the work of great minds.

Coleridge was not unaware of the development of historical philology in Germany.[35] During his short stay in Göttingen, he devoted much of his time to philological studies and was especially interested in old German dialects, and he even amusingly referred to a plan for a comparative study of ancient Germanic dialects and Sanskrit (CL 1:494). This suggests that he

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[33] Coleridge, *The Notebooks of Samuel Taylor Coleridge*, ed. Kathleen Coburn (New York: Pantheon Books, 1957-2002) (CN), 2:2784). Subsequent references to this edition will appear in the text.

[34] Coleridge, *The Collected Works of Samuel Taylor Coleridge*, ed. Kathleen Coburn (London: Routledge and Keagan, 1969-) (CC), 13:16-8. Subsequent references to this edition will appear in the text.

[35] L. A. Willoughby, "Coleridge as philologist", *MLR* 31 (1936): 176-201.

was familiar with William Jones' discovery of the Indo-European connection but did not take it seriously. At later dates he showed familiarity with the work of Franz Bopp but was generally uninterested in the connections between the European and Asian branches of the Indo-European languages (CN 4:4697). His etymologies often refer to old German words as the origin of modern English ones. At the same time, Coleridge was interested in more casual comparisons between European languages, appreciating German and especially ancient Greek above all others and disparaging Latin and its derivatives, French in particular. Yet he was also prepared, at least on some occasions, to acknowledge certain advantages to each of the major modern European languages.[36] As many of his contemporaries, he saw the relative qualities of languages as closely related to corresponding qualities of the peoples speaking them, sometimes considering defects in language as responsible for shortcomings of national culture, sometimes vice versa (CN 3:3557; CN 3:4237).[37]

These comparisons were occasionally nationalist, but I consider that they cannot be characterized as racist. A more problematic approach appeared in his unpublished work on *Logic*, written between 1819 and 1828. This work, which Coleridge saw as a philosophical introduction to his unfinished theological work, *Opus Maximum*, involves a critical representation of Kantian philosophy in which language plays a much more important role than it did for Kant, in that he identifies the Kantian faculty of understanding with language. In this work Coleridge argued that language reflects the structure of the intellect, and consequently structure and grammar rather than words are the important feature of language, an idea that he had already outlined in the *Biographia Literaria* (1817) (CC 7,2:53-4). This is similar to Schlegel's emphasis on grammar and inner structure as the essential features of language. Similarly to Schlegel, who identified perfect structure with a particular language from which European languages developed with decreasing perfection, so did Coleridge, identifying Greek rather than Sanskrit as the original language of Europe. Yet the most problematic moment in his presentation arrives when he distinguishes between Greek and other languages. After having portrayed the development of languages in the personal level of children, beginning by learning a quantity of isolated words and then beginning to reflect upon the relationships between them,

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[36] For German: CC 7,1:210, CN 2:3160; Greek vs. Latin: CC 7,1:239, CN 3:3365; German vs. Greek: CC 7:2,89-90, 197-8 Italian vs. English: CC 7,2:35; comparative remarks on all modern European languages CN 4:4934.

[37] See also Joshua Neumann, "Coleridge on the English Language", *PMLA* 63 (1948): 642-61; Michael Kent Havens, "Coleridge on the Evolution of Language", *Studies in Romanticism* 20 (1981): 163-83.

he comes to the moment when the first logical, i.e. really human language was born. This language is Greek, located at the point of passage from barbarian to civilized peoples. Coleridge argues that

> [i]n the early periods of the human race and at present, wherever a scanty population is spread over a large and uncultivated domain, whether in the pastoral or in the hunting states, man is comparatively a silent animal. Conversation is almost confined to affairs of moment. The conversations themselves are entitled "words", or some equivalent term, as for instance the "palavers" or "palabras" of the Africans: we might therefore expect that the particular speeches, the harangues of the individual, should be distinguished from light or ordinary talk by some appropriate name. At all events, we may expect to find it so, whenever, as was the case in Greece, the race, climate, geographical circumstances, and above all the confluence of kindred tribes, (congenerous) were favourable to the formation of a copious language; thus it was that select, considerate, well-weighed, deliberate words were named λόγοι in distinction from ῥήματα, that is, fluents, vocabula fluentia: λόγο. [CC 13:27]

This construction was inspired by Lord Monboddo's theory that language is a product of advanced society, and therefore hardly exists among primitive peoples as well as the stadial theory of the progress of history.[38] Yet Coleridge added to it a peculiar twist that brought him closer to Schlegel by arguing that the meaningless chattering of barbarians became the reflected speech of Greeks not simply through the gradual progress of civilization but through a combination of natural and racial factors. Climate and geographical circumstances are of course related to common Early Modern and Enlightenment ideas on the differences between people that also played a role in all eighteenth-century racial theories, but in addition to the explicit reference to race, attention should be paid to the word "congenerous" that Coleridge adds in a note to the main text as a way of elaborating on the term kindred tribes, for this word resonates strongly with Coleridge's racial theories.

In a notebook entry dated 10 June 1819, containing one of the fullest elaborations of his racial theory, Coleridge begins with the following definition:

> Generosus = in full possession of the qualities & of the degree, (or erased) intensive or extensive, of the qualities by which the Genus was originally formed and characterized.

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[38] James Burnett, Lord Monboddo, *Of the Origin and Progress of Language* (Edinburgh: Kincaid, 1773-92) 1:189-97, 216-39, 285.

> Degener = the contrary of Generosus, and yet contra-distinguished from
> Bastard, Hybrid, crossed   in short, from the Offsprings of Parents of
> different Origin, whether of greater, lesser, or equal dignity. [CN 4:4548 f82]

These definitions served Coleridge in developing his attempts to reconcile the racial divisions of Blumenbach and Kant with the biblical genealogy of humanity from the three sons of Noah. The entire construct relied heavily on the notion that moral degeneration and intermarriage between descendants of Shem, Ham and Japheth were responsible for the appearance of the variety of peoples and of the main five races in Blumenbach's scheme (CC 12,1: 539-40; CN 5:5734). The terms *generosus* and *degener* that Coleridge used in the definition given above were based on the concept of degeneration that was central in all monogenetic race theories of the time, serving to explain the development of multiple races out of one original stock. While Blumenbach used the term with an at least ostensibly neutral meaning, implying simply diversion from the original type, Coleridge followed Buffon (and Schlegel) in explicitly attaching a qualitatively degrading meaning to the term degeneration. The term *generosus* in his notebook entry was Coleridge's own coinage, meaning the opposite of a degenerated type, obviously playing on the older sense of the word generous, still in use in the early nineteenth century, as being of noble birth. In attaching a strong negative significance to the descendants of intermarriage, Coleridge relied heavily on biblical verses prohibiting the ancient Hebrews to intermarry with Canaanites that Coleridge interpreted as a general prohibition on intermarriage between Semites and Hamites and by implication, as a disapproval of intermarriage in general.[39]

Coleridge's theory of race heavily relied on the concept of the significance of the synthesis of poles in the formation of nature derived from Schelling's philosophy of nature (CC 12,1:539; CN 5:5506; CN 5:5868).[40] He characterized the process of the separation of races as both destructive and constructive. It is destructive because of the degeneration of races involved, but constructive because of the potential of the "Historic Race" for pulling the degenerated races upward, bringing about the regeneration they would not be able to accomplish on their own, albeit the gap between the former and the latter, like the gap between Schlegel's organic and mechanical languages, will always remain (CC 11,2:1402-7). Coleridge apparently drew the term "Historic Race" from Henrik Steffens concept of

[39] Deut. 7:3: "you shall not intermarry with them, giving your daughters to their sons or taking their daughters for your sons".
[40] For a discussion see Levere, *Poetry realized in nature*, 108-115. For Coleridge definition of the decisive role of poles in nature see CC 4,1:94.

"Historic Peoples". Steffens distinguished in his *Anthropologie* (1822) the historic peoples from degenerated races, living far away from the center of divine creation in Asia, further distinguishing between real and ancient historic peoples, the latter being those peoples whose mythologies are related to the ancient world such as Egyptians, Chinese, and even Mexicans, the former being those related to Christianity.[41] Coleridge distinguished likewise between a "Historic Race", roughly corresponding to Blumenbach's Caucasians, to which he also referred to as the "Central Race", and the deteriorated races of Americans, Mongols, Malays and Africans. Of these, Africans were the lowest race.

Following Blumenbach, Coleridge saw race as a relative term, not representing sharp divisions of humanity but rather many varieties moving imperceptibly into each other. While accepting that natural circumstances played a significant role in the formation of races, Coleridge insisted that the most important factors must be moral, the failure of certain groups of people to fulfill the potential of their humanity, thereby increasingly sliding down from their starting point as part of the original "Historic Race", although this process of deterioration has affected even the "Historic Race", the difference between the higher race and the others being one of degree (CC 11,2:1399-1408).

In the literature of the Enlightenment on race, intermarriage played an important role especially in Kant's definition of a human race. For Kant, the difference between race and variety was that the offspring of parents from different races preserved racial qualities even while merging or combining them whereas the characteristics of mere varieties could disappear in the next generation.[42] For Blumenbach, intermarriages were one of the ways by which new human varieties emerged, although he did not apply this to his five main varieties, created mainly under the influence of climate, geography and nutrition.[43] Intermarriage played a more important role for Buffon, who explained the physical appearance of some major peoples, such as Persians, by the influence of intermarriage with other peoples.[44] For Buffon and Blumenbach, applying intermarriage as a factor in the development of human varieties stressed the fluent passage between different varieties and their common origin. This was also important for

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[41] Henrik Steffens, *Anthropologie* (Stuttgart: Goetheanum, 1922), 172, 284.

[42] Immanuel Kant, *Gesammelte Schriften*, (Berlin: Reimer, 1900-) 8:94-5. For Coleridge's discussion of Kant's definition see CC 11,2:1398.

[43] Johann Friedrich Blumenbach, *Über die natürlichen Verschiedenheiten im Menschengeschlechte* (Leipzig: Gruber, 1798), 141-2.

[44] Georges-Louis Leclerc, Comte de Buffon, *De l'homme*, ed. Michèle Duchet (Paris: Maspero, 1971), 255.

Coleridge, who was strongly opposed to any polygenic theory. But he also lay stress on the significance of the purity of race and associated racial mixture with moral defects. In January 1822, he wrote in a notebook entry:

> The rigorous superintendence over the preservation of Races in the divine Legislation before as well as after the Deluge, and in human in proportion to their wisdom is a weighty presumption of its importance, and its pregnancy in good & evil - the prohibition of intermarriages in the same family, and the confinement of them to the same Race, or (as an advanced bulwark, and perhaps for the maturation of distinct Powers in different portions of the same race) to the Tribe - are the Diastole and Systole of Humanity. [CN 4:4866]

Although in another context, that of attempting to play down the significance of race, he also saw intermarriage as a potentially positive factor that can contribute to the disappearance of races once the supposed moral causes of their separation be removed (CC 11,2:1461).

In accordance with his negative view of interracial marriage, he argued that Greeks and Romans in the south of Europe and Germanic peoples in its north were the only pure descendants of Japheth, with Jews and Arabs being the only pure descendants of Shem. Pure Japhetites and Semites were only a small part of Coleridge's greater "Historic Race". Not all those belonging to the "Historic Race" were, however, on the same level, with Celts (including modern French) and Slavs in Europe representing an inferior group of impure Japhetites (CC 12,1:540). Thus the term "congenerous", brought as a quality of the Greeks facilitating the creation of their philosophical language in the discussion in *Logic,* is much more than just the common origin of the Greek tribes. It is a sign of racial superiority and purity. Africans, on the other hand, were the lowest among the degenerated races, defined as pure degenerate Hamites, with Native Americans, Malays, and Mongols representing mixed degenerated races (CC 12,1:540). In the case of Africans, racial purity was a fault, emphasizing their belonging to a race cursed by God as punishment for a moral offense committed by the ancestor of the race.[45]

This view had some correspondence with Coleridge's views on certain languages in other texts, too. While never developing a systematic language typology as Schlegel did, Coleridge often distinguished between homogeneous and compounded languages. The distinction was derived

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[45] On the development of the notion of the curse of Ham in Medieval and Early Modern Europe see Benjamin Braude, "The sons of Noah and the construction of ethnic and geographical identities in the Medieval and Early Modern periods", *William and Mary Quarterly* 54:1 (1997): 103-42.

from Adam Smith's distinction between original languages, whose grammatical structure tends to be based on inflexion, and compounded languages, whose grammar tends to be based on propositions, that as noted above, may have influenced Schlegel's language typology. Smith's theory centered on the influence of the encounter between Latin and Germanic dialects on the development of modern European languages, with Greek and Latin serving as the prime examples of original languages and English, Italian, and French for compounded languages.[46] Unlike Smith, who applied the term original languages to a variety of languages, including Greek, Latin, Hebrew, and Gothic, Coleridge reserved it almost exclusively to Greek, referring to German and Latin as homogeneous languages (CN 3:3762, 3789). Smith, too, regarded Latin as less original than Greek, being a composition of Greek and Tuscan dialects, and he did not refer to modern German. Coleridge occasionally showed little respect for Latin, considering it a poor Greek dialect (CN 4:5136 f134). I argue that in this he was very probably prejudiced by his hostility to the Roman Catholic Church. He highly appreciated German, even above English, at least in some respects, and even suggested adopting certain German forms in English (CN 2:3160). But he admired Greek above all other languages (CC 14,1:301-2). This view corresponded to his view that Greeks were the noblest line of the Japhetic race (CN 4:4668). Accordingly, he considered Greek as the first Japhetic language (CC 14,2:55), although not necessarily as the one from which all others had developed, and subsequently it was the only one from whose grammar and vocabulary he was prepared to draw conclusions for the structure of logic. In the *Lectures on the History of European Literature* in 1818 he wrote of the Greeks as

> a race of men strongly distinguished and peculiarized personally, intellectually, and morally by their predominant powers and tendencies, by a peculiar logical character in the groundwork and grammatical forms of their various dialects, the surest mark of a thoughtful Race, disposed to notice and retain the relations and connections of things. (CC 5,2:50-1)

James McKusick is thus certainly not off the mark in arguing that Coleridge's attitude to Greek may be compared to that of other philosophers and linguists to Sanskrit in the beginning of the nineteenth century.[47]

African languages, on the other hand, are represented in the passage from Coleridge's *Logic* cited above as the exemplary non-language, or

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[46] Adam Smith, *The Theory of Moral Sentiments. To Which is Added a Dissertation on the Origin of Languages* (London: Millar, 1767), 472.

[47] McKusick, *Coleridge's Philosophy of Language*, 128.

hardly human languages, comprising of context-less and structure-less assemblages of isolated words, not unlike Schlegel's presentation of American languages in *On the Language and the Wisdom of the Indians*. The term *Palaver* that Coleridge uses as the African term for their meaningless word-clusters is not African in origin but Portuguese, and was used among European traders in West Africa as reference to polite conversation before starting commercial negotiations with local rulers. Coleridge mentions it in this context in his relation of stories heard from Henry Hutchinson, brother of Sarah Hutchinson with whom Coleridge had a romantic relationship (CN 3:3369 f46). That Coleridge uses this term as characterizing African languages in general is highly ethnocentric, although not in itself racist. It gains a racist implication when the distinction he makes between Greek and African language is seen in the context of the place he accords to Africans and Greeks in his racial theories.

While Coleridge was not impressed by the contribution of comparative-historical philology to the understanding of language, he was happy to draw on its achievements for substantiating his racial theories. Especially the proof of the affiliation between Greek, Latin and German appeared to him as a welcome contribution for the thesis of the great Japhetic migration. He also welcomed the evidence that Persian and Sanskrit belonged to this group, but in this case his approval was reserved, as he insisted that Persians and Indians were not pure Japhetites as Greeks and Goths were but of Japhetic-Semitic origin, in the case of Indians perhaps with Hamitic admixture (CC 5,2:72; CC 12,5:337; CN 4:4548 f77; CN 4:4668; CN 4:4697; CN 5:5506). Considering that Coleridge even speculated that Adam may be classified with the Japhetic race while containing all types within himself (CN 4:4548 f79), it appears that he appreciated Japhetic origin over a Semite one, just as he appreciated Greek more than Hebrew, regarded by him as a very simple language with a small vocabulary, albeit containing clues on the revelatory beginnings of language (CC 14,1:429). He even anticipated Renan by characterizing the Semitic race as predominantly religious and the Japhetic as predominantly scientific (CC 12,1:339), although it must be borne in mind that in the terms of Coleridge's philosophy this was anything but a condemnation of Semites as it would be for Renan.

Not least welcome to him was the accepted consensus at the time that kept Celtic languages outside the Indo-European language family. On several occasions, but most notably in the *Lectures on European Literature* in 1818 and the *Lectures on the History of Philosophy* of the same time Coleridge related how the Celts, a people formed by intermarriage of Semites and Hamites, had settled in Europe between the two great lines of

pure Japhetic peoples, Greek-Romans on the south and Goths on the north, preventing contact between them until being entirely subjugated by both. In this context, he referred to the alleged similarity of the Welsh and Irish languages to Hebrew, maintaining that the affinity is rather between Celtic on the one hand and Phoenician and Carthaginian languages on the other hand, both according to Coleridge in all likelihood a mixture of Semitic and African languages. He added an episode related to him by his former employer, the governor of Malta, Sir Alexander Ball, according to which Welsh soldiers in a British regiment anchoring off western Africa had discovered they could understand the language of the inhabitants on shore. This story served Coleridge as proof for the Hamite origin of the Celtic language, substantiating his contention that Celtic people were the descendants of prohibited intermarriage between Semitic and Hamitic people (CC 5,2:71-3). Coleridge did not analyze the grammar of the Welsh language in this context and did not imply that the inferiority of Celts could be shown by the inferiority of their language. But he did argue that the characteristics of their language point to the impure and inferior origin of the people. This is not so different from Schlegel's arguments in *On the Language and Wisdom of the Indians*, that the alleged non-organic structure of Celtic language, while not so different from that of organic languages is still significant enough to show the distance between Germans and Celts (KA 8:187). Yet Schlegel's disparagement of Celts was rather moderate compared to Coleridge's. In the India book, Schlegel insisted on the clear difference between Celtic and German in order to rebuke the associations of Germanic and Celtic antiquities common in the eighteenth century. His frequent attacks on the French more often associated the neighboring people with the Roman Empire, drawing on the motifs of decadence and despotism. While Coleridge also made use of these motifs, he more often than Schlegel turned to anti-Celtic imagery that was also very handful against Scottish Highlanders and especially Irish, two peoples explicitly mentioned along with the French in his list of European peoples belonging to the second-rate members of the Historic Race. He speculated that what he considered as the deterioration of modern French culture points to a constant rise of the Celtic component in the composition of the French blood, assuming that French men of letters that he admired such as Blaise Pascal, René Descartes, and Molière, must be the last of the French of Gothic blood (CC 12,4:78). In another instance he suggested that the Franks who had conquered Gaul had gone through a process similar to the oxidation of metals by mingling with Celts (CN 4:4934 f24). Such racialized political hostility gained popularity

in Britain in the nineteenth century, and resonates well with Coleridge's association of Celtic with an allegedly inferior African language.[48]

Conclusion

Coleridge's and Schlegel's theories on the distinctions between groups of people appear to meet the criteria for racialist theories, and both lay an important emphasis on language, although the latter point was much more the case for Schlegel. While their approaches were very different, they also had much in common, in particular sharing the widespread Romantic interest in adding a spiritual component to the racial theories of natural historians, that can also be perceived in the work of other Romantic philosophers such as Steffens and Schelling. This was done in the name of religion, and indeed the theories that both Coleridge and Schlegel constructed also defended monogenism or at least weakened the case for explicit polygenism. In Schlegel's case, this tendency became stronger in subsequent writings in which he touched on similar issues, such as the *Lectures on the History of Ancient and Modern Literature* (1812) and the *Lectures on the Philosophy of History* (1828), where he moved to an explicit monogenism that does not imply equality of races (KA 6:97; KA 9:37). Schlegel's attempt to replace naturalistic racial theory by a racialist language typology was far more radical, sophisticated and original than Coleridge's theories on race that were much more strongly attached to the older theories of Blumenbach and Kant. Schlegel's theory was also much more influential (not least because it was published, while Coleridge's speculations on race remained mostly in manuscript form until the publication of volume 4 of his notebooks in 1990 and of volume 11 of his collected works in 1995), although it became really dangerous when it was combined with the racial theories of natural sciences to form the mature theory of the Aryan race about 1850.

In Coleridge's case, language played a secondary, even minor role, and the emphasis was laid on the reconciliation of Blumenbach's and Kantian race theory with biblical genealogy. In his speculations, natural history supplied most of the typological element, with the genealogy borrowed from Scripture and the Christian tradition. Language complemented these great discourses by supplying supportive evidence both for the genealogical connections between people, as in applying some ideas from historical-comparative philology borrowed from Bopp and Klaproth and in attributing a Hamite origin to Celts, and for the respective value of races as in the

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[48] Kidd, *Forging the Races*, 16.

analysis of the emergence of philosophical language in Greece as contrasted with the isolating and nonsensical language of Africans. His respective appreciations of Greek and African languages are thus very similar to Schlegel's juxtaposition of organic and mechanical languages. It is not easy to establish how much of this similarity results from direct influence of the ideas of historical-comparative philology, of which Coleridge was evidently aware, or from the common source of eighteenth-century philosophy of language that found its way into the speculations of both Schlegel and Coleridge, exemplified by the motif of "primitive languages" of which both of them made use.

More generally speaking, the racialism of both Coleridge and Schlegel should be considered as moderate for its time, not only due to their religiously motivated rejection of polygenism but also, more significantly, for their insistence on minor differences between adjacent levels in their racial hierarchies. While not free of anti-Semitic clichés, the racial theory of both of them was not characterized by blatant anti-Semitism and was not motivated by anti-Semitic considerations. And yet their racial theories were highly problematic, even without considering the historical outcomes of these ideas, both because of the enormous and virtually unbridgeable gaps they conceived between the highest and lowest levels in their racial hierarchies, Africans and Europeans in Coleridge's system, Amerindians and Germans in Schlegel's, and, secondly, because of the political visions their racial theories served: universal Christian empire under German leadership (but not German domination), albeit nothing like the Nazi nightmare that would eventually emerge out of the idea of an Aryan race in Schlegel's case, a civilizing, missionizing British colonial empire in Coleridge's, his support for the abolition of slavery notwithstanding.

Chapter Three

The Aesthetics of Race in Oscar V. de L. Milosz: Mysticism and Politics

Pauline Moret-Jankus

This chapter proposes to reflect on the intricate relationship between mystical literature, the conceptualisation of race, and politics. More specifically, it seeks to explore how these three aspects can evolve and adapt themselves to the others in an author's oeuvre. In this respect, the work of Oscar Vladislas de Lubicz Milosz (1877-1939)[1] are of particular interest. Oscar Milosz (in Lithuanian *Milašius*) embodies the plurality of identities characteristic of Eastern Europe at the beginning of the twentieth century. He was born in Céréïa[2], which is today in Belarus. It was then part of the Russian Empire and was formerly in the Grand Duchy of Lithuania. The Milosz family was a noble family from Lusatia who, in the thirteenth-fourteenth centuries, put down roots in Lithuania, becoming part of the Lithuanian-Polish aristocracy.[3] However, Milosz's mother Marie Rosenthal was Jewish (although she was baptized when Oscar turned 16). At home, his parents would speak Polish, German and some English. In 1889, when he was 12 years old, Milosz was sent to Paris to pursue his education there. Apart from a stay in Céréïa from 1902 to 1906 and despite several journeys across Europe, he never returned to settle in Lithuania or Belarus. He wrote all his books in French, but always considered himself to be Lithuanian—a Francophone-Lithuanian writer, so to speak[4]. Milan Kundera evokes

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[1] His name can also be spelt Oskar Władysław de Lubicz Miłosz, Oscar Vladislas de Lubicz-Milosz, Oscar Venceslas de Lubicz Milosz, etc. However, O. V. de L. Milosz was the signature most commonly used.

[2] Other spellings: Czereïa, Čareja, Chereya.

[3] Alexandra Charbonnier, *O. V. Milosz. Le poète, le métaphysicien, le Lituanien*, (Lausanne: L'Âge d'Homme, 1996), 18.

[4] Milosz was granted French citizenship in 1931.

Milosz's in-betweenness in the following terms: "his poetry is not French; keeping all his Lithuanian-Polish roots, he had found refuge in the language of the French people as in a Charterhouse."[5] With Lithuania's independence in 1918, Milosz became extremely passionate about the fate of his fatherland and eventually became its chief representative in France (*Ministre Plénipotentiaire de Lituanie en France*) until 1925.

An important point that needs emphasising is that Milosz did not speak Lithuanian.[6] He had followed courses of oriental epigraphy with Eugène Ledrain in Paris; he knew the basic rules of the language and some vocabulary—that was all. This, however, does not come as a surprise. It should be noted here that the Polish-Lithuanian aristocracy that had merged together after the Union of Lublin (1569, creation of the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth), had become in time increasingly Polonized. This elite conceived of its homeland as one entity. A famous example of this and of how Lithuania's independence shifted the lines can be found in Milosz's own family. His more-renowned great-nephew Czesław Miłosz, who grew up in Lithuania, always wrote in Polish and won the Nobel Prize for Literature (1980) as a Polish writer. Conversely, Oscar chose Lithuania for the following reasons:

> I heard that there was a Lithuanian freedom movement. I had to choose, in all good conscience, between Lithuania and Poland. I embraced the Lithuanian cause because Lithuania was my ancestors' direct fatherland since the thirteenth century, because these ancestors had earned their living from the work of Lithuanian peasants and not Polish peasants, because Lithuania was the weakest. And, eventually, for the key reason that only an independent Lithuania established in Vilna[7] would be able to provide all the weight needed to the defence of the interests that a historical fatality seems to bind to Poland's interests.[8]

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[5] "[S]a poésie n'est pas française; gardant toutes ses racines polono-lituaniennes, il s'était réfugié dans la langue des Français comme dans une chartreuse", Milan Kundera, *Une rencontre* (Paris: Gallimard, 2009), 152. Unless otherwise stated, all translations are mine.
[6] Florence de Lussy, Gérard Willemetz, *O. V. de L. Milosz. Ténèbres et lumière*, (Paris: Bibliothèque nationale, 1977), 76.
[7] Vilnius.
[8] "[J]'ai appris qu'il existait un mouvement lithuanien de libération. J'avais devant ma conscience, à choisir entre la Lithuanie et la Pologne. J'ai embrassé la cause lithuanienne parce que la Lithuanie était la patrie directe de mes ancêtres depuis le XIIIème siècle, parce que ces ancêtres avaient vécu du travail des paysans non pas polonais mais lithuaniens, parce que la Lithuanie était la plus faible, et, enfin, pour cette raison décisive que seule une Lithuanie indépendante et installée à Vilna est capable de donner toute sa mesure dans la défense de ceux-là même de ses intérêts

At the end of the nineteenth century Lithuanian had long become the language of solely peasants after centuries of Polonization and Russification.

> The serfs were about the only people still speaking Lithuanian and therefore they made up the nucleus of the Lithuanian nation. The Czarist government and the Polonized nobility had in effect already pronounced a death sentence on Lithuanian.[9]

With the nation-state ideas proposed by Romanticism and an economic recovery, a Lithuanian-speaking intelligentsia emerged that started a movement of national revival and liberation. A key element of this movement was, unsurprisingly, the fostering and preservation of the Lithuanian language. Even marital strategies were proposed by the most active intellectuals to ensure the same: Juozas Kėkštas, for instance, suggested that Lithuanian intellectuals should marry peasant girls in order to create a family were Lithuanian would be the *lingua franca* (aristocratic ladies knew only Polish). It was thought that "the half-Polish woman [...] would sever the ties between the educated Lithuanians and the nucleus of the nation, people [...]. [I]n the end, we will end up with the race of national hermaphrodites".[10]

I shall focus on the evolution of the relationship between mystical literature, conceptualisation of race, and politics, in the following three instances of Milosz's literary production: first, his novel *Les Zborowski* (1913, "The Zborowski"); subsequently, the publication of Lithuanian folk tales; and finally, the poem "Psaume de l'Étoile du Matin" (1936, "Psalm of the Morning Star"). Milosz's works evolve, as will be argued, alongside two primary variants: Lithuania's political status, and his own life, marked by a mystical illumination in December 1914. Following Julien Gueslin's assumption that perhaps the "incessant tension between the sacrifices made

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qu'une fatalité historique semble relier aux intérêts de la Pologne." "Quelques renseignements biographiques destinés à Monsieur J. Grinius", *Cahiers de l'Association Les Amis de Milosz*, no. 16-17 (1979): 18-19. In this chapter, I will maintain the old spelling "Lithuanie" in the French quotes although the modern spelling is "Lituanie".

The often multiethnic identification of Polish-Lithuanians was also be illustrated, at an earlier date, by Adam Mickiewicz. The opening line of his book *Pan Tadeusz* (1834), considered to be a masterpiece in Polish literature, is as follows: "Oh Lithuania, my fatherland!".

[9] Zigmas Zinkevičius, *The History of the Lithuanian Language* (Vilnius: Mokslo ir enciklopedijų leidybos institutas, 1998) 286.

[10] Quoted in English by Tomas Balkelis, *The Making of Modern Lithuania* (London/New York: Routledge, 2009) 71.

[i.e. the time and efforts that Milosz spent as a diplomat] and his spiritual quest [plays] a significant role as a catalyst for his metaphysical preoccupations",[11] I will argue that Milosz's writings become all the more mystical as he personally becomes more politically engaged. The concept of race is, in this respect, the focal point of both stakes.

Les Zborowski (1913)

The novel *Les Zborowski* is a text that Milosz finished in 1913. Its publication was interrupted by the outbreak of the First World War and after the war, everyone—the publisher as well as the author himself—became indifferent to it. The manuscript, partially lost, was published only posthumously in 1982.[12] Although fictional, this text is also strongly autobiographical. Milosz introduces the two Zborowski brothers. The older one Henry,[13] is the son of the Polish-Lithuanian nobleman Jean Zborowski and a Jewish woman who dies during childbirth. Here, the reader can easily recognise Milosz's own bloodline. The mother of the younger son Edouard,[14] is not Jewish but Polish-Lithuanian. The two brothers are—perhaps unsurprisingly—extremely different, and it is very evident in the novel that the author models these characters in order to convey a particular racial concept. Edouard, the Lithuanian, is portrayed as an unpleasant person, who is seemingly vain and superficial, but is also described as courageous and honest. Henry, the Jewish son, is an intellectual. He is reserved and reflective but also weak and fearful. The narrator who is an Englishman (the brothers' instructor) describes him as a "young, stooped man with a large and stern forehead; with the profile of a sick bird of prey and with a mouth full of long and black teeth".[15]

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[11] La "tension incessante entre les sacrifices consentis et sa quête spirituelle [joue] un rôle non négligeable de catalyseur de ses préoccupations métaphysiques", Julien Gueslin, "'Entre deux mondes', Oscar Milosz, croisades politiques et dilemmes d'un homme de lettres (1916-1925)", in *Les Écrivains-diplomates. Pratiques, sociabilités, influences (XIXe-XXIe siècles)*, eds. Laurence Badel, Stanislas Jeannesson, Renaud Meltz (Paris: Armand Colin, 2012), 346.

[12] See Janine Kohler's article *"Les Zborowski*, un second roman de Milosz", in *Lire Milosz aujourd'hui. Colloque international de Fontainebleau, 18 et 19 juin 1977*, ed. Jean Bellemin-Noël (Paris: André Silvaire, 1977), 17-39.

[13] Spelt sometimes "Henri".

[14] Spelt sometimes "Edward".

[15] "jeune homme voûté au grand front sévère, au profil d'oiseau de proie malade, à la bouche meublée de dents longues et noires", Oscar V. de L. Milosz, *Les Zborowski. Œuvres complètes XII* (Paris: André Silvaire, 1982), 137. Hereafter cited as *LZ*.

One day, a fire breaks out in the castle's farm and the house of a poor family bums. Children are trapped inside. Seen through the eyes of the narrator, this is what happens. Edouard speaks

> with a voice so firm, and seemingly a master of himself and of his nerves that I suddenly had the vision of a Zborowski wearing a shining armour, upright and proud in the midst of the turmoil and the lights of a night combat.[16]

The house suddenly collapses. However, Edouard emerges as a hero, holding the children in his arms while Henry loses consciousness.

> A tremendous scream breaks out: the young lord, the young lord!   The house collapses with a sinister crack.
> What a sudden stillness…
> The face black with smoke, the hair burnt, the hands covered with blood, half naked, Edouard is there, with the two children in his arms. And I help Wilski to bring Henry, without consciousness, to the pharmacist.[17]

Henry's fainting corresponds to the conception of Jewish men as feminine, a racial *topos* observed from the medieval belief that Jewish men menstruated to the later description of the Jewish race as a feminine race by Otto Weininger.[18] In contrast, Edouard inherits the medieval image of the fearless Lithuanian knight, of the kind that resisted the Teutonic Order at Grunwald.

To which extent does this negative image of the Jew correspond to the author's? As is often the case, there is no easy answer. Henry seems to bear the unremovable stain of his lineage. As observed from the quotes, his physical traits are as repulsive as some of his moral characteristics: he is

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[16] "d'une voix si assurée, d'un si grand air d'être maître de son esprit et de ses nerfs [que] j'eus soudain la vision d'un Zborowski revêtu d'une armure éclatante, droit et fier au milieu du tumulte et des lueurs d'un combat nocturne", *LZ*, 172.

[17] "Un cri immense éclate : le jeune seigneur, le jeune seigneur !   La maison s'effondre avec un craquement sinistre.
Quel silence soudain…
Le visage noir de fumée, les cheveux brûlés, les mains sanglantes, à demi nu, Edouard est là avec les deux enfants dans ses bras. Et voici que j'aide Wilski à porter chez le pharmacien Henry évanoui". *LZ*, 177.

[18] On menstruation, see John Efron, *Defenders of the Race. Jewish Doctors and Race Science in Fin-de-Siècle Europe* (New Haven/London: Yale University Press, 1994), 5; and on Weininger, see Jacques Le Rider, *Le Cas Otto Weininger. Racines de l'antiféminisme et de l'antisémitisme* (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1982).

powerless, fearful, secretive. Interestingly, Henry himself comes across as
having adopted this view. One day, while speaking with his father, he

> attacks the whole race of Israel, curses the Jewish blood inherited from his
> mother and confides in me the bizarre project he has apparently been shaping
> since a long while of burying the shame and uselessness of his idle and
> coward life in the depths of some obscure monastery.[19]

This is all the more revealing when we take into account the fact that, as
already mentioned, we can consider Henry to be Milosz's literary
doppelganger. However, the narrator remains until the end (at least until the
end of the available manuscript) closer to Henry than to Edouard, making
the former character closer to the reader than the latter and thereby nuancing
the negative perception of Henry's Jewishness. Furthemore, the narrator
openly declares his disgust towards Edouard and explains it as an "aversion
of a timorous and puny dreamer".[20] The younger brother is also qualified as
"odious";[21] and his anti-Semitism is at times discreetly discredited for it is
vulgar and ignorant. The narrator, for instance, says: "As a way of morning
greeting [to his brother], Edouard would pronounce the sole word: 'Jew'."[22]
In this sense, I argue that Milosz's ambiguous portrayal of the Jewish race
is certainly racialist, but only intermittently racist:[23] if the Jew is sometimes
shown in an unfavourable light, the discriminatory behaviours towards them
are also criticised.

However, the opposition articulated around Jewishness and Polish-
Lithuaniamess is not the only racial conception to appear in *Les Zborowski*.

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[19] "prend à partie toute la race d'Israël, maudit le sang juif hérité de sa mère et me
confie le projet bizarre qu'il a paraît-il formé depuis longtemps d'aller enfouir la
honte et l'inutilité de sa vie de fainéant et de lâche au fond de quelque obscur
monastère…", *LZ*, 214.

[20] "aversion de rêveur timoré et chétif", *LZ*, 204.

[21] "odieux",*LZ*, 211.

[22] "En manière de salutation matinale, Edouard prononçait ce seul mot : 'Juif'.", *LZ*,
150.

[23] I borrow the distinction between "racialist" and "racist" from Pierre-André
Taguieff, *La Couleur et le sang. Doctrines racistes à la française* (Paris: Fayard,
2002), 17: "Nous [appellerons ces doctrines] 'racialistes' en tant qu'élaborations
idéologiques centrées sur une visée explicative, et 'racistes' en tant qu'elles
comportent des prescriptions, définissent des valeurs et des normes, qui se traduisent
par des discriminations ou des ségrégations, des expulsions ou des persécutions,
voire des exterminations." "We shall call these doctrines 'racialist' when they are
ideological elaborations aiming to explain, and 'racist' when they involve a
prescription and when they define values and norms that lead to discriminations or
segregations, expulsions or persecutions or even to exterminations."

Less obvious but also worth exploring is the way in which the Lithuanian race is linked to the Polish one—a conception that remains implicit. In this 1913 novel, Milosz still conceives the Polish-Lithuanian identity as a unified one: Lithuanian means Polish and Polish means Lithuanian. This is further hinted at by the qualification of Polish-Lithuanians as Slavs (though Lithuanians are Baltic). In the Zborowski's mansion, several "portraits of monarchs and illustrious characters of ancient France, neighbouring representations of Polish Kings or Grand Dukes of Lithuania" can be seen. "The deep admiration of the Slavic sister towards her Latin sister found here a vivid expression."[24] The very name "Zborowski" points towards Poland (Lithuanian names have different endings). Furthermore, Jean is said to possess a "spontaneous faith that can be found only among Slavs".[25] Finally (and ironically), his son Edouard is described as a "little Slavic Bonaparte".[26]

Moreover, the very term "Lithuania" is symbolically mentioned in its Polish version when Milosz tries to evoke the country's inner soul: "It was the old and mysterious Litwa, the wild and lulling Lithuania where Sanskrit, hardly distorted, is still a living language."[27] "*Litwa*", as mentioned, is the Polish name for Lithuania; the Lithuanian one being "*Lietuva*". It appears then that in 1913, Milosz still conceives the Lithuanian race as Slavic. This conceptualization will change in 1918 with Lithuania's independence and the rivalry between Poland and Lithuania to control the city of Vilnius, considered to be Polish by Poles and Lithuanian by Lithuanians.[28] After this turning point, Milosz starts to conceive the idea of a distinct Lithuanian race. It constitutes the basis of his new literary production: the publication of Lithuanian folk tales, which I will now examine.

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[24] "portraits de monarques et de personnages illustres de la vieille France, coudoyant des représentations de Rois de Pologne ou de Grands-Ducs de Lithuanie. L'admiration profonde de la sœur slave pour la sœur latine trouvait ici une expression […] vive", *LZ*, 135.

[25] "confiance spontanée que l'on ne rencontre que chez les Slaves", *LZ*, 107.

[26] "petit Bonaparte slave", *LZ*, 168.

[27] "C'était la vieille et mystérieuse Litwa, la Lithuanie sauvage et berceuse où le sanscrit, à peine déformé, est encore langue vivante", *LZ* 125.

[28] For more details on this, see Dangiras Mačiulis and Darius Staliūnas, *Lithuanian Nationalism and the Vilnius Question, 1883-1940* (Marburg: Verlag Herder-Institut, 2015), and for Milosz's role in this dispute, see his writings in *Deux messianismes politiques. Œuvres complètes XIII* (Paris: Éditions André Silvaire, 1990). Hereafter cited as *Mess.*

Lithuanian Folk Tales

Milosz was certainly not the first writer to publish Lithuanian folk tales. A strong, German tradition in Lithuanian tales started as early as 1747 with Philipp Ruhig's Lithuanian-German dictionary, in which he incorporated three Lithuanian *dainos*[29] (as well as a few proverbs).[30] Herder's *Stimmen der Völker in Liedern* (first published under the name *Volkslieder* in 1778-1779, and subsequently in 1807) also comprised Lithuanian texts.[31] It is a well-known fact that Herder's *Volkslieder*'s collection responds to his ideology of the national, the *Volksgeist*—an idea that famously inspired the Grimm brothers.[32] Herder was followed in his enterprise by Goethe, who also found the Lithuanian *Lieder* particularly inspiring.[33] Finally, we may evoke Ludwig Rhesa's *Dainos oder Littauische Volkslieder* (Königsberg, 1825).

In 1857, the Indo-European linguist August Schleicher transformed Herder and Goethe's inheritance. His collection of Lithuanian folk tales[34] is much more than an illustration of a national spirit; it also represents what Schleicher believes to be the proof of his linguistic theories on Indo-European—the *Stammbaumtheorie*, or tree model, where Lithuanian played an instrumental role.[35]

Milosz followed these famous examples with two collections: *Contes et fabliaux de la vieille Lithuanie* (1930, Tales and fabliaux of the Ancient

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[29] *Daina*, phr. *dainos*, is the Lithuanian word for "song" or "folk song".

[30] *Littauisch-Deutsches und Deutsch-Littauisches Lexikon* (1747).

[31] The tales are: "Brautlied", "Der Morgenspaziergang", "Die kranke Braut", "Abschiedslied eines Mädchens", "Der versunkene Brautring", "Lied des Mädchens um ihren Garten", "Lied des jungen Reuters", "Der unglückliche Weidenbaum", and "Die erste Bekanntschaft".

[32] See Christine Mondon, "Le mythe du peuple : de Herder aux romantiques de Heidelberg", in *Le Peuple, mythe et réalité*, ed. Jean-Marie Paul, (Rennes : Presses universitaires de Rennes, 2007), 17-27; and Herder's text *Auszug aus einem Briefwechsel über Ossian und die Lieder alter Völker* (1773).

[33] See Anatole C. Matulis, "History of the Lithuanian cultural profile in German literature", *Lituanus. Lithuanian quarterly journal of arts and sciences* 11, no. 1 (Spring 1965). URL: http://www.lituanus.org/1965/65_1_02_Matulis.html

[34] August Schleicher, *Litauische Märchen, Sprichworte, Rätsel und Lieder* [1857] (Hildesheim New York: Georg Olms Verlag, 1975).

[35] August Schleicher, *Handbuch der litauischen Sprache* (Weimar: Böhlau, 1856/57), and *Compendium der vergleichenden Grammatik der indogermanischen Sprachen (kurzer Abriss der indogermanischen Ursprache, des Altindischen, Altiranischen, Altgriechischen, Altitalischen, Altkeltischen, Altslawischen, Litauischen und Altdeutsche.)*, Weimar, Böhlau (1861/62).

Lithuania), *Contes lithuaniens de ma Mère l'Oye* (1933, Mother Goose Lithuanian tales), as well as *Dainos* (1928), a short collection of poems. I intend to show that in his approach to folklore, whose final aim was to emphasise the uniqueness and the great age of the Lithuanian culture, Milosz recycled both Herder and Schleicher but also added a third element: the concept of a Lithuanian race.

As can be guessed from the titles, both tale collections present stories whose actions take place at the time of the Grand Duchy. However, the Lithuanian dimension of the texts does not seem to be much more than a folkloric veneer initially: mainly through references to the Lithuanian pagan world (such as Perkūnas, the Lithuanian thunder god[36]) and informative explanations. This apparent superficiality is proven further by a complex relationship with the language. Although animals are said to speak "pure Lithuanian",[37] this pure language does not appear in the text since it is written in French; thus the reader is left to imagine what this language would sound like. Furthermore, there is an attempt to imitate the linguistic traits of Old French to convey to the (French) reader the idea that the Lithuanian culture is as ancient and noble as the French culture. An example is provided below, first reproduced in the original French and then in a proposed translation that unfortunately does not convey the (made-up) Old French:

> Follastrant par pré et chemin
> Vecy venir à moy corbin.
> Au bec luy pens quoy ? une main.
> - N'est-ce mal acquest, oiselet,
> Ceste main blanche comme let
> Portant à son poulce annelet ?[38]

> Frolicking across meadows and paths
> A raven comes in my direction.
> What is hanging from his beak? A hand.
> - Isn't it ill-gotten, little bird,
> This hand as white as milk
> Wearing a ring on its thumb?

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[36] Oscar V. de L. Milosz, *Contes et fabliaux de la vieille Lithuanie. Œuvres complètes VI* (Paris: André Silvaire, 1972) 184, and elsewhere. Hereafter *CF*.

[37] "le plus purparler lithuan", Oscar V. de L. Milosz, *Contes lithuaniens de ma Mère l'Oye. Œuvres complètes IX* (Paris: André Silvaire, 1963), 136. Hereafter cited as *CL*.

[38] *Dainos*, in *CL*, 197-98. See also *CF*, "Comment une bachelete occist mains gallans et par quel moyen escheva cest dangier Maistre Iokimas" (215-220).

Eventually, the Lithuanianness of the texts emerges primarily in Milosz's auctorial discourse rather than in the fiction itself. This is achieved through the assertion of a Lithuanian race perceived as the heir of the Aryan race. In order to prove this, Milosz draws a link between the Lithuanian mythology and older mythologies such as the Hindu and Greek mythologies. In the tale entitled "Le statuaire, l'évêque et les douze apôtres" ("The statue sculptor, the bishop and the twelve apostles"), we read the following:

> All things appeared bathed in mystery and a vigil peace; it was one of those nights that only break in Lithuania's sky, pure and pious cradle of the orphic myths transplanted, in the depth of time, in Thrace, in Crete, and in Delos.[39]

In his introduction to *Contes et fabliaux de la vieille Lithuanie*, Milosz writes that "the Lithuanian mythology significantly recalls that of India".[40] Evoking India is, in a rather obvious manner, a way of evoking a possible Aryan inheritance.[41] In another tale titled "Sigute", we find an interesting footnote:

> In this very ancient popular Lithuanian legend, do this cow, this duck and this symbolic week not recall Manu's sacred quadruped, the Phoenix of the hermetic myths and the numbers and the reincarnation doctrines of the Hindus, Egyptians, Greeks and Celts?[42]

Non-fictional texts of the same period (post-1918) allow us to understand what is at stake in Milosz's tales. He writes:

> Lithuania, Latvia. Sanctuaries of the Aryan tradition, mysterious and pure lands whose history embraces not only centuries, not only thousands of

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[39] "Toutes choses apparaissaient baignées d'un mystère et d'une paix de vigile ; c'était une de ces nuits comme il n'en éclôt qu'au ciel de la Lithuanie, pur et pieux berceau des mythes orphiques transplantés, dans la profondeur des âges, en Thrace, en Crète et à Délos." *CF*, 32.
[40] "la mythologie lituanienne rappelle singulièrement celle de l'Inde", *CF*, 12.
[41] See Chapter Two of this volume, by Chen Tzoref-Ashkenazi, for more details on indology and German racism.
I strongly differ from Irena Buckley, who only sees in this association a "universalization". Irena Buckley, "Oscar Vladislas de Lubicz-Milosz: le sublime et la nostalgie", *Les Cahiers du CEIMA* 3: 97.
[42] "Cette vache, ce canard et cette semaine symbolique de la très vieille légende populaire lithuanienne ne rappellent-ils pas le quadrupède sacré de Manu, le Phénix des mythes hermétiques, et les nombres et doctrines à réincarnation des Hindous, Égyptiens, Grecs et Celtes ?" *CL*, 32.

years, but tens of millennia! Holy lands where the ploughman, the fisherman and the shepherd exchange, even today, their thoughts and their feelings in the most venerable language, a Sanskrit barely touched by time and whose idioms immortalized by Homer, Virgil, Dante, Shakespeare, Racine, Cervantes, Goethe are only accidental and local deformations.[43]

In Lithuania, Milosz sees "the Aryan blood [that] flows like water [...]",[44] "a country as old as the world, [...] the offspring of pure Aryans, and the Vedic language of our peasants, last echo of a humanity in its infancy."[45] Elsewhere, he evokes "all this Aryan humanity whose origins sleep in the secret of the old Lithuanian soil",[46] and "the Lithuanian people, eldest son of the pure Aryans who adored the Spiritual Fire and Sun."[47]

As in the following example where he refers to the ancient Baltic paganism, Milosz's crusade for Aryanism seems at first to be a mystical enterprise that is more poetical than political.

Lithuania, Latvia. Appanages of a chosen race [...]: [...] only a few centuries split you up from the times when, last refuges of the Aryan hierarchy, enemies of war, you were governed by the Krivoa-Krivaitis,[48] the White Priest and King [...].[49]

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[43] "Lithuanie, Lettonie. Sanctuaires de la tradition aryenne, contrées mystérieuses et pures dont l'histoire embrasse non pas des siècles, non pas des milliers d'années mais des décades de millénaires ! Terres sacrées où le laboureur, le pêcheur et le berger échangent, aujourd'hui encore, leurs pensées et leurs sentiments, dans le plus vénérable des langages, un sanscrit à peine effleuré par le temps et dont les idiomes immortalisés par Homère, Virgile, Dante, Shakespeare, Racine, Cervantès, Goethe, ne sont que des déformations accidentelles et locales." *Au seuil d'un monde nouveau*, in *Mess.*, 15.

[44] "le sang aryen, [qui] coule à flots [...]", *Mess.*, 17.

[45] "un pays vieux comme le monde, [...] les descendants des purs aryens, et le langage védique de nos paysans, dernier écho d'une humanité en son enfance", *Les relations actuelles entre la Lithuanie et la Pologne*, in *Mess.*, 105.

[46] "toute cette humanité aryenne dont les origines sommeillent dans le secret du vieux sol lithuanien." *Les relations actuelles entre la Lithuanie et la Pologne*, in *Mess.*, 98.

[47] "le peuple lithuanien, fils aîné des purs aryens adorateurs du Feu et du Soleil Spirituels." *L'Alliance des États baltiques*, in *Mess.*, 120.

[48] *Kriviu krivaitis*, the high priest in Baltic paganism.

[49] "Lithuanie, Lettonie. Apanages d'une race élue [...] : [...] quelques siècles à peine vous séparent des temps où, derniers refuges de la hiérarchie aryenne, ennemies de la guerre, vous étiez gouvernées par le Krivoa-Krivaïtis, le Prêtre et le Roi Blanc [...]." *Mess.*, 16.

The change of discourse compared to *Les Zborowski* is striking. Milosz has completely abandoned the idea of a Lithuanian-Slavic race. But the following lines reveal that Milosz's mysticism is strongly political:

> Completely different based on its origins, its language, its culture and most of all based on its character from the turbulent Slavic nations that so long oppressed it, Lithuania asks for the complete political independence of a territory inhabited by six and a half millions Lithuanians and consisting of the governments of Vilna, Grodno, Kovno, Suwalki, of a part of Minsk's government and finally of East Prussia or Lithuania Minor. The capital of that State, the antic Vilnius or Vilna, is in a way the holy city and the heart of Lithuania. That is where the temple of the Universal Divinity was to be found; that is where the Amzina Ougnis,[50] the Aryan Eternal Flame, used to burn. Nobody shall touch Vilna, our capital.[51]

Conceptualising the Lithuanian race as Aryan and, more importantly, as "completely different" from Slavs is a strategy to differentiate the country from its neighbour, the Slavic Poland that aims to take possession of Vilnius. In this context, the racialised and mystical conception of an Aryan Lithuania can be interpreted as a political tactic. According to what Milosz calls a "political messianism", Lithuania's independence and claims over Vilnius cannot be denied. Lithuanians, purest sons of a primitive, ruling race, are simply claiming their due. More than independence, this is the Aryan resurrection. It is "Lazarus, in the body of a whole people that rises from the tomb".[52] We can therefore argue that Milosz's folk tales and poems

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[50] *Amžinoji ugnis*, eternal flame.

[51] "Absolument étrangère par ses origines, sa langue, sa culture, et surtout son caractère aux turbulentes nations slaves qui l'ont si longtemps opprimée, la Lithuanie réclame l'entière indépendance politique d'un territoire peuplé de six millions et demi de Lithuaniens, et constitué par les gouvernements de Vilna, Grodno, Kovno, Suwalki, par une partie du gouvernement de Minsk, enfin par la Prusse orientale, ou Lithuanie Mineure. La capitale de cet État, l'antique Vilnius ou Vilna, est en quelque sorte la ville sainte et le cœur de la Lithuanie. C'est là que se trouvait jadis le temple de la Divinité Universelle ; c'est là que brûla l'Amzina Ougnis, le Feu Éternel des Aryens. Il ne faut pas toucher à Vilna, notre capitale." *Conférence du 29 mars 1919*, in *Mess.*, 30-31.

[52] "Lazare qui se lève du tout un people, se lève du tombeau." *Les relations actuelles entre la Lithuanie et la Pologne*, in *Mess.*, 106.
If it is political, then how does Milosz handle the claim of Germany (another dangerous neighbour) to embody the Aryan inheritance? He simply shrugs off the issue: "The Germans have already tried to associate the Lithuanians to the Germanic family: but the Lithuanians settle for remaining pure Aryans […]." "Les Allemands

are a form of literary propaganda directed to the Western reader (primarily French,[53] but also many an educated European). This analysis, however, should not be interpreted as a way of mitigating the literary beauty of Milosz's works. As this chapter aims to show, we as literary critics should not refrain from discussing the pragmatic implications of some books lest this imply minimising their worth. Milosz's case is particularly enlightening, since, as has been argued here, the poetical and mystical aspect of his writing is fuelled by his political aims. In the following and last section, I will analyse this intricate relationship further by presenting the evolution of Milosz's racial idea in more detail and exploring its presence in one of his best-known psalms.

The "Psaume de l'Étoile du Matin" (1936)

Alongside the Aryans (as seen, Milosz holds the Lithuanians to be the descendants of the Aryans), another ancient European race is the so-called Iberian race. According to Milosz, the Iberians were the primary Mediterranean race and today's Basques are their purest and most famous offspring. In 1932, with the publication of *Les Origines ibériques du peuple juif*, he asserts that the Jews are also descended from these Iberians. One of Milosz's main arguments to prove his theory is linguistic. Although Milosz could read the Bible in Hebrew, his made-up etymologies are far-fetched when not absurd.

In *Les Origines de la nation lithuanienne* (1936), however, Milosz highlights that the Lithuanians are dolichocephalic with an average skull index of 79 (whereas, says Milosz, the Polish man is brachycephalic) with black hair (when the surrounding Slavic populations are blond).[54] The pre-Celtic Iberians happened to be dolichocephalic too. Although one difference remains (Baltic people are tall whereas Iberians are short) Milosz suggests—he presents it merely as a hypothesis—that the Balts come from an Iberian migration through Memel's port (today Klaipèda; and he adds that the term "Memel" sounds extremely "Iberian"),[55] and speaks of a pre-Pelasgian, prehistoric link between Lithuanians and Iberians.[56] Although he

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ont déjà essayé de rattacher les Lithuaniens à la famille germanique : mais ceux-ci se contentent de demeurer des Aryens purs […]." *L'affaire de Kovno*, in *Mess.*, 151.
[53] Julien Gueslin reminds us that France, because of her alliance with Poland, did not support Lithuania's claims over Vilnius. "Entre deux mondes", 344.
[54] *Les Origines de la nation lithuanienne*, in *CL*, 204.
[55] *CL*, 210-11.
[56] *CL*, 10.

does not state it clearly, this would ultimately mean that, in this last stage of Milosz's racial conception, Lithuanians are not Aryan anymore.[57] It also implies that Lithuanians and Jews are cousins. This could not be further away from the mental arrangements at play in *Les Zborowski*: after the strong Slavic Polish-Lithuanian race as opposed to the weak Jewish race, Milosz conceptualises now a Baltic-Hebraic race superior to all the other races, and specifically, superior to the Slavs.

Milosz's last text, the "Psaume de l'Étoile du Matin" (1936, published 1937), is a very mystical and cryptic poem.[58] Although it was not his first piece inspired by the Kabbalah, this one has long fascinated the critics. Its rhythm is given by its typography, with intralinear spaces inspired by the Hebraic Bible. [59] It is not my aim here to decode the many hidden meanings of this text.[60] I seek to uncover only one particular aspect: the hidden reference to the Lithuanian race. Spangled with Hebrew words, or simile-Hebrew terms, the poem seems at first not to include any reference to Lithuania or a Baltic race. It evokes rather the Iberian race: Spanish names such as "Andorra" (*Andorre* in French), "Madrid", "Toledo" (*Tolède* in French), are spelt "An-Dor", "Matred", "Toled"—a textual strategy that recalls the Hebrew language to the reader. Despite this apparent absence of the Lithuanian in the Psalm, I argue that Milosz strives to convey the idea of a fundamental link between Lithuanians and Iberians.

First of all the morning star that is the object of the poem symbolically represents a Lithuanian-Hebrew world. In *Les Origines de la nation lithuanienne*, Milosz writes the following:

In his book on Baltic linguistic historiography, Pietro Dini describes the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries theories about Baltic languages as linked to Hebrew (Johannes Funck, Severin Göbel, Johannes Loewenklau, Christian Hartknoch, Johannes Behm, Friederich Menius). Milosz, however, does not seem to know them. Pietro Dini, *Prelude to Baltic Linguistics. Earliest Theories about Baltic Languages (16th century)* (Amsterdam/New York: Rodopi, 2014).

[57] Milosz for instance notes that we should not anymore seek the origins of the Lithuanians in the Orient (i.e. Aryan India) but in the Occident (Iberia). *Les Origines de la nation lithuanienne*, in *CL*, 207.

[58] O. V. de L. Milosz, "Psaume de l'Étoile du Matin" [1937], *Poésies II. Œuvres complètes II*, (Paris: André Silvaire, 1960), 190-2.

[59] Marie-Ève Benoteau-Alexandre, "Typographie biblique et modernité poétique : réflexions sur le blanc intralinéaire dans la poésie de Milosz, Claudel et Meschonnic", *Loxias* 33 (2011). URL: http://revel.unice.fr/loxias/index.html?id=6675.

[60] See David Mendelson, "Milosz et l'hébreu du "Psaume de l'Étoile du Matin". Cela : 'Selah'", *Lire Milosz aujourd'hui, op. cit.* 199-222.

Astarté [the morning star] had another name among the Hebrew: Aschéra […]. Aschéra-Schahar also meant dawn. And the Lithuanian words for dawn are Ausra, to be pronounced Auschra, and Pazara. The Ibero-Hebraic mutation p=t gives us Tazara. The Lithuanian Auschra-Tazara contains the two Bask and Hebrew names of the Morning Star: Artizarra and Aschéra!"[61]

Another comment in that opuscule can help interpret the Psalm. "In the Samogitian Lithuania's cottages, up until very recently, the familiar grass snakes and the home's little children drank their morning and evening milk from the same bowl."[62] And in the Psalm, we read: "the vase for the milk of light // on her shoulder / she calls the Olel child // keeper of the lions' pastures / stroked in // his sleep by the vipers".[63]

Furthermore, the colour white is mentioned twice: "*sky salted with whiteness*" (plural feminine form), "*white nineteen*"[64] (plural feminine), thus recalling the term "Baltic", since its root is allegedly the term for "white" in Indo-European (and "*baltas*" in Lithuanian means "white"). White is also the colour of the Vytis, the knight on horseback who appears in Lithuania's coat of arms. In addition to this, Milosz writes in another cabbalistic text, *L'Apocalypse de Saint Jean déchiffrée*, that "white horse rider" is phrased as "*sous laban*" in Hebrew and that if we exchange the syllables, the result is "Labounovo", which happens to be the name of Milosz's family domain in Lithuania.[65] He comments: "The horse rider (in Hebrew Parash, anagram for Aschpar, morning star), is also white."[66] Again, the morning star is a hidden designation of Lithuania—here in correlation with the Vytis.

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[61] "Astarté avait un autre nom chez les Hébreux : Aschéra […]. Aschéra-Schahar désignait également l'aurore. Et les noms lithuaniens de l'aurore sont Ausra, qui se prononce Auschra, et Pazara. La mutation ibéro-hébraïque p=t nous donne Tazara. L'Auschra-Tazara lithuanienne renferme les deux noms basque et hébreu de l'Étoile du Matin : Artizarra et Aschéra !" *Les Origines de la nation lithuanienne*, in *CL*, 231.

[62] « Dans les chaumières de la Lithuanie samogitienne, tout récemment encore, les couleuvres du foyer et les petits enfants de la maison buvaient au même bol leur lait du matin et du soir. » *CL.*, 219.

[63] "le vase de lait de lumière // sur l'épaule / elle appelle l'enfant Olel // gardien du pâturage des lions / caressé dans // son sommeil par les vipères", "Psaume de l'Étoile du Matin", 191.

[64] "ciel salé de blancheurs", ibid., 190 "blanches dix-neuf", ibid., 191.

[65] *L'Apocalypse de Saint Jean déchiffrée*, in Oscar V. de L. Milosz, *Ars Magna. Œuvres complètes VII* (Paris: André Silvaire, 1961), 137.

[66] *L'Apocalypse de Saint Jean déchiffrée*, in Oscar V. de L. Milosz, *Ars Magna. Œuvres complètes VII* (Paris: André Silvaire, 1961), 137.

Finally, I would like to propose an interpretation based on David Mendelson's analysis of the Psalm. He notes that Milosz adds an *h* in terms where it is not commonly used in French. For example, "*Beit*h *Aram*", "*Beit*h *lehem*", "*Mazaro*fh", "*Aïelet*h—*haschahar*", "*Iehezkeel*", etc. Could we, by extension, claim that this *h* evokes the *h* in *Lithuanie*, that can also be written *Lituanie*—a spelling he never used?

It appears then in this utterly mystical text that the Baltic-Hebraic race, although never mentioned, is nonetheless present. I would even argue that it is the sole core of the Psalm. Here again, the political stake feeds into the literary.

Conclusion

Milosz once wrote: "*je ne suis pas un homme politique*"[67]—I am not a politician. I very much doubt this assertion, and we have seen in this chapter how Milosz's writings are indebted to his political engagement, even— when not primarily—the most mystical ones. His conception of the Lithuanian race evolves together with his political needs: first presented as a Slavic race, subsequently as Aryan, and finally as an Iberian race, it enriches the esoteric aspect of Milosz's writings. Additionally, it demonstrates a dialogue between race theory and the literary form: if Milosz wrote the Psalm as mystical, Kabbalistic poem, it is also because of the racial theory he then wanted to convey: that of a messianic race. Literary texts are not mere echo chambers of racial constructs, but are transformed by it.

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[67] "Les relations actuelles entre la Lithuanie et la Pologne", in *Mess.*, 94.

CHAPTER FOUR

GESTUS ANSTATT GEIST: KAFKA, BENJAMIN, AND BRECHT AGAINST DIALECTICAL RACE THEORY

ADAM J. TOTH

There is an unmistakable similarity between the Chinese people portrayed in the works of Austria-Hungarian author Franz Kafka and how Georg Friedrich Wilhelm Hegel describes Chinese people in his *Vorlesungen über die Philosophie der Geschichte*. Hegel, applying his phenomenology of Spirit to a reading of world history in these lectures, advances a dialectic of race theory, which creates a hierarchy of superior and inferior cultures and contributes to later discourses of colonialism and imperialism. There are two understandings of racism that I want here to briefly differentiate: the first is a more common understanding that racism is set of individual acts of physical, verbal, and other forms of violence against people on the basis of their skin-color or their ethnic origins. The second is larger system of laws, norms, practices and customs in many spaces (business, the law, the academy, etc.) that seek to deprive people of rights, privileges and resources, as well as justify violence in various forms against people on the basis of their race and ethnicity. In a sense, the first definition asserts that 1. people are racist and 2. therefore racism is the culmination of their actions, while the second definition maintains that, for example, institutions like the prison disproportionately incarcerate more people of color than people of European descent and, therefore, prisons are racist. I maintain that Kafka's literary representations of Chinese people draw attention to an inadvertent theory of race in Hegel's lectures; Kafka employs the performative act of what Bertolt Brecht would later define and Walter Benjamin would identify as *Gestus*. I want in this chapter to focus on how Kafka, as mediated through Brecht and Benjamin, disrupts the dialectical method of Hegel's notion of

Geist (translated roughly as "spirit")[1] over the course of history, and to consider how this disturbance can in turn help reconcile tensions between dialectical Marxism, which is derived from Hegel's notion of dialectics, and postcolonial theory, which brings attention to racial inequalities in various cultural contexts and serves as the foundation of this chapter.

The discussion of the tense relationship between the dialectical method and its discontents in postcolonial critique is a substantially well-documented one. In the context of German Studies, Susan Buck-Morss identifies this tension in her seminal book on Hegel and the Haitian revolution, noting:

> The problem is that (white) Marxists, of all readers, were the least likely to consider real slavery as significant because within their stagist understanding of history, slavery no matter how contemporary was seen as a premodern institution, banned from the story and relegated to the past...There is an element of racism implicit in official Marxism, if only because of the notion of history as a teleological process.[2]

Buck-Morss observes that the dialectical reading of history as a class-struggle key to Marx resulted in a number of Marxists failing to recognize material realties, such as slavery, as a part of world history so that those Marxists could advance a teleological trajectory of history. This argument suggests a relativist approach to world history that accounts for such historical realities. Not to be undone, Vivek Chibbers and Asad Haider lambaste postcolonial theory's failure to observe the roll of global

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[1] The term *Geist* takes on various meanings within Hegel's oeuvre. Deferring to Inwood's *A Hegel Dictionary*. I should note that Hegel's notion of *Geist* is, inasmuch as the Chinese are concerned, an "'Objective Spirit,'...of a social group, embodied in its customs, laws, and institutions", which is included in the definition of *Geist* in *Phänomenologie des Geistes* (*Phenomenology of Spirit*), but with one caveat: not all cultures have attained "'Absolute Spirit'...[which] has a pre theological flavor... [and] is the self-consciousness of God". Hegel is convinced that virtually the entire world outside of his contemporary Western-Europe has attained this. *Spirit* explains why some cultures historically progressed, while others stagnated, as far as Hegel is concerned in the context of the *Lectures on the Philosophy of History*. The *Geist* that the Chinese maintain is different from what they have failed to achieve, namely *Weltgeist* (which Hegel famously attributes to Napoleon for reshaping world history). See Michael Inwood, *A Hegel Dictionary* (Oxford: Blackwell Publishers, 1992),275.

[2] Susan Buck-Morss, *Hegel, Haiti, and Universal History* (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 2009), 57. Buck-Morss, it should be noted, argues that Hegel bases his master-slave dialectic in *Phenomenology of the Spirit* (*Phänomenologie des Geistes*, 1807) on the Haitian Revolution, giving the dialectic a material grounding and therefore radical potential.

capitalism in the modern era, and how "far from landing a blow against colonist and ●rientalist presentations of the East, Subaltern Studies has ended up promoting them,"[3] and observe that "[t]he framework of identity reduces politics to who you are as an individual and to gaining recognition as an individual, rather than your membership in a collectivity and the collective struggle against an oppressive social structure."[4] Although discussing postcolonial critique within Subaltern Studies and the history of Black movements in the United States and Great Britain respectively, Chibber and Haider write against postcolonial theory's (and by extension identity politics') flat rejection of Marxism's unifying potential. George Ciccariello-Maher's *Decolonizing Dialectics* takes up the growing tension between dialectical Marxism and postcolonial theory in most recent scholarship on the intellectual conflict. ●n the one hand, postcolonial theorists have demonstrated both a general disregard for class struggle, and complicity in neoliberal complacency of identity politics, which fails to address capitalism's role in systematic racism. ●n the other hand, postcolonial theorists have resisted the reinforcement of Eurocentrism and rejection of difference within the Left. Ciccariello-Maher's solution to this, as read through Georges Sorel, Franz Fanon, and Enrique Dussel, in the contemporary politics of Venezuela, is a "counterdiscourse that, by foregrounding rupture and shunning the lure of unity, makes its home in the center of the dialectic and revels in the spirit of combat, the indeterminacies of political identities slamming against one another, transforming themselves and their words unpredictably in the process."[5] Scholarship has well documented Kafka's ability within his works to rupture narrative, discourse, the bodies of characters, and the stages on which those characters are set. Benjamin vis-à-vis Brecht recognized this revolutionary potential within Kafka's works and identified it as *Gestus*. I sketch out the arguments put forward by Buck-Morss, Chibber, Haider, and Ciccariello-Maher not to suggest within the confines of this chapter that Kafka will resolve all of these issues, but to demonstrate where and how this tension has manifested itself. While I do not want to suggest that Kafka's literary works completely resolve the tension between dialectics and postcolonial critique, Kafka's literary works on China do, I argue, function as a counterdiscourse to Hegel's dialectical racism.

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[3] Vivek Chibber, *Postcolonial Theory and the Specter of Capital* (New Y●rk: Vers●, 2●13), 26.

[4] Asad Haider, *Mistaken Identity: Race and Class in the Age of Trump* (New Y●rk: Vers●, 2●18), 24.

[5] Ge●rge Ciccariell●-Maher, *Decolonizing Dialectics* (●urham: ●uke University Press, 2●17), 6.

While at the University of Berlin, Hegel employed the dialectical triad of thesis, antithesis, and synthesis throughout his lectures, and one can clearly observe his definition of *Geist* within the *Lectures on the Philosophy of History*.[6] Hegel does not fall directly into the ranks of his predecessors,[7]

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[6] Four editions of the *Lectures on the Philosophy of History* were published: one in 1837 by Hegel's student, Eduard Ganz, two in 1840 and 1848 by Hegel's son, Karl, and a critical edition by Georg Lasson in 1917. Whether or not Kafka, or the post-Hegelians Kafka knew, had read the third edition is uncertain, but they certainly would have been familiar with the previous editions. I will refer to the 1961 Reclam edition, which combines the Ganz edition with Karl Hegel's two editions, since, as Robert Bernasconi points out, "Until the publication of [a critical] edition in 1996, it would have been impossible to recognized that Hegel changed his portrayal of China radically after 1823," see Robert Bernasconi, "China on Parade: Hegel's Manipulation of His Sources and His Change of Mind," in *China in the German Enlightenment*, eds. Daniel Purdy and Bettina Brandt (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2016), 174, fn. 5.

[7] Michael Hoffmeier rightly acknowledges that "Hegel more successfully avoided endorsing any competing theories of the origin of races," and that "Hegel departed most radically from Blumenbach in his treatment of the spiritual characteristics of race. There he relied implicitly on Kant's scheme and ranking, rejecting any mental or cultural implications of Bluenbach's hypothesis that American Indians mediated between Europeans and Asians." Here Hoffmeier points out that Hegel's lectures, although racist in their own way, do not entirely line up with the conclusions reached by race theorists approaching differences between Europeans and non-Europeans. See Michael H. Hoffheimer, "Hegel, Race, Genocide," *The Southern Journal of Philosophy* 34, (2001): 42 and 46. Moreover, as Sandra Bonetto also shows, "In the *Phenomenology of Spirit*, Hegel had ridiculed physiognomy and phrenology (or crainoscopy), and in the Encyclopedia he explicitly opposes these pseudo-sciences — popularized during the latter half of the eighteenth century by Lavater (1741-1801) and Gall (1758-1828), together with his pupil Spurzheim (1776-1832) respectively — which claimed to be able to explain human behavior through what Hegel regards as 'exterior and accidental' details, such as the characteristics of the body or the form of the head." Sandra Bonetto, "Race and Racism in Hegel — An Analysis," *Minerva – An Internet Journal of Philosophy* 10, (2006): 41. Indeed, Bonetto's study, whose thesis I otherwise disagree with, shows the ways in which Hegel took no issue with the Chinese or Jews, much less anyone else who is not European. While Bonetto rightly points out that Hegel elsewhere stood against the scientific studies of physiognomy and phrenology, particularly within the theoretical treatise that underlines his *Lectures on the Philosophy of History*, her narrowed definition of racism considers only Hegel's *intent* and does not account for the possible impact Hegel's representations of the Chinese and Jews could have on Chinese and Jews as a consequence of providing misleading information about those groups of peoples. Indeed, Bonetto reads not only Hegel's lectures and the *Phenomenology of Spirit* in her paper, but also considers race theory

just as Kafka does not in both his fictional and non-fictional prose. I should emphasize here that I am not making any too large or personal of a claim about Hegel, Kafka, and racism. I cannot attribute derogatory language or acts of physical violence against non-European peoples biographically to Hegel. However, we must not ignore the impact Hegel's assumptions about non-Europeans had on his students who were listening to these lectures and what impressions this made on those students, no matter what their future endeavors outside of that lecture hall.To recapitulate, I am not accusing Hegel of himself being a racist, but that his application of the dialectical method yielded racist results and reinforced racist practices ascribed to Europe at that time and onward.

In the *Lectures on the Philosophy of History*, Hegel applies his thesis from *Phänomenologie des Geistes* (*Phenomenology of Spirit*, 1807), looking at the extent to which each culture has achieved freedom of thought, which for Hegel is the pinnacle expression of *Geist*. As Jeffery Librett notes, "The work of history is the work of spirit as God's work. Letter and spirit achieve their sublation into spirit in and as the course of history itself. History as work is God's freely self-given project."[8] In Hegel's Protestant, yet secular reading of world history, the letter of biblical law and its spirit synthesize in Christianity, particularly in German/ Prussian, Lutheran-Protestant Christianity, with the letter of the law inherited by them from the Jews, and the spirit of that law from their Germanic, pagan ancestors. This kind of synthesis occurs nowhere else in the annals of world history for Hegel. Hegel begins with Africa and the Americas and claims that they ultimately do not have the ability to think abstractly, deferring instead to a

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as it is discussed in Hegel's *Enzyklopädie der philosophischen Wissenschaft* (*Encyclopedia of Philosophical Sciences*, 1817), as well as in earlier writings and letter exchanges, nuancing what Hegel the person thought about race and racial difference. However, she defers to Dinesh D'Souza's text, *The End of Racism: Principles for a Multicultural Society*, which, according to historian John David Smith, "ignores the complex causes and severity of white racism, misrepresents [Franz] Boas's arguments, and undervalues the matrix of ignorance, fear, and long-term economic inequality that he dubs black cultural pathology" and fails to appreciate the larger, systematic consequences of Hegel's lectures and other writings where he makes false assumptions about the Chinese and Jews as people. This, I would argue, is why Kafka's works come into dialogue so closely with Hegel's theories without saying anything, creating a kind of critical engagement without pigeonholing race and racism into confined definitions. See John David Harris, "Review of *The End of Racism: Principles for a Multicultural Society* by Dinesh D'Souza" 62, no. 3 (1996): 642-43.

[8] Jeffery S. Librett, *Orientalism and the Figure of the Jew* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2015), 136.

fetish culture; these cultures, for Hegel, are stuck in a kind of historical infancy, lacking freedom of thought.[9] The Enlightenment project and its goals of universalism needed to justify, within its own lines of logic, cultural differences, and why a European way of life was objectively the best, and overall the most reasonable. Therefore, early thinkers in the Enlightenment were eager to highlight similarities between European and non-European cultures, for example the possession of a written history. This accounts for why Egypt would constantly get lumped with Persia and the Middle East and not continental Africa; thinkers of the Enlightenment had to reasonably explain difference in order to justify superiority.

History thus begins with China for Hegel. Everything leading up to China is regarded as prehistory by Hegel, due largely to what he considers to be an absence of abstract thought amongst Africans and Native Americans. Hegel, however, views China's history as stagnant and failing to progress philosophically outside of a paradigm in which the Chinese subject, unable to think for themselves, defers strictly to the letter of the law defined by the Emperor. As Librett also observed, "In China, there cannot really be a state because there is nothing but the state (qua patriarchal family). In India, there cannot be a state because there is only religion, but religion that is none, for subjectivity is voided by virtue of absorbing everything into its dreaming self."[10] Librett's division between China and India accurately characterizes the thesis and antithesis of world history, namely that China and India represent a part of history where state and religion are not one, but separate and devoid of each other. The two cultures sublimate into what Hegel characterizes as Persian, or the biblical/Middle Eastern cultures that enjoy characteristics of both China and India, but for Hegel are also at the most primitive stage of historical development. The issue of religion and state figure greatly here because Hegel is tracing *Geist* as it frequently occurs or does not occur in the annals of world history. Dean Bond offers perhaps the most concise explanation of *Geist* in the context of Hegel's *Lectures on the Philosophy of History*. Hegel "treated human beings' relation to geography under the heading 'subjective spirit,' which constituted the first and least concrete state in the progression from

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[9] As Birgit Tautz points out, if "texture refers to efforts to integrate ethnic difference into an Enlightenment notion of universalism, whereas color stands in for differences perceived as irreducible and thus challenging claims of universality," then Hegel "saw Africa as a threat based on its color" and "linked" China "by its texture to European Enlightenment." Birgit Tautz, *Reading and Seeing Ethnic Differences in the Enlightenment: from China to Africa* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007), 4 and 5.
[10] Jeffery S. Librett, *Orientalism and the Figure of the Jew*, 152.

subjective to objective to absolute spirit."[11] Objective and Absolute Spirit are achieved when an individual subject has attained mental freedom, something the Chinese do not have, as far as Hegel is concerned.

Benjamin, Brecht, Kafka and the Question of Dialectical History

In order to further clarify the way in which Kafka's works intervene into Hegel's dialectical racism, I suggest looking towards two different Marxists: Walter Benjamin and Bertolt Brecht. According to Benjamin, mediated through Brecht's terminology, Kafka's crowning literary achievement is the application of *Gestus* in his prose. *Gestus* goes beyond simply being a movement that expresses a particular action, and is the combined use of movement and language to express a mindset. Brecht includes language in his definition of gesture:

> A language is gestic when it is grounded in a gest and conveys particular attitudes adopted by the speaker towards other men. The sentence "pluck they that offends thee out" is less effective from the gestic point of view that "if thine eye offend thee, pluck it out." The latter starts by presenting the eye, and the first clause then comes as a surprise, a piece of advice, and a relief.[12]

Syntactic rearrangement seems to underscore Brecht's notion of language being gestic; if we consider the subheading for this section, an inversion of the typical English-language adage, "There's method to this madness," which itself is a rewrite of Polonius' line from Shakespeare's

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[11] Dean W. Bond, "Hegel's Geographical Thought," *Environment and Planning D: Society and Space* 32, no.1 (2014): 188.

[12] In the original German, "Gestich ist eine Sprache, wenn sie auf dem Gestus beruht, bestimmte Haltungen des Sprechenden anzeigt, die dieser andern Menschen gegenüber einnimmt. Der Satz: „Reiße das Auge, das dich ärgert, aus" ist gestich ärmer als der Satz „Wenn dich dein Auge ärgert, reiß es aus." Im letzteren wird zunächst das Auge gezeigt, dann enthält der erste Halbsatz den deutlichen Gestus des etwas Annehmens und zuletzt kommt wie ein Überfall, ein befreiender Rat der zweite Halbsatz." See Bertolt Brecht, *Schriften zum Theater: Über eine nicht-aristotelische Dramatik*, ed. Siegfried Unseld (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp Verlag, 1960), 252 and John Willett, trans. and ed. *Brecht on Theater: Development of an Aesthetic* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1992), 252.

Hamlet, "Though this be madness, yet there is method in't."[13] Shakespeare's unique contributions to the English language provide the more *gestic* of the two expressions, as we are surprised that there is a careful train of thought (method) to what is otherwise seen (by the rest of the characters) as Hamlet's irrational angst over the death of his father and his love for Ophelia. Kafka's language makes similar arrangements in language to distance his readers from his representations of racial others.

Kafka's use of *Gestus* was first recognized not only by Bertolt Brecht, but also, most notably, by Walter Benjamin. Referring to Kafka's writings on the biblical Abraham, which will be treated in this work, Benjamin says "This Abraham appears 'with the promptness of a waiter.' Kafka could understand things only in the form of a *Gestus*, and this *Gestus* which he did not understand constitutes the cloudy part of the parables. Kafka's writings emanate from it."[14] For Benjamin, Kafka unknowingly does what Chinese actors do for Brecht, suggesting that there is a parallel between the two.[15] Drawing on the previous discourse of Jews as inherently Oriental within German (and indeed most European) theological and philosophical discourses and the subsequent debate of adopting an oriental aesthetic to German-Jewish identity by early twentieth-century authors, such as Else Lasker-Schüler and Martin Buber,[16] Benjamin suggests that Kafka is an

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[13] William Shakespeare, *The Tragedy of Hamlet, Prince of Denmark* (1600-1) in *The Oxford Shakespeare: The Complete Works*, eds. John Jowlett, et al. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2006), Act II, Scene ii, 206.

[14] In the original German, "'Bereitwillig wie ein Keller' erscheint dieser Abraham. Etwas war immer nur im Gestus für Kafka faßbar. Und dieser Gestus, den er nicht verstand, bildet die wolkige Stelle der Parabeln. Aus ihm geht Kafkas Dichtung hervor" See Walter Benjamin, "Franz Kafka: Zur zehnten Wiederkehr seines Todestages," in *Gesammelte Schriften* 2.2, ed. Rolf Tiedmann and Hermann Schweppenhäuser (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp Verlag, 1977), 427. and for the translation, see "Franz Kafka: One the Tenth Anniversary of His Death," trans. Harry Zohn, in *Illuminations*, ed. Hannah Arendt (New York: Schocken, 1968), 129.

[15] Benjamin does not necessarily make this claim, however, as he could not have; his seminal essay on Kafka was published months before Brecht, with whom he was in contact, watched Mei Lanfang's performance in Moscow. This performance is significant as it served as the basis for Brecht's concept of the Alienation Effect (*Verfremdungseffekt*), in which various elements of the theatrical stage could be used to distance audience members from the plot of the play and urge them to consider the social and political ramifications of their own lives vis-à-vis the characters actions.

[16] Librett notes, "To illustrate this subjection position, numerous versions of the Jewish-Oriental conjunction from the modernist epoch might be cited. For example, Karl Wolfskehl, Jakob Wasserman, and Hans Kohn all constructed positive images of the 'Oriental Jew' in their influential anthology Of Judaism (Vom Judentum) of

oriental Jew. Indeed, he draws the parallel between Kafka and Chinese theater in his reading of Kafka's posthumously published novel, *Amerika oder der Verschollene* (*America or the Man who Disappeared*), claiming, "the Nature Theater of Oklahoma in any case harks back to the Chinese theater, which is a gestic theater."[17] Though Benjamin's link between the Chinese theater and Kafka's use of *Gestus* indirectly suggests that Kafka wrote as some oriental other, I want to avoid pigeonholing Kafka racially, as I argue his characters offer us a perspective that allows readers to see how Hegel's dialectic method fosters a hierarchy of racial superiority of Europeans over non-Europeans. Benjamin additionally identifies several character types within Kafka's works, and the ones on whom I want to focus on in this chapter are the ones Benjamin refers to as "assistants:" "In Indian mythology there are the gandharvas, celestial creatures, beings in an unfinished state. Kafka's assistants are of that kind: neither members of, not strangers to, any of the other groups of figures, but, rather, messengers from one to the other."[18] The Chinese people of Kafka's "The Great Wall of China," and to a lesser extent "An Old Manuscript," also belong to this category of characters. I contend that, in this liminal state, the characters embody the incompletion of the dialectic and re-bound the global racism that emerges consequently from Hegel's lectures on world history.

1913. Of the thinkers who participated in such developments, none was more importantly influential than Martin Buber." See Jeffrey S. Librett, *Orientalism and the Figure of the Jew*, 214. Nina Berman also mentions that "In zwei Prosastücken (Die Nächt Tino von Bagdads, 1907/19. Der Prinz von Theben, 1914/20) entwirft Else Lasker-Schüler Protagonisten, deren ethnische, religiöse, soziale oder gschlechtliche Zugehörigkeit nich fixierbar ist. Die Identität der Figuren bewegt sich zwischen jüdischer, arabischer, vage orientalistischer, aber auch männlicher oder weiblicher Zuordnung. Die Konstruktion dieser schilldernden Charaktere wird hier im Zusammenhang mit einer zeitgnössischer Diskussion über orientalisch-jüdische Identität gesehen. Diese Debatte, an der sich jüdische Intellektuelle wie Martin Buber, Hans Kohn, und Jakob Wassermann maßgeblich beteiligten, war selbst Teil einer unfassenderen Diskussion der in Deutschland lebenden jüdischen Minderheit, die eine Neubestimmung des jüdischen Selbstbildes zu formulieren suchte." See Nina Berman, *Orientalismus, Kolonialismus und Moderne: zum Bild des Orients in der deutschsprachigen Kultur um 1900* (Stuttgart: M&P Verlag für Wissenschaft und Forschung, 1997) 38.

[17] In the original German, "in jedem Fall weist das Naturtheater von Oklahoma auf das chinesische Theater zurück, welches ein gestisches ist" See "Franz Kafka: Zur zehnten Wiederkehr seines Todestages," 418 for the original and for the translation, see "Franz Kafka: One the Tenth Anniversary of His Death," 120.

[18] Ibid. 116-7.

As Marx, who was influenced by Hegel, influenced Benjamin,[19] Hegel's indirect presence can be found within Benjamin's understanding of *Gestus,* as Benjamin attempts to redeem the supposed failure of Kafka that was diagnosed by Brecht. Marcus Bullock importantly points out that

> the freedom that is to be achieved by political intervention in Benjamin's view of history does not have a symmetrical equivalent in Kafka's view of human possibilities as he depicts them in that context, or, of course elsewhere. Kafka's notebooks identify impatience with the deceptions of psychology, not history […] the freedom to act in the interest of our true needs, in Benjamin's view, is lost wherever history is pursued in its false nature as an objective science. Historical knowledge that is bound by the laws of causality has been emptied of human understanding because it is alienated from human freedom.[20]

Admittedly, Benjamin's position on Kafka is a historical one, even though Kafka himself was engaged with more than just history as a topic (Bullock here claims psychology specifically). Benjamin engages with the connections between history and freedom key to Hegel's lectures, that he sees resonate in the works of Kafka.

With this said, Kafka's literary works also employ the *Gesten* that comprise the other half of *Gestus.* Adorno famously notes, "Gestures often serve as a counterpoint to words: the pre-linguistic that eludes all intention upsets the ambiguity, which, like a disease, has eaten into all signification in Kafka."[21] The contrapuntal actions that predate language in Kafka's

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[19] Andrew Chitty has noted that "Marx was indebted to Hegel at the level of some very general orientations. Thus both shared a fundamental emphasis on change. Both conceived history as the gradual emergence of human freedom through a series of major stages" and from Matthias Fritsch that "Benjamin revises the question of history in order to direct it away from the alleged laws of historical development, focusing instead on the ever new 'construction' of the past in the present." See Andrew Chitty, "Hegel and Marx" in *A Companion to Hegel*, eds. Stephen Houlgate and Michael Baur, (Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishing, Ltd 2011), 477 and Matthias Fritsch, *The Promise of Memory: History and Politics in Marx, Benjamin, and Derrida* (Albany: SUNY Press, 2005), 14.

[20] Marcus Bullock, "Franz Kafka: The Politics of Disappointment in a Poetics of Patience (Benjamin-Brecht-Kafka)," *Journal of the Kafka Society of America* 16, no. 1 (1992): 25.

[21] In the original German, "Oft setzen Gesten Kontrapunkte zu den Worten: das Vorsprachliche, den Intentionen Entzogene fährt der Vieldeutigkeit in die Parade, die wie eine Krankheit alles Bedeuten bei Kafka angefressen hat". See Theodor Adorno, *Prismen: Kulturkritik und Gesellschaft* (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp

Orientalism run the gamut from the devouring of live oxen by carnivorous horses, to stabbing one's self; all actions resist firm, linguistic definition and are therefore defined as gestures, movements made by characters to express what cannot be expressed in words. Puchner observes that "Gesture […] escapes rigid labeling and fixed meaning, and it is for this reason that the category of gesture has surfaced with such frequency in the several 'crises of language,' especially in the one that is most closely associated with Kafka, namely the turn-of-the-century crisis of language whose spiritual center is Vienna."[22] With the Habsburg Empire in a period of linguistic unrest, Kafka's literary works take the opportunity to address representations of race in nineteenth-century race theory not by offering a more authentic representation, but by offering a parody of something that cannot be conclusively proven true by the nineteenth-century race theorists with their lack of first-hand experience of foreign others and their desire to excuse anti-Semitism at home by portraying other races as backwards. Language's freedom from fixed meaning, as Puchner puts it, allows for the possibility of an imbedded critique of nineteenth-century race theory through the parody of the representation of races within Kafka, especially as they parallel it on a smaller, more localized scale.

Benjamin has put it best when he says that Kafka offers an array of means to alienate us from identifying with the struggle of his characters: "Kafka's entire works constitutes a code of gestures which surely had no definite symbolic meaning for the author from the outset; rather, the author tried to derive such meaning from them in ever-changing contexts and experimental groups."[23] These gestures are not just themselves movements the characters make, they are an assortment of literary devices and tropes. The lack of definite symbolic meaning here also, in a way, underpins how Kafka's prose undermines Hegel's dialectic racism. Patricia Simpson explains that "whereas the dialectic relies on the totalizing capacity of symbolic discourse, allegory, in the form of parable in both Brecht and

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Verlag, 1955), 308 for the original German and, for the translation, see *Prisms*, trans. Samuel and Sherry Weber (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1992), 248.

[22] Martin Puchner, "Kafka's Antitheatrical Gestures," *The Germanic Review: Literature, Culture, Theory* 78, no. 3 (2003): p. 190.

[23] In the original German, "Kafkas ganzes Werk [stellt] einen Kodex von Gesten [dar], die keineswegs von Hause aus für den Verfasser eine sichere symbolische Bedeutung haben, vielmehr in immer wieder anderen Zusammenhängen und Versuchsanordnungen um eine solche angegangen werden." See Walter Benjamin, "Franz Kafka: Zur zehnten Wiederkehr seines Todestages," 418. For the original German and, for the translation, see "Franz Kafka: One the Tenth Anniversary of His Death," 120.

Kafka, operates according to principles of radical discontinuity. Thus crude thinking allows Benjamin to read Brecht and Kafka allegorically and in the same light, according to *Gestus*, but with attention to the use of 'daily' speech."[24] Simpson correctly illustrates that Kafka's works (as well as Brecht's method) serve Benjamin and Brecht well in their resistance to dialectic completion and this, I argue, is how Kafka's works resist Hegel's dialectical racism, namely, by interrupting the totalizing capacity of Hegel's interpretation of China and the Chinese in the grander scheme of world history through his own representations of the Chinese, and the China that Kafka constructs for those representations.

Kafka's Intervention

Librett has initially pointed out that "the First Hegelian motif that finds itself explicitly displaced in [the introductory passage to 'The Great Wall of China'] is nothing less than the dialectical method itself, which [...] is itself a grand and grandiose realization of typological reasoning, the construction of a narrative of world history though the development of oppositions out of previous syntheses in a continuous coherence of context."[25] The opening passage of "The Great Wall of China" explains how the Chinese "System of construction"[26] had small armies of builders make two 500-meter lengths of wall at a time in a given space, only to be relocated elsewhere once the two lengths of wall were joined, resulting in various gaps within the wall. We are also told at the onset of the text that "The Great Wall of China was finished off at its northernmost corner. From the southeast and the southwest it came up in two sections that finally converge there."[27] Librett suggests that the wall stands in for the dialectical method and the dialectic incompletion of *Geist* within Chinese culture, and also reinforces Simpson's observation about the allegoric discourse that Benjamin identifies within

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[24] Patricia Anne Simpson, "In Citing Violence: Benjamin, Brecht, and Kafka," in *Jewish Writers, German Literature: The Uneasy Examples of Nelly Sachs and Walter Benjamin*, eds. Timothy Bahti and Marilyn Sibley Fries (Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Press, 1995), 176-7.

[25] Jeffery S. Librett, *Orientalism and the Figure of the Jew*, 225.

[26] Franz Kafka "The Great Wall of China," trans. Willa and Edwin Muir, in *The Completed Stories*, ed. Naum N. Glatzer (New York: Schocken, 1971), 235.

[27] In the original German, "Die Chinesische Mauer ist an ihrer nördlichsten Stelle beendet worden. Von Südosten und Südwesten wurde der Bauherangeführt und hier vereinigt." See "Beim Bau der chinesischen Mauer," in *Sämtliche Werke* (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp Verlag, 2008), 1086 and, for the translation, see "The Great Wall of China," 235.

Kafka and Brecht, in this case with the wall as a metaphor. Only very recent scholarship[28] has taken up the task of Kafka's China within these texts as a literal and not allegorical or metaphorical meaning. This chapter is, however, more interested in looking at Kafka's representations of China not as Kafka's own understanding of China, but as an understanding of China, and more importantly an understanding of the Chinese people that comes into dialogue with the understanding of Chinese people embedded within Hegel's philosophy.

Kafka's opening passage, which Librett accurately identifies as a demonstration of the dialectic failing to reach completion, take on two trajectories that underpin a case against the dialectic method: the rationale for building the wall and the recurring image of incompletion within the text. As to the first trajectory, the story's narrator explains,

> I was lucky inasmuch as the building of the wall was just beginning when, at twenty, I had passed the last examination of the lowest school. I say lucky, for many who before my time had achieved the highest degree of culture available to them could find nothing year after year to do with their knowledge, and drifted uselessly about with the most splendid architectural plans in their heads, and sank by thousands into hopelessness...But to encourage the subordinate supervisors intellectually so vastly superior to their apparently petty tasks, other measures must be taken...[29]

The question of motivation arises here, as well as the possibly that despair will prevent an otherwise intellectual work force from completing the task set to them by the state. What Kafka presents not only replicates the

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[28] The German Kafka Society put together a volume that addresses Kafka's representations of China from the perspectives of German Studies, Sinology, and Chinese reception studies of Kafka. See Kristina Jobst and Harald Neuneyer, eds., *Kafkas China* (Würzburg: Königshausen & Neuhausen GmbH, 2017).

[29] In the original German, "Ich hatte das Glück, daß, als ich mit zwnazig Jahren die oberste Prüfung der untersten Schule abgelegt hatte, der Bau der Mauer gerade begann. Ich sage Glück, denn viele, die früher die oberste Höhe der ihnen zugänglichen Ausbildung erreicht hatten, wußten jahrelang mit ihrem Wissen nichts anzufangen, treiben sich, im Kopf die großartigsten Baupläne, nutzlos herum und verlotterten in Mengen...Aber für die unteren, gesitig weit über ihrer äußerlich kleinen Aufgabe stehenden Männer, mußte anders vergesorgt werden..." See Franz Kafka, "Beim Bau der chinesischen Mauer," in *Sämtliche Werke* (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp Verlag, 2008), 1087. for the original and, for the translation, see "The Great Wall of China" trans. Willa and Edwin Muir, in *The Completed Stories* (New York: Schocken, 1971), 236-7.

reception of China in the German Enlightenment,[30] but that the knowledge gained by the Chinese itself could or would simply go unused because, those who preceded the narrator in the task of building the wall had nothing to do with the information they accumulated. The lack of intellectual stimulation suggests an incompletion of fulfillment that the empire must take upon itself to rectify. Thus, they adopt the piecemeal approach to the wall:

> One could not, for instance, expect them to lay one stone on another for months or even years on end, in an uninhabited mountainous region, hundreds of miles from their homes; the hopelessness of such hard toil, which yet could not reach completion even in the longest lifetime, would have cast them into complete despair and above all made them less capable for the work. It was for this reason that the system of piecemeal was decided on.[31]

Kafka's narrator will go on to explain how seeing the completed portions of wall, as workers traveled from one building site to another, gave the intellectual builders a sense of hope that the wall would actually see completion. The metaphor of deferral or incompletion acts as a riff on dialectical theory because, one can easily contrast this practice with the historical reality of the wall's completion. The incompletion of the wall is

[30] Gottfried Wilhelm Leibniz and Christian Wolff had taken a positive approach to reading China in the early Enlightenment. According to Peter Park, "Leibniz celebrates the opening of China to intellectual exchange with Europe and enthusiastically greets the prospect of the advancement of knowledge, both theoretical and practical, through this exchange," as well as "focused on Chinese as the model for a universal language," while Wolff "argued that the Chinese system of government was inspired principles very similar to those enunciated in Plato's *Republic*. He believed that he had found in ancient China the ideal state in fact and that its rulers understood the usefulness of philosophy and philosophers." Peter Park, "Leibniz and Wolff on China," in *Germany and China: Transnational Encounters since the Eighteenth Century*, eds. Joanne Miyang Cho and David M. Crowe (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014), 24 and 30. Hegel would unilaterally take issue with all of these claims, asserting that philosophy in China was nothing more than bureaucratic Confucianism designed to maintain a social hierarchy that interfered with the sublimation of spirit, and that the language was dense and confusing.
[31] In the original, "Man konnte sie nich zum Beispiel in einer unbewohnten Gebirgsgegend, hunderte Meilen von ihrer Heimat, monate oder gar jahrelange Mauerstein an Mauerstein fügen lassen; die Hoffnungslosigkeit solcher fließigen, aber selbst in einem lange Menschenleben nicht zum Ziele führenden Arbeit hätte sie verzweifelt und vor allem wertloser für die Arbeit gemacht. Deshalb wählte man das System des Teilbaus." See Franz Kafka, "Beim Bau der chinesischen Mauer," 1088, for the original and, for the translation, see "The Great Wall of China," 237.

reflected in the incomplete, affective rounding of the characters who, without the piecemeal system of the project, would otherwise fall into complete despair. In this way, the Chinese citizens of Kafka's "The Great Wall of China" are less like the tragic anti-heroes Gregor Samsa and Josef K. and more like the gandharvas described by Benjamin.

The image of incompletion is repeated twice more in "The Great Wall of China:" once, in the only excerpt from this text published in Kafka's lifetime under the title "Eine kaiserliche Botschaft"/"An Imperial Message" and then in a passage that anticipates "An Old Manuscript." The former story frequently stands alone a parable about the unreliability of communication itself as "The Emperor, so it runs, has sent a message to you, the humble subject, the insignificant shadow cowering in the remotest distance before the imperial sun; the Emperor from his deathbed has sent a message to you and you alone;"[32] the herald of this message never, however reaches you, as "The multitudes are so vast; their numbers have no end. If he could reach the open fields how fast he would fly, and soon doubtless you would hear the welcome hammering of his fists on your door."[33] There is a palpable shift in grammar, from the indicative to the second subjective, from what is happening to what could plausibly happen, only for us to learn in the indicative that "Nobody could fight his way through here even with a message from a deadman."[34] The grammatical shifts from indicative to subjunctive and back, from actual to plausible, as well as the simple fact that there was never a message or a sender for the recipient, plays into Benjamin's notion of *Gestus* as a failure of language. The performance of this incompletion, when we bring this parable back into the context of "The Great Wall of China," signals an undoing of the hold that the Emperor, according to Hegel, has over the Chinese with the letter of the law and his place the supreme patriarch of the empire.

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[32] In the original German, "der Kaiser, so es heißt, hat gerade Dir, dem einzelnen, dem jämmerlichen Untertanen, dem winzig vor der kaiserlichen Sonne in die fernste Ferne geflüchteten Schatten, gerade Dir hat der Kaiser von seimen Sterbebett aus eine Botschaft gesendet." See "Beim Bau der chinesischen Mauer," 1093 for the original and, for the translation, see "The Great Wall of China," 244.

[33] In the original, "die Menge is so groß. ihre Wohnstätten nehmen kein Ende. Öffnete sich freies Feld, wir würde er fliegen und bald wohl hörtest Du das herrlichen Schlagen seiner Fäusten an Deiner Tür." See "Beim Bau der chinesischen Mauer," 1094. for the original and, for the translation, see "The Great Wall of China," 244.

[34] In the original German, "Niemand dringt hier durch und gar mit der Botschaft eines Toten an einen Nichtigen." See "Beim Bau der chinesischen Mauer," 1094 for the original and, for the translation, see "The Great Wall of China," 244.

The image of physical distance keeping the herald from reaching the subject that we see in "An Imperial Message," gets repeated in a different context in "The Great Wall of China," namely in describing the purpose, or perhaps the lack of necessity, for the wall. As the narrator explains, "Against whom was the Great Wall to serve as protection? Against the people of the north. Now, I come from the southeast of China. No northern people can menace us there...We have not seen them, even if on their wild horses they should ride as hard as they can straight towards us – the land is too vast and would not let them reach us, they would end their course in the empty air."[35] Here, Kafka uses the special perception of China's vastness to suggest that, wall or no wall, the Chinese will come to no harm from the peoples of the north (by inference, the Mongolians). This configuration of geography adopts a fantastical mode of space and, by challenging the readers' conception of space, accommodates Hegel's notion of China's historical stagnation by suggesting that China's size will prevent something as historically radical as the invasion of the Mongols from altering their day-to-day lives, and by extension their history. Indeed, the repeated act of deferral occurring in this text mocks the notion that historical progress is dialectical and that peoples of particular geographical origins (namely China) have not been able to move beyond a patriarchal hierarchy and experience historical change. Put differently, the radical difference in thought embodied by the peoples of the north[36] will never reach the Chinese,

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[35] In the original German, "Gegen wen sollte die große Mauer schützen? Gegen die Nordvölker. Ich stamme aus dem sudöstlichen China. Kein Nordvolk kann uns dort bedrohen... Gesehen haben wir sie nicht, und blieben wir in unseren Dorfe, werden wir sie niemals sehen, selbst wenn sie auf ihren wilden Pferden geradeaus zu uns hetzen und jagen. Zu groß ist unser Land und läßt sich nicht zu uns, in die leere Luft werden sie sich verrennen." See "Beim Bau der chinesischen Mauer," 1091 for the original and, for the translation, see "The Great Wall of China," 241.

[36] Kafka's narrator places a strong distinction between the Chinese and these people of the north, echoing a broader racist discourse, when noting "Wir lesen von ihnen in den Bücher der Alten, die Grausamkeiten, die sie ihre Natur gemäß begehen, machen uns aufseufzen in unserer friedlichen Laube. Auf den wahrheitsgetreuen Bildern der Künstler sehen wie diese Gesichter der Verdammnis, die aufgerissenen Mäuler, die mit hoch zugespitzten Zähnen bestrcken Kiefer, die verkniffenen Augen, die schon nach dem Raub zu schielen scheinen, den das Maul zermalnnen und zereißen wird"/ "We read of them in the books of the ancients; the cruelties they commit in accordance with their nature makes us sigh in our peaceful arbors. The faithful representations of the artist show us these faces of the damned, their gaping mouths their jaws furnished with great pointed teeth, their half-shut eyes that already seem to be seeking out the victim which their jaws will rend and devour" See "Beim Bau der chinesischen Mauer," 1091; and "The Great Wall of China," 241.

by virtue of an unrealistic geographical understanding of where peoples are in terms of historical progress.

When we examine the predicament of the nomadic intrusion set up in "An Old Manuscript," We presume from Hegel, and by extension from Kafka, that the abstract Emperor, who pervades the collective *Geist* of the Chinese people, will act on behalf of the material Emperor and guide his subjects toward a solution. Instead, we are left with a narrator who says,

> "What is going to happen?" we all ask ourselves. "How long can we endure this burden and torment? The Emperor's palace has drawn the nomads here but does not know how to drive them away again. The gate stays shut; the guards, who used to be always marching out and in with ceremony, keep close behind barred windows. It is left to us artisans and tradesmen to save our country; but we are not equal to such a task; nor have we ever claimed to be capable of it. This is a misunderstanding of some kind; and it will be the ruin for us."[37]

The first sentence following the frustrating question is interesting because it employs a kind of synecdoche; the Imperial Palace, as a structure, does not fail to understand how to drive the nomads away, but rather, it is the material Emperor and the other presumed occupants of the Imperial Palace, e.g., the courtiers, who do not understand what to do in this predicament. The use of synecdoche here suggests that the Chinese subject, embodied here as the cobbler-narrator, can abstract the Palace as a substitute for the material Emperor, something similar to, but not quite the same as, the abstract Emperor. So we know that Kafka's Chinese subject can conjure an idea of the Emperor. But, we are still at an impasse because, the abstract Emperor, developed by both Hegel and Kafka, fails to guide the cobbler-narrator and his fellow artisans and tradesmen to get rid of the nomads. In order to understand why the abstract Emperor fails to appear, we must return to Hegel's discussion of the Chinese subject. This passage, along with its

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[37] In the original German, "Was wird es werden?" fragen wir uns alle. "Wie lange werden diese Last und Qual ertragen? Der kaiserliche Palast hat die Nomaden angelockt, versteht es aber nicht, sie wieder zu vertreiben. Das Tor bleibt verschlossen; die Wache, früher immer festlich ein   und ausmarschierend, hält sich hinter vergitterten Fenstern [auf]. Uns Handwerkern und Geschäftsleuten ist die Rettung des Vaterlands anvertraut; wie sind aber einer solchen Aufgabe nicht gewachsen; haben uns doch auch nie gerühmt, dessen fähig zu sein. Ein Mißverständnis ist es, und wir gehen daran zugrunde." See "Ein altes Blatt," in *Sämtliche Werke* (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp Verlag, 2008), 852 for the original and, for the translation, see "An Old Manuscript," trans. Willa and Edwin Muir, in *The Complete Stories* (New York: Schocken, 1971), 417.

text published by Fischer Verlag in 1917, arrives at a tremendous historical point that Hegel's lectures do not anticipate: the fall of Imperial China and the establishment of its subsequent republic. The collapse of the Qing Dynasty and its uncertain consequences in the time of the Habsburg *fin de siècle* aligns perfectly with the air of uncertainty that undermines the possibility of either empire sublimating into a more "Enlightened" culture, especially with the ravages of the Great War on everyone's mind at the same time as these imperial breakdowns.

As I mention elsewhere on Kafka and Hegel, "Hegel argues that the Chinese have a super-imposed patriarchy with an opaque spoken and written language: The Emperor is actually the manifestation of a Universal Will, an omnipresent *Geist* within China that prohibits the Chinese subject from making individual decisions and judgements."[38] For Hegel, a hierarchical structure permeates Chinese culture, which, depending on the social situation, has fathers and father like figures dominating households and other social structures towards the head of the totem-pole and the Emperor, both abstract and material, at the absolute top; he claims, "The Chinese regard themselves as belonging to their family, and at the same time as children of the state."[39] The consequence of these mirroring hierarchical structures is, once again for Hegel, a lack of rationality and imagination in the Chinese subject's thought processes. The Chinese subject is a child blindly, and without question, obeying the Emperor's laws, who accepts both the abstract and material Emperor's guidance in making decisions and judgements. This *Geist* does not refer to Hegel's notion of *Geist* in *Phänomenologie des Geistes*, but one that is an approximate equivalent to Hegel's notion. Under most circumstances, we understand that the physical distance between most of the Chinese subjects and the material Emperor results in the insistence of an abstract Emperor maintaining his omnipresence and, by extension, the structural integrity of the various social hierarchies. The Chinese people are reduced to people with no free will of their own in order to advance Hegel's notion of *Geist* dialectically moving through world history, and I contend that Kafka's representations of the Chinese undermine this dialectic.

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[38] Adam J. Toth, "Breaching the Great Wall of Geist: Kafka, Hegel, and the Boundaries of Orientalist Race Theory," *Journal of the Kafka Society of America* 40-1, (2016-7): 146.

[39] In the original German, "Die Chinesen wissen sich als zu ihrer Familie gehörig und zugleich als Söhne des Staates." See G. F. W. Hegel, *Vorlesungen über die Philosophie der Geschichte* (Stuttgart: Reclam Verlag, 1961), 189 for the original and, for the translaiton, see G. F. W. Hegel, *The Philosophy of History*, trans. J. Sibree (Mineola, NY: Dover Publications, Inc., 2004), 121.

If we return to the final passage of "An Old Manuscript," we realize that the cobbler-narrator is confronted with the lack of both a material and an abstract Emperor. The material Emperor is, on the one hand, visible but, on the other hand, offers no leadership or orders for the artisans and tradesmen to follow. We would expect an abstract Emperor to intercede and guide the cobbler toward a resolution, but, alas, he never comes. By removing the abstract Emperor, Kafka demonstrates how Hegel's assertion that the Chinese have no ability to rationalize on their own is simply impossible. Kafka is of course aware that, at the time he wrote this text, the Habsburg Empire was experiencing its own collapse and that the subjects of the Habsburg Empire were undergoing a similar situation of impeding, uncertain change. Kafka also removes any specific geo-political names that would clearly demark a setting for "An Old Manuscript," allowing for analogies with the Habsburg Empire.[40] Of course, Kafka's elimination of specific geo-political names also means that his critique of Hegel's China-through-Eurocentric-eyes is lost on some readers, though those familiar with Hegel, or with the discourse on China championed by Hegel, no doubt identified Kafka's critique when reading this short story.

In contrast to "An Old Manuscript," "The Great Wall of China" contains clear geo-political terms from the title onward. "The Great Wall of China" also contrasts with its sequel, in that the narrator seems to affirm, rather than deny, the existence of the abstract Emperor. The narrator explains,

> We — and here I speak in the name of many people — did not really know ourselves until we had carefully scrutinized the decrees of the high command, when we discovered that without the high command neither our book learning nor our human understanding would have sufficed for the humble tasks which we performed in the great whole.[41]

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[40] The Nomads from the North serve as a metaphor for any number of things, such as the nationalism creeping in on the decaying Habsburg Empire, as pointed out by Ritchie Robertson, see *Kafka: Judaism, Politics, and Literature* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1985), 136. For further reading, see John Breuilly, *Nationalism and the State* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1998); and, Robert Kann's two volume book, *The Multinational Empire: Nationalism and National Reform in the Habsburg Monarchy, 1848-1918.*

[41] In the original German, "Wir — ich rede hier wohl im Namen vieler — haben eigentlich erst im Nachbuchstabieren der Anordnungen der obersten Führerschaft uns selbst kennengelernt und gefunden, daß ohne die Führerschaft weder unsere Schulweisheit noch unser Menschenverstand auch nur für das kleine Amt, das wir innerhalb des großen Ganzen hatten, ausgereicht hätte." See Franz Kafka, "Beim Bau der chinesischen Mauer," 1090 for the original and, for the translation, see "The Great Wall of China," 239.

Speaking on behalf of the Chinese subject collectively with the pronoun "We," Kafka's narrator identifies the moment of enlightenment as the moment in which they realize the sum of their knowledge was nothing without the hierarchical structure of the high command (Führerschaft). This high command within Kafka's work parallels the work of the abstract Emperor and the hierarchical structures that position the Emperor on top and guide the Chinese subject. The human understanding (Menschenverstand) seems to parallel Hegel's "Understanding without free Reason or Will"[42], in that this understanding is something built from individual experiences, trial-and-error, etc., but then never applied. Only with the high command in place, and careful examination of the high command, can the Chinese subject proceed with daily life. Kafka's narrator intentionally works against the very tenets of the European Enlightenment to fit the Chinese subject into Hegel's model of the Chinese subject; as Roy Pascal has observed,

> the context bears repeated references to the position and thoughts of the person composing 'Building the Chinese Wall' and throughout he puts his arguments, including the parable itself, as his modest attempt at explaining the nature of the relationship of the Chinese people to their emperor, the source of their unity as a people and of what we may call their awareness of their political identity.[43]

This awareness of his political identity has the narrator render himself suddenly unreliable as a narrator for the European reader because the ability to closely examine the decrees of the high command should have resulted in the realization that the high command controls the Chinese subject like a shepherd does his flock. Instead, the Chinese subject, in this case the narrator, never sees the high command for what it is, namely a hierarchical structure designed to control the Chinese subject. Kafka's reader is therefore confronted once again with the logical flaw of self-awareness that emerges from Hegel's representation of China.

Hegel and Kafka thus seem to have opened up a debate, for their respective readers, on the degree to which the Chinese subject has free will. Hegel maintains that "In China, however, the distinction between slavery and freedom is necessarily, not great, since all are equal before the

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[42] In the original German, "verständig ohne freie Vernunft oder Phantasie." See G. F. W. Hegel, *Vorlesungen über die Philosophie der Geschichte*, 192 for the original and, for the translation, *The Philosophy of History*, 123.

[43] Roy Pascal, *Kafka's Narrators: A Study of His Stories and Sketches* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1982), 165.

Emperor—that is, all alike are degraded."[44] When Hegel talks of slavery in this context, he means both a social practice of forcing a group of people to perform a wide range of tasks, without the expectation of compensation, as well as his master-slave dialectic.[45] He wants to contrast this practice with the conditions under which the abstract and material Emperor holds the Chinese subject. Indeed, for Hegel there is no distinction between the practice of slavery and the hierarchical structure with the Emperor on top. This is not a reiteration of the master/slave dialectic within his *Phenomenology of Spirit*, but rather a demonstration of its incompletion because, the real Emperor is absent and insists on an abstract Emperor to keep the Chinese subject in check, so there is no actualization of self-consciousness and therefore no trial of death for the Chinese subject. However, Kafka's narrator directly contradicts this, and himself: "Human nature, essentially changeable, unstable as the dust, can endure no restraint; if it binds itself it soon begins to tear madly at its bonds, until it rends everything asunder, the wall, the bonds, and its very self."[46] This statement follows the narrator's reading of a scholar's research on the building of the Tower of Babel and the Great Wall of China. Kafka's narrator writes the scholar off as crazy because, the people building the Tower of Babel were full of varying idea in an attempt to reach a singular goal. For the narrator, trying to reach a singular aim with a variety of ideas was an impossible feat because humans will not bind themselves long to a common goal. The narrator's statement regarding human nature admittedly comes before his statement on the high command, and he claims that the Chinese subject still falls in line with the high command, in spite of human nature. The narrator nonetheless fails to work out how and why it is that the Chinese subject has

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[44] In the original German, "Doch ist notwendig in China der Unterschied zwischen der Sklaverei und der Freiheit nicht groß, da vor dem Kaiser alle gleich, das heißt, alle gleich degradiert sind." See G. F. W. Hegel, *Vorlesungen über die Philosophie der Geschichte*, 201 for the original and, for the translation, see *The Philosophy of History*, 130-1.

[45] We know from Buck-Morss that Hegel was aware of the paradoxes between the Enlightenment idealization of Freedom and the practice of African slavery, as well as from Bernasconi that Hegel read and exaggerated accounts of Chinese practices from British travelers to make the Chinese appear more savage. See Susan Buck-Morss, *Hegel, Haiti, and Universal History*.

[46] In the original German, "Das menschliche Wesen. Leichtfertig in seinem Grunde, von der Natur des auffliegenden Staubes, verträgt keine Fesseln; fesselt es sich selbst, wird es bald wahnsinnig an den Fesseln zu rütteln anfangen und Mauer, Kette, und sich selbst in alle Himmelsrichtung zerreißen." See Franz Kafka, "Beim Bau der chinesischen Mauer," 1089 for the original and, for the translation, see "The Great Wall of China," 239.

transcended human nature's desire to be free, or how he has escaped the paradox of freedom that he describes. Failing to account for the relationship between the Chinese subject and freedom makes Kafka's narrator unreliable for ascertaining an authentic way of thinking about the Chinese subject.

The unreliability of Kafka's narrator extends to another contrast between "The Great Wall of China" and "An Old Manuscript," namely, the physical distance between Kafka's narrators and their material Emperor. The narrator of "The Great Wall of China" reveals that "There is perhaps no people more faithful to the Emperor than ours in the south, but the Emperor derives no advantage from our fidelity."[47] Kafka distances the material Emperor from the narrator of "The Great Wall of China" in order to demonstrate the realistic distance between the Emperor, both material and abstract, from his subject. The narrator therefore has no reason to fear invasion of the nomadic Northerners, and for this reason remains most loyal to the Emperor. However, he also realizes that the Emperor has nothing to gain from his loyalty because he is as distant from the Emperor as he is. Kafka relies, to some extent, on the possibility that his Austrian readers will relate to this distance from the Emperor and see how Hegel's perception of the Chinese subject is wrong. On the one hand, the Habsburg Empire provides for its subjects during times of war in the form of a militarized defense, and the Habsburg subject will recognize this. On the other hand, the Habsburg subject realizes that there is nothing for the Emperor to gain from their loyalty, since the Emperor commands the army.

Conclusion

Franz Kafka did not write "The Great Wall of China" and "An Old Manuscript," with the *Lectures on the Philosophy of History* by G.F.W. Hegel in mind, no more than Hegel intended to develop a theory about races in the world within those lectures. However, Hegel's lectures still contain a theory about race, namely, how far races of the world have progressed historically, if they have progressed at all. Likewise, when brought into dialogue with these lectures, Kafka's works find a way to speak against the hierarchical position that Hegel puts China and the Chinese into in the annals of world history. In his resistance to interpretation, Kafka's literary works have always been amoral stages with gentle, playful actors and his

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[47] In the original German, "Es gibt vielleicht kein kaisertreueres Volk als das unsrige im Süden, aber die Treue kommt dem Kaiser nicht zugute.". See "Beim Bau der chinesischen Mauer," 1096 for the original and, for the translation, see 'The Great Wall of China," 246.

China/ Chinese people should only be regarded as such. However, Kafka's stages and actors are also not without revolutionary potential, especially when brought into dialogue with oppressive discourse. These two literary works by the German- and Czech-speaking, Austrian-Hungarian Jew utilize spatial trickery and unreliable narrators to talk about threats to a crumbling empire. Whether that empire is China, or a thinly veiled allegory for Austria-Hungary, we do not know for sure, especially as both met their imperial ends almost simultaneously. However, as Kafka identifies these spaces and peoples as China and the Chinese, there is no reason not to read them as such. Indeed, Walter Benjamin has shown us, through Bertolt Brecht, that Kafka's stories can tease out theories about the Chinese and China in a way that both undermines racist assumptions, while still preserving the salient philosophical messages that emerge side-by-side with these racist assumptions, and this chapter has ventured to demonstrate the particular instance of the racist assumptions brought about with the use of the dialectical method on world history.

CHAPTER FIVE

ON SPECIALIZATION AND THE DEAD EYE:
KANT'S RACE THEORY AND THE PROBLEM
OF PERCEPTION ILLUSTRATED IN KLEIST'S
"BETROTHAL IN SANTO DOMINGO"

SALLY HATCH GRAY

Introducing the Dead Eye

The tragic love story in "Betrothal in Santo Domingo" ("*Verlobung in St. Domingo*" 1811) between an island girl of color and a Swiss officer in the French Army, and set during the Haitian Revolution (1791-1804), illustrates Heinrich von Kleist's (1777-1811) continuing fascination with the polarization of opposing forces, as well as with the confusion created by perception of the empirical, experiential world. In this story set during a successful slave revolt, and the first vanquishing of the French army to-date, race plays the prominent role in creating the polarity between Kleist's colonial Romeo and his island Juliet, but black and white are also blended, and confused.[1] Clarity in the story can only be found beneath the skin, in a

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[1] For an insightful discussion of the political context see Paul Michael Lützeler, *Kontinentalisierung* (Bielefeld: Aisthesis, 2007). Lützeler writes, "Kleist war der Dichter des Widerstands par excellence: des Widerstands des Einzelnen oder von Gruppen, von Nationen und Rassen gegen die Unterdrückung durch andere Einzelne, Gruppen, Nationen und Rassen" ("Kleist was a writer of opposition par excellence: the opposition of the individual or of groups, of nations and races against the oppression through other individuals, groups, nations and races" 121). In "The Aesthetics of Blackness in Heinrich von Kleist's *Die Verlobung in St. Domingo*" in *Modern Language Notes* 90 (1975): 661-672. Sander L. Gilman argues that this story is not historical fiction, but rather, that Kleist uses tropes of the many accounts of the Haitian Revolution for a staging of the discussion of aesthetics. See also James P. Martin, "Reading Race in Kleist's '*Die Verlobung in St. Domingo*'" *Monatshefte* 100:1 (Spring 2008): 48-66. Martin advocates for a semiotic analysis which

girl's love. While the empirical reality is confused and the science prejudicial, the heroine's love is clear. In this chapter, I will argue that the problem of perception depicted in this story involves a critique of emerging disciplinary lines between the sciences, and between new fields of philosophy and literature—disciplinary lines which Immanuel Kant (1724-1804) was influential in drawing.[2] The consensus of a wealth of scholarship on the topic of Kleist's "Kant Crisis," or critique of Kant's epistemology, is that it demonstrates a superficial understanding, and that Kleist's problems with new disciplinary boundaries show an unwillingness to focus.[3] This broad consensus does not entertain a reality in which, as Kleist argues, an accurate perception of empirical nature requires an engaged soul.[4] In science

embraces the ambiguity of the text. He writes, "The critical task of reading Kleist's '*Die Verlobung in St. Domingo*' requires an analysis of how textual elements function in relation to the cultural construct of race in order to produce meaning" 50. See also Suzanne Zantop "Changing Color: Kleist's *Verlobung in St. Domingo* and the Discourses of Miscegenation" in *A Companion to the Works of Heinrich von Kleist* (Rochester: Camden House, 2003), 191-208, who argues that race is a driving force in this story, ever present but also meaningless. She mentions Kant's work on race as background for the story, but does not suggest the story be read as a critique of Kant's race categories specifically.

[2] See Chad Wellmon, "Kant's Critical Technology" in *Organizing Enlightenment: Information Overload and the Invention of the Modern Research University* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2015), 123-150.

[3] See Günter Blamberger, "Science or Fiction: Wie Kleist zum Projektemacher wird und 'Fragmente aus der Zukunft' entwirft: Kleists Studium in Frankfurt und die Kant-Krise" in *Heinrich von Kleist: Biographie* (Frankfurt am Main: S. Fischer Verlag, 2011), 51-84. Blamberger's thorough and engaging study of Kleist's life and work takes center stage in scholarship on Kleist. Blamberger discusses in detail Kleist's study of, and use of, science in his literary work, as well as his reaction to Kant's epistemology. Indebted to Blamberger, and without disagreeing that what Kleist writes about Kant's epistemology in his letters does not amount to a serious critique on its own, my point here is only to suggest that Kleist's story may illustrate a more substantive critique of the new disciplinary boundaries in science, with respect to Kant's epistemology, than has traditionally been considered. To get an idea of the general consensus, see Hans Dieter Zimmermann, *Kleist, die Liebe und der Tod* (Frankfurt am Main: Athenäum, 1989), Joachim Maass, *Kleist: A Biography*, trans. Ralph Manheim (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1983), Gerhard Schulz, *Kleist: eine Biographie* (München: C. H. Beck, 2007), Thomas Wichmann, *Heinrich von Kleist* (Stuttgart: Metzlersche Verlagsbuchhandlung, 1988). See also Henry Pickford, "Thinking with Kleist: Michael Kohlhaas and Moral Luck," *The German Quarterly* 86.4 (Fall 2013): 381-403.

[4] An important exception to this general account may be found in "Von der Tugendlehre zur Lasterschule: Die sogenannte 'Kantkrise' und Fichtes Wissenschaftslehre" in *Goethe, Kleist: Literatur, Politik und Wissenschaft um 1800*

today, to say that an accurate perception of nature requires an active soul is anathema. What is a soul, after all? Since the early nineteenth century, the emerging disciplinary boundaries, which were part of the profound societal changes at the time that Kleist was working on establishing himself in a career, are now entrenched, and remain largely unchallenged. In a time consumed with advancing emerging concepts of distanced objectivity, and with creating distinctions between what can be empirically or logically proven, and what is mere desire, myth, or prejudice, Kleist's perception of the natural world in which something as undefinable as an active soul is required leaves him vulnerable to critique and to misunderstanding. Reading Kleist's critique from within long-established disciplinary boundaries presupposes its inefficacy. This chapter will read it, instead, in the context of Kleist's illustration of the failed idea of race theory, one of Kant's most famous academic products in Kleist's day. In doing so, it will illustrate what Kleist sees as the tragedy of Kant's more mechanical idea of perception, as it may be, and indeed was, performed in his race theory, a topic central to both definitions of scientific theory and to ideas of nature and of humans in nature at the end of the eighteenth century.[5] Also written during a time of newly established scientific disciplines in which philosophy is severed from literature, "Betrothal" illustrates the value of love—a subject most associated with stories and poetry—in service to accurate perception of the empirical world.

Fascinated by natural science for his entire, if short, life, Kleist transforms science experiments into literary ones.[6] While physics appears prominently in his work, the erstwhile student of physics expresses his criticism of the overly technical, distanced nature of emerging scientific disciplines in the German university. In a letter to his half-sister, Ulrike von

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(Berlin: Erich Schmidt Verlag, 2011), 53-75, Michael Mandelartz argues that Kleist's so-called 'Kant crisis' actually comes from a reading of Fichte's *Die Bestimmung des Menschen* (1800), and that instead of referring to epistemology, Kleist is looking at Kant's work from a moral perspective. Kleist's crisis comes about when, because everyone is wearing colored glasses, it becomes impossible to discern good from evil. See also Tim Mehigan, *Heinrich von Kleist: Writing after Kant* (Camden House, 2011). Mehigan focuses on a literary analysis of the depiction of Kant's philosophy in Kleist's stories.

[5] Gilman reads this story as a critique of Kant's absolutism with respect to the aesthetics of blackness and race. Indebted to this most influential essay, and working with this idea, this essay uses Kleist's concept of the "dead eye" which he describes in his letters to further elucidate Kleist's idea of perception and the perspective on nature that this view would entail. I do not argue that Kant's epistemology must be read with respect to his race theory, but, instead, that it can be, and that it was.

[6] See Blamberger, *Heinrich von Kleist: Biographie*, 66-7.

Kleist, in February of 1801, one month before his Kant-crisis letter, Kleist writes that it is impossible for him to choose one discipline over another, just as a father cannot chose one son over another. He writes that he cannot bury himself like a mole in a hole and forget everything else, but also finds it unrealistic to flit from one field to another and remain only on the surface.[7] The demonstrated polarity of "Betrothal," written late in Kleist's career, illustrates a consistency of philosophical concerns exhibited earlier in letters to his fiancée and sister during the time of his own failed engagement and before he abandoned his formal study of physics. In November of 1800, Kleist wrote to his physics student and fiancée, Wilhelmina von Zenge, about natural science, his concept of *wahrnehmen,* or "true perception:"

> All human beings can see and hear, but to truly perceive [*wahrnehmen*] that is, to fashion an impression of the sensory experience with the soul and to think   that all cannot do to the fullest extent. They [those who do not engage their soul] have nothing more than a dead eye, which takes so little that is true from the picture of nature, like the picture of the sky in a mirrored reflection of the sea. The soul must be engaged [*thätig*], or else all of the appearances of nature are lost, even if all of the senses are active . . . [translation mine].[8]

What does Kleist mean by engaging an active soul, using it to fashion an impression from the senses? It would follow that without activating the soul, a person takes in the world through a "dead eye," seeing the picture of nature as a superficial reflection, as one might see the sky in a still sea. Indeed, Kleist describes "*wahrnehmen*," "truly perceiving the empirical world," as interaction between the soul and the phenomenon. In Kleist's view, then, "*Wahrnehmung,*" or "true perception," would require a human observer skilled in natural science and philosophy, but also one capable of empathy, and of imagining a picture of a living and moving nature, that is, a person also literate in the arts. For Kleist, physics is only a part of the picture of empirical nature, and thus, it cannot serve as a model for a possible structure of nature based on organizing principles. Instead, he

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[7] Kleist, *Heinrich von Kleist Sämtliche Werke und Briefe: Briefe von und an Heinrich von Kleist 1793-1811* vol. 4 (Frankfurt am Main: Deutscher Klassiker Verlag, 1997), 200.

[8] Kleist, *Briefe*, 172. Kleist writes, "*Sehen* und *hören* & können alle Menschen, aber *wahrnehmen,* das heißt mit der Seele den Eindruck der Sinne auffassen u[nd] denken, das können bei Weitem nicht alle. Sie haben nichts als das todte Auge, u[nd] das nimmt das Bild der Natur so wenig wahr, wie die Spiegelfläche des Meeres das Bild des Himmels. Die Seele muß thätig sein, sonst sind doch all Erscheinungen der Natur verloren, wenn sie auch auf alle Sinne wirkten..."

presents empirical nature as a kind of broken narrative. Given the constraints of new disciplinary boundaries, Kleist's view of empirical reality would best be elucidated in a story.

In Kleist's stories, the problem of misperception, and the idea of literature as an empirical science experiment, become central themes. It makes sense to focus on his 1811 story, "Betrothal in Santo Domingo", to illustrate this idea, because the conflict in this story revolves around misperceptions due to assumptions based on color—a seemingly obvious empirical phenomenon. Yet, in the case of skin-color-based race theory, which was newly invented by Immanuel Kant in 1775 with his first of three essays on the topic, "On the Different Races of Man" (*Von den verschiedenen Racen der Menschen*), color does not actually signify as Kant believed it to do.[9] For example, Kant began his thoughts on color earlier with his 1964 treatise *Observations on the Feeling of the Beautiful and the Sublime (Beobachtungen über das Gefühl des Schönen und Erhabenen*), where he famously dismisses a statement made by an African in the employment of a certain Father Labat, that one could see that a man was stupid, as he was black from head to toe.[10] In this treatise, Kant begins his thoughts on his aesthetics, attempting to distinguish the beautiful from the sublime using empirical examples with respect to categorizing people, working on the whole to be able to judge the inner from the outer. For example, he writes of the taste among men for women who have a paler color is understandable, for that color is accompanied by tender sensitivity, which belongs to the character of the sublime.[11] Color acts as a key to the puzzle that is the inner nature of classes of people.

Kant defended his race theory in a hotly contested debate through the 1780s, during a time in which he wrote and published his three critiques.[12]

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[9] See Robert Bernasconi, "Who Invented the Concept of Race? Kant's Role in the Enlightenment Construction of Race," *Race*, ed. Robert Bernasconi (Oxford: Blackwell, 2001), 11-36.

[10] Immanuel Kant, *Beobachtungen über das Gefühl des Schönen und Erhabenen,* in *Akademieausgabe von Kants Gesammelten Schriften* (abbreviated AA) II, (Berlin, 1902), 255.

[11] Kant, *Beobachtungen*, 236.

[12] See Sally Hatch Gray, "Kant's Race Theory, Forster's Counter, and the Metaphysics of Color" in *The Eighteenth Century: Theory and Interpretation* 53 no. 4 (Winter 2012): 393-412. This essay outlines the debate between explorer and naturalist Georg Forster and Kant over Kant's race theory. Forster argued for an empirical, deductive scientific theory against Kant's metaphysically justified principles of nature. Forster was seen to have won that debate by many. Yet, Kant's race theory survives, as Johann Blumenbach cites and adopts it in *Handbuch der Naturgeschichte* (Göttingen 1825): 22.

In "Betrothal," Kleist illustrates the futility of this project, along with the narrowness of Kant's concept of perception, by enabling his reader through the sensory misperception of any given moment in the text to focus on what is not confused, the love, and so to experience a living eye. This living eye he sets in stark contrast to the destructive prejudice embedded in a carefully delineated scientific theory which resulted from what Kleist deemed to be a dead one. Indeed, Kleist's choice of freedom wars in which to set his story of rebellion during a time when he could no longer publish his diatribes against Napoleon was aimed not only at Prussia's occupier. The former slaves of Santo Domingo, by defeating a foe that no one in Europe had yet bested, also proved invalid influential theories regarding the inferiority of black people.

In Santo Domingo, Empirically Self-Evident Categories Impede Understanding

Yet, this story is no simple diatribe against racism and slavery. It begins in a state of confusion, a house in which the people are currently living has been burned by a former slave freed by his master. This is not a story where black people are good and white bad, or vice versa, but rather it is one in which the black people become the white oppressors, or in some interpretations, take on the role of Napoleon. The white officer becomes the victim, and then the "monster," who murders the heroine. She is both black and white, the daughter of French man who took advantage of a woman of color. The Haitian Revolution is not only famous for the success of the slaves, but also for the massacre of the native Europeans who did not get away. The slave has been wronged and wrongs, as does the master. The narration allows for opposite and impossible empirical statements, such that the reader comes to realize in this world of mistrust and war, little is certain outside of violence and fear. The characters as well as the reader have difficulty understanding what is going on.[13] By the end, there is no more meaning to the ever-present race vocabulary, black and white, there is only

[13] See Andreas Gailus, "Language Unmoored: On Kleist's *The Betrothal in St. Domingue*" in *The Germanic Review* 85 (2010): 20-43. Gailus argues Kleist uses revolution as a mode of presentation: "In short, to read Kleist's story is to be subjected to the progressive undoing of the spatial, temporal, and semantic coordinates that ground our orientation in the world; it is to be deprived of the security of knowing where one stands" 24. He concludes that the text "self-reflexively explores the possibility of social and linguistic connectedness in the absence of established meanings and conventions" 20.

the struggle against, and tragic loss of life to, the oppression that is the system of race hierarchy and the state of war that it produces.[14]

The arsonist, "a terrible [*fürchterlicher*] old black man," Congo Hoango, has been given his freedom, the job of over-seer on a plantation, and his own female slave companion, Babekan, in the place of his deceased wife.[15] He is a powerful black man and a leader during a revolution in the name of liberty, who takes revenge against the former slave holders, including the French, and other whites left on the island. The massacre at the end of the Haitian revolution struck fear among plantation owners throughout the colonies of the Americas. Kleist's Congo Hoango is both a frightening, blood-thirsty villain, and a hero for the cause of freedom. At the same time, he is a slave owner, having been given a woman, Babekan, by his former master. While using the language of a white colonist, calling Congo Hoango "terrible" at the beginning, the "monster" at the end of the story is the white Romeo, Herr Gustav von der Ried.[16] Regardless of the outcome of the revolution, though, what becomes clear is that violence will not solve the basic problem of the race categories themselves. The injustices only persist as characters are born into them.

Much the way Shakespeare's Romeo is born a Montague and Juliet a Capulet, Kleist's lovers do not have the option to choose their parents. Yet the warring clans separating these lovers, defined simply as "black" and

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[14] See Ray Fleming "Race and the Difference It Makes in Kleist's 'Die Verlobung in St. Domingo'" in *The German Quarterly* 65 vol. 3/4 (1992): 306-317. See also Peter Horn, "Hatte Kleist Rassenvorurteile? Eine kritische Auseinandersetzung mit der Literatur zur *Velobung in St. Domingo*" in *Monatshefte* 67 no. 2 (1975): 117-128. Horn discusses how scholarship used different ideas of Kleist's possible racial prejudices in interpretations of this story. Kleist uses the language of racism throughout the story, referring to Congo Hoango as a "terrible" black man, for instance. After careful analysis of the literature, the characters, and the story, though, Horn concludes that "Betrothal" may be best interpreted as a critique of the race categories themselves.

[15] Kleist, "The Engagement in Santo Domingo" in *The Marquise of O— and other Stories* trans. Martin Greenberg, preface Thomas Mann (New York: Criterion books, 1960), 193. The title of this story has been translated into English as both "Engagement in Santo Domingo" and "Betrothal in Santo Domingo." Most recently, in a translation by Juan LePuen, *Betrothal in Santo Domingo* (Kindle Edition, 2013). For the purposes of this chapter, I quote an excellent translation which uses the word "Engagement" in the title, however, I feel that "Betrothal" is a more specific translation of "Verlobung" for this story. Kleist, "Die Verlobung in St. Domingo" in *Sämtliche Werke und Briefe* vol. 3, 222.

[16] For a discussion of semiotics and the use of race vocabulary in this story, see James P. Martin, "Reading Race in Kleist's 'Die Verlobung in St. Domingo.'"

"white," are more arbitrary. The heroine, a young "*Mestize*" named Toni, plays both sides. Because Toni's skin tone is so light, she is tasked with deceiving the enemy, luring hapless soldiers in to the house and to their doom. The hero, a Swiss officer named Gustav, meets the heroine, Toni, when he comes to her door for help. As Toni has been put in this precarious position by her mother, she has been born into violence. Toni's mother, a "mulatto" named Babekan, was cruelly deceived by her father, a Frenchman, who rejected Babekan, and who insured that she be horribly whipped. As a result Babekan hates all white people. Toni, on the other hand, does not share her mother's hatred, and later in the story, identifies herself as white. While people take sides, apparently based on their own determinate color, the colors may also confuse and deceive those whose perceptions of them are overly determinate.

During Toni's attempt to seduce Gustav, they share an intimate moment, and in spite of her complexion, "which repelled him, he could have sworn that he had never seen anything more beautiful." Just as the juxtaposition of opposites in this sentence forms images which, taken together, cannot make any sense, their courtship is brief and unlikely. She sits in his lap, he asks her if it is necessary to be white in order to gain her favor, and she then "sank into his breast with a most charming blush."[17] She reminds him of his lost love, and she is overcome by compassion, "throwing her arms around his neck and mingling her tears with his."[18] After they presumably have sex, she collapses into tears. This moment may be less confusing than it seems. Looking at her situation from her perspective, one might consider that she is not married to Gustav, and that he is her mother's prey. Toni's French father rejected her black mother after she became pregnant with Toni, will Gustav behave in the same way? The power imbalance between white men and woman of color on a colonial island should not be ignored. Furthermore, Gustav is an officer in the army who has been previously engaged, while Toni is a fifteen-year-old girl. As he repeatedly states that he will marry her, promising her everything that he has, Toni is tasked with deceiving him, so that her family can kill him and his family. Should she trust him or her mother? A horrible situation for a powerless fifteen-year-old: she must choose.

Toni's decision becomes clear when she responds to Babekan's plan, "flushing with anger" that it is "shameful and contemptible to violate the laws of hospitality in this way against people whom one had lured into one's house." Toni asks,

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[17] Kleist, "Engagement," 205. Kleist, "Verlobung," 235.
[18] Kleist, "Engagement," 208. Kleist, "Verlobung," 238.

What harm has this young man done to us? He is not even a Frenchman by birth, but a Swiss, as we have learned; so why should we fall on him like bandits and kill him and rob him? Do such grievances as we may have against the planters here exist in the part of the island from which he comes? Is it not, rather, quite obvious that he is an entirely noble-minded and honourable man who has in no way participated in the injustices committed by his race against the blacks?[19]

While her path to this point is wholly confusing, this climax has clarity. Shown questioning that all Europeans belong to a "white" category of oppressors, such that they are equally guilty of injustices against black people, Toni commits heresy in her mother's eyes. Transcending the immediate racially-charged reality, she also appeals to a higher, indeed ancient law, of being friendly to guests and travelers. Thus, in Toni's mind, honor exists. She has fallen in love with Gustav, rejecting the idea that color signifies with respect to him, her loyalty to her vengeful mother severed.

The tragedy comes about when Gustav, now her betrothed, mistrusts her.[20] Stuck in an impossible situation, Toni attempts to fool her family by pretending to capture Gustav and ties him up. She then brings his family, who had been waiting nearby, to him, to save his life. She plays her role too convincingly for everyone, but especially for Gustav. Toni cannot transcend her faint blackness enough so that Gustav will trust her to be on the white side. Gustav misunderstands, thinking that Toni deceived him, and kills her, only to learn in the end that she was on his side all along. Dying in his arms, her last words to him are, "you should not have mistrusted me!" As they futilely try to remove the bullet, it becomes clear that "the shot had pierced right through her and her soul had already departed to a better world."[21] In this story, people have souls which can transcend. Having murdered his true love, our Swiss Romeo then turns his gun on himself. Gustav's mistake is that he cannot see past Toni's skin color into her soul. His inclination for evidential clarity overcomes his ability to see truth. He may have a soul, but it is not "*tätig*," or active, in this moment when he shoots her, as she presents him with no danger. She is holding a child in her arms, not a weapon, and

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[19] Kleist, "Engagement," 210-211. Kleist, "Verlobung," 240-241.

[20] See Anette Horn, "'Du hättest mir nicht misstrauen sollen!' Eine Utopie der Gewaltlosigkeit in Kleists 'Die Verlobung in St. Domingo'" in *Kleist-Jahrbuch* (2013): 271-279. Working with Gailus's thesis in "Language Unmoored," Horn writes that Toni's situation illustrates the question of trust and mistrust in a reality in which the sign is separated from the signified, and believes this to be a central question in Kleist's work as a whole (271).

[21] Kleist, "Engagement," 227. Kleist, "Verlobung," 259.

the hand of Gustav's uncle. He shoots her because of this misperception, seeing his lover, a fifteen-year-old girl, only through a static, dead eye.

Throughout the story, there is a problem of *wahrnehmen,* of accurate perception, propagated by confusing contrary statements and images at the level of the sentence and supported thematically by the pre-existing race categories themselves. In the end, the misleading and violent race categories persist, the mixed-race lovers die, and the families are separated according to color. The story illustrates that the only way out of the apparently ontological chains of scientifically-justified race categories is by activating one's soul, and by simply and counter-intuitively, trusting in the love of the foreign other. Kleist's depiction of the fate of these lovers illustrates the problem he has with Kant's scientific method.

Kant's Theory of Human Races in the Context of his Philosophy of Natural Science

In his treatise, the *Metaphysical Foundations of Natural Science* (*Metaphysische Anfangsgründe der Naturwissenschaft,* 1786), Immanuel Kant worked from ideas he established in the *Critique of Pure Reason* (*Kritik der reinen Vernunft,* 1781) to define natural science as a discipline during a time of increasing specialization. He began by introducing a "two-fold doctrine of nature, the doctrine of the body and the doctrine of the soul, where the first considers extended nature, the second thinking nature."[22] As the title of this work implies, Kant's idea of natural science must include a doctrine of thinking nature, a metaphysics characterized by pre-existing principles of the natural world. One may find examples of judgments based on these principles in mathematics, any addition problem for instance gives new information about numbers, but in this essay, Kant focused on Newtonian physics. Newton described forces behind the movement of physical objects by using mathematical principles. Thus, he could predict how a body would move before it moved. That is, one did not have to watch a body, a ripe apple, say, fall straight down to the ground each time to know how it will fall before that happens. For the outcome may be predicted using principles of the forces at play, principles which were based on mathematics. Thus, using math, one can learn about the empirical world, and make judgments. These kinds of judgments are *a priori:* they can be justified pre-

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[22] Kant, *Metaphysical Foundations of Natural Science*, trans. and ed. Michael Friedman (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 3. Kant, *Metaphysische Anfangsgründe der Naturwissenschaft* in *Akademieausgabe von Immanuel Kants Gesammelten Werken* IV (Berlin: Prussian Academy of Science, 1902),467.

experience, with math, but they are also synthetic in that they provide content which is not already contained in the original concept. Synthetic judgments give new information. Yet, unlike judgments based purely on empirical observation, these *a priori*, synthetic judgments can be apodictically certain. Physics, like mathematics, was for Kant apodictic, or absolutely certain, and provided an example of how nature itself can be seen to be governed by metaphysical principles. For this reason, Newtonian physics was Kant's model for an aspect of the soul of nature that we can grasp.

Kant thought natural science based solely on empirical data was improper. This term, "improper," reminds one of a fraction whose top number is bigger than the bottom one, such that it is difficult to discern the simplest number, a puzzle which still needs solving. The systematic ordering of natural things is mere natural description, for Kant, and could be ordered differently. Such categorization is useful for understanding, and he calls these "Schuleeinteilungen" or school categories. They are purely empirical, and are missing the crucial key that could substantiate that order authoritatively. They are missing a principle, the like to which may be found in Newtonian physics. Natural description can thus be clearly distinguished from "natural science," according to Kant, which "first treats its object wholly according to *a priori* principles."[23] At the same time, for Kant, all experiences are processed through the categories of the mind. The mind, like nature, is ordered according to principles. While experience is the root of knowledge, empirical experience is always processed through categories. While things outside of our processing of them must exist for this concept of perception of reality to be valid, humans cannot actually experience things outside of our minds, our processes. Thus, Kant argues, we have no actual experience that things in themselves do exist.

While the empirical sciences in which Kant lectured more than any other for thirty years at the university in Königsberg—physical geography and anthropology---cannot rise to apodictic certainty in his view, his distinctions between "school" categories and "real" categories of nature are to be found here as well.[24] Furthermore, certainty is the goal. Most significantly for this discussion, while writing his three critiques and his piece on the metaphysical foundations of natural science, Kant wrote two essays published in 1785 and 1789 in which he delineated principles of nature to justify a new skin-color-

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[23] Kant, *Metaphysical Foundations of Natural Science*, 4. Kant, *Metaphysische Anfangsgründe der Naturwissenschaft*, AA IV, 468.
[24] For a break-down of the courses that Kant taught, see Emmanuel Chukwudi Eze, "The Color of Reason: The Idea of 'Race' in Kant's Anthropology," in *Anthropology and the German Enlightenment: Perspectives on Humanity*, ed. Katherine M. Faull (Lewisburg: Bucknell University Press, 1995), 200-241.

based theory of human races. In his 1785 essay, "Definition of a Concept of a Human Race," Kant makes a distinction between "Schuleeinteilungen" ("school classifications") and "Natureinteilungen" ("natural classifications").[25] Categories of organisms according "Schuleeinteilungen," including Linnaean categories, are helpful to learn about nature, but are not certain enough to reflect the principles of nature. These categories shift and change due to new discoveries. Kant sees Georges-Louis Leclerc Buffon's (1707-1788) law, found in his *Histoire naturelle* (1749), on the other hand, which identified species according to those who could mate and produce fertile offspring, as unchanging and certain, and so as evidencing a natural principle.[26] Working with this idea, Kant considered skin color to be an "unausbleibliche Eigenschaft" or "an inevitably inherited characteristic" which could separate humans into four discrete race categories. For him, color was predictive.[27] One did not need to wait to see the color of a child, one could know it by looking at the parents. For Kant, race was a "Realgattung," a real category of nature, while the more flexible, less certain, Linnaean categories based solely on a collection of empirical observations, were only "Nominalgattungen" or "categories in name only."

When reading Kant's critical philosophy alongside his anthropology and his philosophy of natural science, in other words, without strict adherence to the confines of disciplinary boundaries, which were in fact of issue at the time Kant wrote, one finds not just thematic consistencies in Kant's writing on natural science and metaphysics, but also a consistency of approach.[28] Kant worked from principles toward objective certainty through categorization. In the case of his race theory, when the data led naturalists to question the principle, Kant dug in his heels, and jettisoned the data, not

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[25] Kant, "Bestimmung des Begriffs einer Menschenrace," AA VIII, 89-106.
[26] Georges-Louis Leclerc Buffon, *Histoire naturelle générale et particulière avec la description du Cabinet du Roi* (Paris: De L'Imprimerie royale, 1749-1804).
[27] See Mark Larrimore, "Sublime Waste: Kant on the Destiny of the 'Races'" in *Canadian Journal of Philosophy* 25 (1999): 99-125.
[28] Scholarship on Kant since the Second World War has been careful to argue for Kant's disciplinary boundaries, especially between the race theory and his critical work. For an example of a reading which highlights the connections between Kant's work in physical geography, anthropology, and critical theory, see G. Gerland, "Immanuel Kant, seine geographischen und anthropologischen Arbeiten" in *Kant-Studien* 10 (1905): 1-9. While Gerland celebrates the breath of Kant's creativity and his ability to see the whole of nature, in that same volume on page 223, Theodor Elsenhaus remarks in a "Selbstanzeigen" that, with respect to Kant's race theory, one notes a tendency in Kant's work to make out of empty logical forms measures for living beings.

the principle.[29] Written during a time when print material was multiplying, threatening to replace the academic lecture, the highly technical language as well as the objective definitions in Kant's work served to ensure authority, while the content achieved some measure of academic success.[30] In turn, his race theory, though widely criticized, served to insure continuing theoretical support for African chattel slavery in the academy.

While the repercussions of this theory are catastrophic, the theory itself is pure colonial fantasy.[31] Working logically, empirically, and systematically to remove all bias from his empirical science, Kant created an ultimate weapon for marginalizing every other group of people and individual who could not identify as European. This fact was not lost on many of his contemporaries. In his epistolary treatise, *On the Aesthetic Education of Man* (*Über die ästhetische Erziehung des Menschen,* 1795), Friedrich Schiller (1759-1805) discusses the repercussions of the emerging discipline of philosophy as exemplified in Kant's work. He argues that the highly technical perimeters being carefully placed around discussions of beauty, and of perception itself, are a new kind of tyranny. Then, with regard to Kant's race theory he writes,

> In other continents we shall honour humanity in the negro; in Europe profane it in the thinker. The old principles will remain; but they will wear the dress of the century, and Philosophy now lend her name to a repression formerly authorized by the Church.[32]

In an age of globalization, Schiller writes, while we can honor the humanity of the African, the European thinker creates a scientific theory which does no more than to repurpose the old prejudices of the church. These prejudices, given scientific status, may then be used to oppress people. Schiller's assessment is helpful in this context to illuminate Kleist's fundamental problem with Kantian philosophy. Using principles of physics,

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[29] See Gray, "Kant's Race Theory, Foster's Counter, and the Metaphysics of Color."
[30] See Chad Wellman, "Kant's Critical Technology" in *Organizing Enlightenment*, 123-150. Wellman makes this argument regarding the technical nature of Kant's critical work.
[31] See Susanne Zantop, *Colonial Fantasies: Conquest, Family and Nation in Precolonial Germany*, 1770-1870 (Durham: Duke University Press, 1997). Zantop describes the German fascination with colonialism before Germany as a nation had colonies, calling the phenomenon "colonial fantasies."
[32] Friedrich Schiller, *On the Aesthetic Education of Man in a Series of Letters, (Über die ästhetische Erziehung des Menschen in einer Reihe von Briefen), English and German facing*, ed. and trans. Elizabeth M. Wilkinson and L. A. Willoughby (Oxford: Clarendon, 1967), 46-47.

and of epistemology, in Kleist's view, Kant's philosophy has effectively distanced the soul from perception. The clearest example of what this means for people in the world may be found in the race theory.

Empirical Science: Governed by Principles or a Broken Narrative?

For Kleist, a process of perception rooted through *a priori* principles is too limiting to accurately describe human experience of nature. An enthusiastic young physicist, Kleist did not see the laws of physics to be a sufficient analogy, or model, for a possible structure of nature as a whole, or for human perception of nature. A more radical empiricist, Kleist's stories do not depict such a principled, or ordered, picture of nature. Instead, his narration in which opposite, seemingly impossible juxtapositions of such moments as houses being burned down and then lived in, women being both hideous and beautiful, black being white and white black, forces the reader to stop and consider. This cesura acts to break up a convoluted narrative, leaving readers to seek consistent threads on their own.

Furthermore, "Betrothal" demonstrates the fundamental problem with the idea that metaphysical principles guide a perception of other people. When meeting a black man, for instance, Kant believed that one could tell that he was stupid by his color. He used aesthetics, a science originally based on sensory perception of the empirical world, and he used physics and the idea of principles of nature, to divine the meaning of blackness. Blackness could then be predictive.[33] In all of this work, the physics, the epistemology, the aesthetics, and the anthropology, Kant establishes the use of metaphysical principles to interpret empirical reality. Written in the form of highly technical proofs, Kant's principles may act to mediate simple observance, such as the moment of meeting the black man. Kant's principles may be used to judge the black man before looking into his eyes and smiling, shaking his hand, having a conversation, learning his language, and hearing his stories. For Kleist, this is a conscious act to deny the engaged soul. The resulting picture of this black man, then, is as superficial as Kleist's description of the "dead eye," like a sky mirrored in a sea. One does not see the sky, but only a reflection of it. Indeed, Kant's understanding of the man is mere colonial fantasy.

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[33] See John Hoffmann, "Kant's Aesthetic Categories: Race in the Critique of Judgment" *Diacritics* 44 no. 2 (2016): 54-81. With his idea of "ideal beauty," Hoffmann argues that Kant makes race an aesthetic category in the *Critique of Judgment*.

In a letter to his fiancée, Wilhelmine von Zenge, in March, 1801, Kleist wrote in reference to Kant's philosophy: "Wir können nicht entscheiden, ob das was wir Wahrheit nennen, wahrhaftig Wahrheit ist oder ob es uns nur so scheint" (205). ("We cannot discern, whether that which we call Truth is actual Truth, or whether only appears to be.") This hinges on the word "*entscheiden,*" "to decide, to discern," which is an action taken on the part of the observer. In trying to remove all prejudice, in trying to understand perception as a mechanical process, in part, to see if there can be anything certain about it, Kleist finds that Kant limits the ability for one to decide. Indeed, objectivity in modern empirical science requires distance, the removal of scruples and prejudices of the observer. In asking where the "*wahrhaftige Wahrheit,*" "the substantiated truth," is from such a process, Kleist rejects Kant's idea of the truth itself. With only the limited the tools that are at one's disposal in Kant's highly technical, highly specialized form of philosophy, Kleist feels like he cannot proceed with understanding the world. For in his view, the soul must be active in order to have a truth which means anything.

Interestingly, both Kleist and Kant conceive of a nature where something beyond the material is at play. The differences lie in how they view the "soul" of nature, and the role of the human being within this concept of nature. For Kant, truth requires distance and disinterest—he maintains a clear subject versus object duality—for Kleist, it is just the opposite: the subject is immersed in a constantly changing empirical reality, such that little can be understood as certain.[34] In "Betrothal," there are few rocks on which to stand in a constantly shifting sea, and certainty comes only from a sense of honor to display "*Gastfreundlichkeit,*" or "hospitality" to a stranger in peril.

To understand the differences at play between these two concepts of nature, it is helpful to consider the work of another most famous, and more successful—if one is to judge based on lasting contributions to the field— natural scientist of the time, Johann Wolfgang von Goethe (1749-1832). Like Kleist, Goethe sees nature as constantly changing. Goethe's empiricism requires an acceptance of the limitations of the scientist who is unable to see every aspect of an organism. Goethe writes, "An organic being is so multifaceted in its exterior, so varied and inexhaustible in its interior, that we cannot find enough points of view nor develop in ourselves enough

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[34] In *Schiller as Philosopher: A Reexamination* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2005), 3, Friedrich Beiser argues that Kant's conception of freedom and moral authority is compatible with the repression of sensible feelings and desires, and it demands a sharp metaphysical dualism. Indeed, Kant's dualism and repression of feelings and desires characterize his view of human apprehension of nature as well.

organs of perception to avoid killing it when we analyze it."[35] Goethe views
the scientist as limited, in the thick of a manifold of experience, such that
static categorization is barbaric.[36] Because of this, Goethe focuses on the
change itself, on metamorphosis. The change is not limited to the organism,
the scientist observing nature changes too.[37] As he expresses in his poem,
"The Metamorphosis of Plants," an elegy devoted to empirical observation,
a scientist must use intuition, and this process of understanding requires a
love of nature which also changes the scientist, much the way love effects
two people. It is a kind of hyper-empiricism, where the scientist's empathy
plays a role in the experience, and where only change is constant. If Kleist

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[35] Goethe, "The Extent to Which the Idea of 'Beauty is Perfection in Combination
with Freedom' May Be Applied to Living Organisms" in *Goethe: Scientific Studies*
ed. & trans. by Douglas Miller (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1995), 22.
Goethe, *Werke* vol. 16 "In wiefern die Idee: Schönheit sei Vollkommenheit mit
Freiheit, auf organische Naturen angewendet werden könne" 219. This idea that
analysis kills the organism may be found, as well, in Schiller's description of Kant's
treatment of beauty at the beginning of his *Letters*, where the "fleeting phenomenon"
of beauty, is caught, chained with rules, and "*zerfleischt*," having its flesh ripped
from its bones, or made into concepts, by the "*Scheidekünstler*," or alchemist, until
all that is left is a "sorry skeleton of words." In the end, any truth that comes out of
this analysis appears as a paradox. For a discussion of this critique and of the
phenomenon of de-sensitivity toward living subjects see Bernd Hüppauf "Giftlauche
und Electropop: Desensibilisierung am Beispiel der frühen Froschexperimente" in
*Gefühllose Aufklärung: Anaisthesis oder die Unempfindlichkeit im Zeitalter der
Aufklärung* (Bielefeld: Aisthesis Verlag, 2012), 311-342.

[36] Johann Wolfgang von Goethe, "The Metamorphosis of Plants," in *The
Metamorphosis of Plants*, ed. Gordon L. Miller, trans. Douglas Miller (Cambridge
MA: The MIT Press, 2009) 1-3. "Die Metamorphose der Pflanzen" in *Gedichte,
Gedenkausgabe der Werke, Briefe und Gespräche*, vol. 1 (Zürich: Ernst Beutler,
1949) 203-6. Goethe writes, "Aye, Name upon name assails thy ears, and each/ More
barbarous-sounding than the one before / Like unto each the form, yet none
alike;/And so the choir hits a secret law,/ A sacred mystery" 1.

[37] Frederick Amrine, "The Metamorphosis of the Scientist" in *Goethe's Way of
Science: A Phenomenology of Nature*, ed. David Seamon and Arthur Zajonc (New
York: State University of New York Press, 1998), 33-54. Amrine explains how
Goethean science is more empirical and less abstract, not only than that of Kant, but
also as science is often practiced in general. He writes, "In Goethe's version of
scientific method, one does not abandon the phenomena, imagine a mechanism or
cause, and then proceed to test one's abstract hypotheses by constructing an artificial
experience in which individual phenomena are torn out of context. Rather, one stays
with the phenomena; thinks within them; accedes with one's intentionality to their
patterns, which gradually opens one's thinking to an intuition of their structure" 37.

depicts natural science in his work, his idea of nature is much closer to that of Goethe than to that of Kant.

Kant is focused on what can be known for certain, on classifications, using physics as a model. The classifications establish clear boundaries. Goethe, on the other hand, sees connections between species, he sees humans as part of an environment, such that classifications are used merely as discussion points. Focused instead on the concept of a living, creative, constantly changing nature, Goethe made an early discovery of import to what would become evolutionary biology three-quarters of a century in the future, finding similarities in the upper jaw of humans with that of other mammals. Kant believed that humans were created in God's image. In his comprehensive examination of this topic, *Kant, Herder, The Birth of Anthropology*, John H. Zammito explains Kant's position:

> Epigenesis is a theory of immanent change. Kant was prepared to believe it operated within fixed structures in the biological world. But he never acknowledged the ontological commitment that epigenesis carried with it. Ultimately, he took refuge in his theory of "regulative ideas" or "reflective (teleological) judgments." He never relented in his denunciation of hylozoism as a *logical* contradiction. The very idea of emergence or evolution on our sense *frightened* him. Nothing was more important to him, metaphysically or methodologically, than to police the boundaries between the organic and the inorganic, and, again between man and animal [italics his].[38]

Kant believed that humans, as with all species, were pre-formed in nature. The fact that humans can reflect on the possible teleological order of nature allows for a point of advantage that other animals do not have. Fundamentally, this allows humans a privileged position among nature's creations, from which to judge and to assign categories.

In contrast, in "Toward a General Comparative Theory," Goethe writes,

> Man is in the habit of valuing things according to how well they serve his purposes. It lies in the nature of the human condition that man must think of himself as the last stage of creation. Why, then, should he not also believe that he is its ultimate purpose? Why, then, should he not be allowed this small deception? Given his need for objects and his use for them, he draws the conclusion that they have been created to serve him.[39]

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[38] John H. Zammito, *Kant, Herder, and the Birth of Anthropology* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2002), 306-7.
[39] Goethe, "Toward a General Comparative Theory" in *Goethe: Scientific Studies*, 53. Goethe, *Werke* vol. 17, 226-7.

Although Kant saw the organism as more than mechanism, as an end-in-itself, and as infinite, he assumes a hierarchy such that humans are the highest level of nature's creations. So, although Goethe admired much of Kant's teleological view on the organism, that it is more than mere mechanism, that it is an end-in-itself, Kant's dualism and concept of the relationship between the human and nature still falls prey to Goethe's critique above. For Goethe, the belief in a privileged position of the human being blinds the scientist to the many-faceted, constantly evolving nature, to which he or she is also a part. Furthermore, Kant's focus on categorization allows for the objectification of organisms, including other humans, denying them the freedom of self-actualization.[40] In short, Kant's idea that discovering the principles of nature is a rational process which carefully regulates and controls the use of one's empathy with another being in one's understanding of it, is, ironically, partially a result of his fervent desire to defend a belief in the God-given superiority of humans over all other creatures, and the superiority of whites over all other colors. That is, as Schiller notes above, it comes from religion, not science.[41]

Conclusion: Philosophy as Fantasy

"Betrothal" illustrates that Kleist rejects the idea of being able to judge the inner from the outer and of finding certainty through principles of nature. On the one hand, Kleist is a radical empiricist, while at the same time, a hopeless idealist, believing in the necessity of a soul. In the moment of his so-called "Kant crisis," Kleist states that he cannot find his highest goal, presumably that may be a scientifically validated understanding of perception.[42] He can no longer rely purely on any one field of study, on

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[40] See Goethe, "Die Lepaden," *Werke* Vol.17, 368-370. In Goethe's view, even duck barnacles, reaching between and among one another, demonstrate the freedom to make their way in the world, however they can fathom to do it. For a modern example of using narrative in natural science, see Peter Wohlleben, *The Hidden Life of Trees: What They Feel, How They Communicate; Discoveries from a Secret World*, trans. Jane Billinghurst (Vancouver, BC: Greystone, 2016).

[41] For a contemporary example on the lines of Schiller's critique, see Yuval Noah Harari, *Sapiens: A Brief History of Humankind* (New York: Harper, 2015), 109. Here Harari presents the mathematical concept of equality for all humans as originating with the idea of all humans being created by God. That is, what looks like a principle of nature backed up by mathematics is just veiled religion. The problem with using the mathematical concept of equality to protect universal human rights is that it sets up an equation in which only white male Europeans measure up.

[42] Kleist, *Briefe*, 205.

physics, or on epistemology. For when science becomes fantasy, then fantasy becomes real. Reality becomes what we make of it. While essences, things-in-themselves, must exist, but cannot be known to exist, in Kant's view, Kleist takes the next radical step in his empiricism, allowing both complete uncertainty in any given moment, and the necessity of leaps of faith. One cannot build a career from here. Most scholars agree that this was a crucial moment leading to Kleist's decision to become a writer. Indeed, one might argue that if philosophy itself were a creative endeavor, substantiated world views would then become real to those who hold them. Nowhere is this more evident than with race theory. If the field of philosophy becomes so narrowly defined, as Kleist sees it being defined, so that it denies its own acts of creation, and if this then does become a forceful reality, then there would be no way out by arguing in kind. For the artist capable of seeing a different reality, this would indeed be a nihilistic act in itself. To dismiss Kleist's reaction to Kant's epistemology as a misunderstanding of it, when Kleist does not argue in kind, is to dismiss the intellectual import of alternate literary realities for the field of philosophy.[43] Can one see some validity to Kleist's problem of perception in "Betrothal?" Or, conversely, how would one use apodictic science to prove the necessity of a soul? Kleist refuses to remain in Kant's wheelhouse, rejecting the perimeters, and critiquing the disciplinary boundaries. Forced to choose, instead of becoming a scientist, he becomes a writer.

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[43] See Friedrich Beiser, *Schiller as Philosopher*. Beiser writes, "It is a false abstraction to think that poets cannot be philosophers just as it is to think that philosophers cannot be poets" 10.

CHAPTER SIX

VOLTAIRE AND BUFFON:
THE CONTROVERSY ON RACE
AND "HUMAN VARIETIES".
ANTHROPOLOGIES, POLITICS AND
ENLIGHTENMENT HISTORIOGRAPHY

VIRGINIE YVERNAULT

This chapter aims to reevaluate the relationship between the Buffon-Voltaire controversy on "human varieties" and Enlightenment historiography. To some degree, it is pertinent to investigate the ways race theory is expressed in the late eighteenth-century narrative literature as well as in the essays and philosophical dictionaries, but at the same time it is necessary to remember that neither "race theory" nor "Enlightenment" form coherent concepts, despite what could be read in the studies of the nineteenth-century historians of literature. The idealized conception of Enlightenment has a long history.[1] Since eighteenth-century philosophers tried to present a united front against fanaticism and absolute monarchy, they are largely responsible for this prevalent historiographical tradition. The importance of Enlightenment has been reaffirmed after the French Revolution and in nineteenth-century France, especially during the Third Republic, when the values championed by the eighteenth-century philosophers were perceived as the intellectual origins of 1789 and the republican culture. Since then, interest has been focused on social and political writings of major philosophers, deliberately established as "philosophies" and "theories". However, far from defining the Enlightenment as a unified category, historians have recently emphasized the disagreements and differences between French Enlightenment

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[1] See Roger Chartier, *Les Origines culturelles de la Révolution française* (Paris: Seuil, 1990).

philosophers.[2] Therefore, it will be to no avail to attempt to describe a unified thought of Enlightenment, particularly since the idea of race appears in different texts that took many forms (philosophical tales, novels, essays, letters, pamphlets, tragedies…), and were closely tied to political and cultural context. In short, there was no Enlightenment race theory but miscellaneous texts that were part of specific intellectual and ideological processes. This has to be kept in mind when examining the notion of "human race" according to Voltaire who offers a rereading of Georges-Louis Leclerc de Buffon's works, notably in the 1750s and 1760s. As a result, it would be more relevant to highlight the reasons for their different positions rather than defining Voltaire's and Buffon's anthropologies. The purpose of this chapter is also to explore how this notorious quarrel has been elaborated and amplified by historiography even though the two protagonists did everything they could to avoid a controversy.[3] By examining the patterns of the Buffon-Voltaire controversy, which can appear to be more the product of literary history than a real conflict, we will understand how our perception of the Enlightenment has been shaped in major part by historiography.

Theoretical Differences on Race and Human Varieties

It is generally taken for granted that Buffon is the first French scientist to have formulated a race theory. His major work is the *Histoire naturelle, générale et particulière,* the first three volumes of which were published in September 1749, sold out in a few weeks, according to Buffon himself, and reached a large audience. *L'Histoire de l'homme* deals with the origins of man. Chapter 9 ("Variétés dans l'espèce humaine") demonstrates that even if mankind is composed of human *races* or *varieties* (these words are used

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[2] See, for instance, Ann Thomson, "L'histoire intellectuelle : quelles idées ? quel contexte ?", in *Revue d'histoire moderne et contemporaine* (2012/5), 47-64. In this essay, Ann Thomson describes her approach to intellectual history that focuses on controversies in order to avoid anachronisms. About general Enlightenment historiography, see also Ann Thomson, *Bodies of Thought, Science, Religion, and the Soul in the Early Enlightenment* (Oxford; New York: Oxford University Press, 2008), 3-4.
[3] See Stéphane Schmitt, "Voltaire et Buffon : une brouille pour des coquilles ?", in *Revue Voltaire,* no. 8, 2008, Pups, 225-237, and Otis E. Fellows, "Voltaire and Buffon: Clash and Conciliation", in *Symposium,* vol. 9, no. 2, 1955, 222-235.

interchangeably in the eighteenth century[4]), originally there was only one human species. The latter has multiplied and spread everywhere on earth and underwent several changes due to the influence of climate and customs (for instance, Buffon argues that "la chaleur du climat est la principale cause de la couleur noire"[5]). The chapter ends with these words:

> Tout concourt donc à prouver que le genre humain n'est pas composé d'espèces essentiellement différentes entre elles, qu'au contraire il n'y a eu originairement qu'une seule espèce d'homme, qui s'étant multipliée et répandue sur toute la surface de la Terre, a subi différents changements par l'influence du climat, par la différence de la nourriture, par celle de la manière de vivre, par les maladies épidémiques, et aussi par le mélange varié à l'infini des individus plus ou moins ressemblants ; que d'abord ces altérations n'étaient pas si marquées, et ne produisaient que des variétés individuelles ; qu'elles sont ensuite devenues variétés de l'espèce, parce qu'elles sont devenues plus générales, plus sensibles et plus constantes par l'action continue de ces mêmes causes […].[6]

Buffon's views on human race are not in contradiction with the *monogenist* conception of human origins promoted by the Catholic Church, which implies unity of human species (all mankind directly descend from Adam). Nevertheless, Buffon clearly separates science from religion whilst, he argues, their conclusions are similar:

> Quant à leur première origine [les hommes en Amérique], je ne doute pas, *indépendamment même des raisons théologiques*, qu'elle ne soit la même que la nôtre.[7]

Buffon's cautious approach fits perfectly into the religious and political context in the middle of the eighteenth century. Far from adopting monogenism, Voltaire espouses polygenism that implies several original strains.[8] He develops his views in many texts, especially in his *Traité de métaphysique* (1734), and in his *Essai sur les mœurs et l'Esprit des nations* (first published in 1756 but revised in 1761 and 1765). Significantly entitled

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[4] José-Michel Moureaux, "Race et altérité dans l'antbropologie voltairienne", in *L'Idée de "race" dans les sciences et la littérature (XVIIIe et XIXe siècles)*, ed. Sarga Moussa (Paris: L'Harmattan, 2003), 43.

[5] Buffon, *Œuvres*, ed. Stéphane Schmitt (Paris: Gallimard, 2007), 404.

[6] Buffon, 406-407.

[7] Buffon, 397 (emphasis added).

[8] See Sarga Moussa's introduction to *L'Idée de "race" dans les sciences humaines et la littérature*, 9.

"Des différentes espèces d'hommes", the opening chapter of Voltaire's *Traité de métaphysique* is intended as a satirical counterweight to the *Genesis*. It is also one of the longest developments that the philosopher devotes to this issue of human race.[9] It is a truism to say that this kind of scientific hypothesis is likely to be suspected of promoting slavery and racist theories.[10] However, the idea of race can be seen as subversive or "progressive" as it rejects traditional Christian beliefs. This deliberate opposition to Church is the cornerstone of Voltaire's argument. The philosopher intends to point out contradictions between the unequal treatment between men and the biblical text, which should lead to equality.

To complete the picture, some attention should be given to Diderot who does not subscribe to a similar opinion even though he constantly contradicts himself as regards to the unity of human species without dismissing the idea of *race*. Ann Thomson has remarkably shown the contrast between his lack of precision, theoretically, and his social and political certainty and determination to fight against inequality and slavery.[11] Diderot wrote the article "HUMAINE ESPÈCE" in the *Encyclopedia,* in which he summarizes Buffon's reflection on human races and explicitly refers to the *Histoire naturelle*:

> Il n'y a donc eu originairement qu'une seule race d'hommes, qui s'étant multipliée & répandue sur toute la surface de la terre, a donné à la longue toutes les variétés dont nous venons de faire mention ; variétés qui disparoîtraient à la longue, si l'on pouvait supposer que les peuples se déplaçassent tout-à-coup, & que les uns se trouvassent ou nécessairement ou volontairement assujettis aux mêmes causes qui ont agi sur ceux dont ils croient occuper les contrées. *Voyez l'Histoire naturelle de Mrs. Buffon et d'Aubanton.*[12]

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[9] José-Michel Moureaux, 44.

[10] Many historians have pointed out contradictions between Enlightenment ideals and the reality of slavery and accused some of the philosophers, especially Voltaire, having enriched themselves from slavery trade. As recent studies have shown, it is misleading to take for granted these simplifications. See Jean Ehrard, *Lumières et esclavage. L'Esclavage colonial et l'opinion publique en France au XVIIIᵉ siècle* (Paris: André Versaille, 2008); Bernard Gainot, Marcel Dorigny, Jean Ehrard et al., "Lumières et esclavage", *Annales historiques de la Révolution française*, 380, no. 2 (2015): 149-169; Nicholas Cronk, *Voltaire: a Very Short Introduction* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017), 117-118.

[11] Ann Thomson, "Diderot, le matérialisme et la division de l'espèce humaine", *Recherches sur Diderot et l'Encyclopédie*, no. 26 (1999): 197-211, http://journals.openedition.org/rde/1191.

[12] "HUMAINE ESPECE", *Encyclopédie*, 8 (1765, Édition numérique collaborative et critique de l'Encyclopédie (1751-1772): 348,

The first part of this chapter has not tried to provide a complete overview of eighteenth-century intellectual debates about human race and varieties. Rather, it has attempted to sketch Voltaire's and Buffon's views on human race as presented by literary historiography. But are the theoretical differences it has revealed sufficient to form a controversy?

Was There Really a "Controversy" between Voltaire and Buffon?

As Antoine Lilti observes,[13] there is a distinction to be made between "quarrels" and "controversies". Used in the history of science, the word "controversy" designates the debates that frame the intellectual field at a particular time. Fruitfully considered by historians, "literary quarrel" means occasional clashes, highly controversial, based on personal conflicts, as well as the disputes which have animated the "intellectual field", like the Quarrel of the Ancients and the Moderns.[14] Still, "quarrel" and "controversy" both have implications on public opinion and it is not uncommon for the opponents to go so low as to trade insults and *ad hominem* attacks. As for the famous "controversy" between Voltaire and Buffon, instead of frontal attacks, a certain concern for smoothing out some of what is likely to exacerbate the conflict must be noted. In other words, theoretical differences between Voltaire and Buffon have no effects comparable to those of other literary polemics in eighteenth-century France (the large debate over the morality of the theatre and actors for instance, revived by the controversial exchanges between Rousseau and d'Alembert or by the no less controversial relationships between critics and playwrights, such as Beaumarchais[15]).

Although Stéphane Schmitt uses the term "antagonism" to designate Voltaire's and Buffon's intellectual or scientific dissensions, he has no choice but to indicate that the conflict between the two men has never turned into a frontal opposition.[16] He rightly distinguishes three phases in their

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http://enccre.academie-sciences.fr/encyclopedie/article/v8-1272-1.

[13] Antoine Lilti, "Querelles et controverses, les formes du désaccord intellectuel à l'époque moderne", in *Mil neuf cent. Revue d'histoire intellectuelle*, no. 25 (2007/1): 15.

[14] Ibid., 15.

[15] See Gregory S. Brown, *Literary Sociability and Literary Property in France, 1775-1795: Beaumarchais, the Société des auteurs dramatiques and the Comédie Française* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2006).

[16] Stéphane Schmitt explores in detail the relationship between Voltaire and Buffon. He asserts that the quarrel ("cette brouille feutrée") between the two philosophers "toutefois ne tourna jamais à l'opposition frontale" (Schmitt, 227).

relationship: first friendship, based on a common admiration for Newton, second stabilization, and third quarrel, when Buffon published the earlier volume of his *Histoire naturelle* in 1749. Buffon's *Histoire et Théorie de la Terre* did not match with an anonymous dissertation to the Academy of Bologna published in 1746: *Dissertation sur les changements arrivés dans notre globe*. The mysterious author, who is none other than Voltaire, rejects the marine origins of fossil shells as well as the most commonly received theory that asserts that the globe has changed its appearance and that the ocean covered the earth for a long time. According to Voltaire, fossil shells are merely remains of lunches of medieval crusaders or pilgrims.[17]

Multiple assumptions have been made about the fossils discovered in the Alps. In his *Théorie de la Terre* Buffon ridicules them without explicit mention of Voltaire's hypothesis[18] (however, we cannot be certain that he knew who the real author of the *Dissertation sur les changements arrivés dans notre globe* was). In 1767, in the *Défense de mon oncle*, Voltaire did not change his views or revise his work in the light of Buffon's. He merely protested that he had no intention of having a quarrel with Buffon over a "handful of shells"[19].

> Quand je lus, il y a quarante ans qu'on avait trouvé dans les alpes des coquilles de Syrie, je dis, je l'avoue, d'un ton un peu goguenard, que ces coquilles avaient été apparemment apportées par des Pélérins [sic] qui

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[17] "On a trouvé dans les montagnes de la Hesse une pierre qui paraissait porter l'empreinte d'un turbot, et sur les Alpes un brochet pétrifié : on en conclut que la mer et les rivières ont coulé tour à tour sur les montagnes. Il était plus naturel de soupçonner que ces poissons, apportés par un voyageur, s'étant gâtés, furent jetés, et se pétrifièrent dans la suite des temps ; mais cette idée était trop simple et trop peu systématique. […] On a aussi vu dans les provinces d'Italie, de France, etc., de petits coquillages qu'on assure être originaires de la mer de Syrie. Je ne veux pas contester leur origine ; mais ne pourrait-on pas se souvenir que cette foule innombrable de pèlerins et de croisés, qui porta son argent dans la Terre sainte, en rapporta des coquilles ? Et aimera-t-on mieux croire que la mer de Joppé et de Sidon est venue couvrir la Bourgogne et le Milanais ? On pourrait encore se dispenser de croire l'une et l'autre de ces hypothèses, et penser avec beaucoup de physiciens, que ces coquilles, que l'on croit venues de si loin, sont des fossiles que produit notre terre". Voltaire, *Dissertation envoyée par l'auteur, en italien, à l'Académie de Bologne, et traduite par lui-même en français, sur les changements arrivés dans notre globe, sur les pétrifications qu'on prétend encore en être les témoignages*, in *Œuvres*, ed. Beuchot, (Paris: Lefèvre, 1830), 38: 566-568.
[18] Buffon, 75-76.
[19] Voltaire, *La Défense de mon oncle contre ses infâmes persécuteurs* (Genève 1767), 60. See also Otis Fellows, *From Voltaire to La Nouvelle Critique: Problems and Personalities* (Genève: Droz, 1970), 29-32, and Stéphane Schmitt, 234.

revenaient de Jérusalem : Mr de Buffon m'en reprit très-vertement dans sa Théorie de la Terre, p. 281... Je n'ai pas voulu me brouiller avec lui pour des coquilles ; mais je suis demeuré dans mon opinion, parce que l'impossibilité que la Mer ait formé les Montagnes m'est démontrée. On a beau me dire que le Porphire [sic] est fait de pointes d'oursin, je le croirai quand je verrai que le Marbre blanc est fait de plumes d'Autruche".[20]

Despite the irony involved in this passage, the direct allusion to Buffon may be regarded as self-defense as much as an attack: Voltaire refrains from discrediting Buffon. Their disagreement is definitely not a public debate. What is actually remarkable is that the two men constantly make sure to maintain respectful "public" exchanges and not to contradict each other too obviously. In his speech to the French Academy in 1788, Félix Vicq d'Azyr,[21] praising Buffon's works,[22] said that the naturalist:

> [...] s'était permis de plaisanter sur une lettre dont il ignorait alors que M. de Voltaire fût l'auteur. Aussitôt qu'il l'eut appris, il déclara qu'il regrettait d'avoir traité légèrement une des productions de ce grand Homme, et il joignit à cette conduite généreuse un procédé délicat, en répondant avec beaucoup d'étendue aux faibles objections de M. de Voltaire, que les Naturalistes n'ont pas même jugées dignes de trouver place dans leurs Écrits.[23]

In this statement, Buffon puts emphasis on mutual esteem (it also appears that most of his contemporaries did not grant as much importance to this quarrel as the enemies of the Enlightenment, those who wanted to make fun of them, and the nineteenth-century historians). Likewise, Voltaire is equally careful to keep Buffon out of his most obvious targets. More than his disagreement with Buffon, Voltaire expresses his complete opposition to Catholic beliefs. What we consider to be Voltaire's theory is thus inseparable from a specific context. His "theories" are in addition scattered in many texts, as we have seen. The opening of the *Essai sur les mœurs*, which is usually considered as a text that targets Buffon's works, never explicitly refers to the academician. More crucially, it seems modelled after the *Genesis*: parts 1 and 2 ("Changements dans le globe" and "Des

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[20] Voltaire, *La Défense de mon oncle*, 60.

[21] Félix Vicq d'Azyr was a naturalist, elected to the seat of Buffon at the Academy. Additionally, he was Marie-Antoinette's doctor.

[22] According to tradition, each member must praise his predecessor when he makes his entrance to the Academy.

[23] *Discours prononcé à l'Académie française le jeudi 11 décembre 1788, à la réception de M. Félix Vicq d'Azyr* (Paris: Demonville, 1788), 27-28.

différentes races d'hommes" reveal Voltaire's explanation of the world's origin. The somewhat dogmatic tone suggests that this passage is essentially intended as a parody of the biblical text or an *anti-Genesis*. For example, Voltaire asserts that "Il n'est permis qu'à un aveugle de douter que les Blancs, les Nègres, les Albinos, les Hottentots, les Lapons, les Chinois, les Américains, soient des races entièrement différentes".[24] The use of the blind figure is indeed a biblical cliché: Voltaire ironically substitutes himself for the evangelical figure of the Christ that opens the eyes of the blind. In that very passage he does not contradict Buffon either, since strictly speaking the latter does not deny the diversity of races. In contrast, he sometimes contradicts some competitors more directly, as he does vehemently in Chapter 7, "Des sauvages", that contains a satire of Rousseau's *Discours sur l'origine et les fondements de l'inégalité parmi les hommes*. The *Traité de la métaphysique* is one other work that is often quoted to illustrate the way Voltaire contradicts Buffon, but it would be wrong to see it as an ordinary book that may reach a large audience. Written in 1734, it was not published during Voltaire's lifetime (its first edition is the Kehl edition, produced by Beaumarchais in the 1780s). All of this demonstrates that Voltaire was not inclined to emphasize his disagreement with Buffon.

Historians of literature have shown little interest in individual strategies elaborated by the philosophers. However, Voltaire and Buffon's purposes were completely different. Whereas Voltaire was blamed for popularizing science and reaching a broad audience, potentially even the whole of society[25]—an audience broader than Buffon's despite the efforts of the latter to seduce the literary and aristocratic circles—Buffon should, under no circumstances, be defined as an active popularizer of science, as Maëlle Levacher explained in a recent monograph.[26] That does not mean that rhetorical and persuasive devices are missing from the *Histoire naturelle*. Unlike Voltaire, Buffon is able to enchant readers without sacrificing any of the scientific content. Less speculative than argumentative, Voltaire's reflection is based on strong social and political issues. In the 1760s, Voltaire was totally involved in his fight against "*l'Infâme*". All his

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[24] Voltaire, *Essai sur les mœurs*, ed. René Pomeau (Paris: Bordas, 1990), 1:6. See also Voltaire, *La Défense de mon oncle*, 52.

[25] Indeed, Christiane Mervaud writes about the *Dictionnaire philosophique*: "Plus de terre réservée aux spécialistes ou à des initiés dont la foi solide peut affronter les difficultés. Sur ce point, la démarche vulgarisatrice de Voltaire heurtait de plein fouet la position de l'Église catholique" (Christiane Mervaud, "Le *Dictionnaire philosophique*: combats et débats", *Revue d'histoire littéraire de la France* (1995-03), 191-192).

[26] Maëlle Levacher, *Buffon et ses lecteurs* (Paris: Classiques Garnier, 2011), 14.

writings, and especially the *Dictionnaire philosophique, portatif*, appeared to his enemies as a danger that should be countered urgently and decisively. The 1764 edition faced considerable hostility from the Church and from the Parlement[27] and aroused strong reactions among Christian apologists and defenders of the faith. Abbé Chaudon thus presented his *Dictionnaire anti-philosophique pour servir de commentaire et de correctif au Dictionnaire philosophique et aux autres livres qui ont paru de nos jours contre le Christianisme* as a controversial book that targeted the "Apostles of unbelief" ("Apôtres de l'impiété"[28]), first and foremost Voltaire.[29] Chaudon replied to each and every one of Voltaire's articles in the *Dictionnaire*, beginning with the first, "Abraham", and using Buffon as an authority against Voltaire:

> La voix du Seigneur se fit entendre à Abraham ; il eut l'ordre de quitter la Chaldée avec son père Tharé, sa femme Sara & Loth son neveu. Il vint s'établir à Haram, ville de Mésopotamie […]. Le Seigneur lui parla de nouveau & lui ordonna de sortir de ce pays, pour aller dans la Contrée qu'il lui montrerait. Abraham, docile à cet ordre, quitta Haram […], s'arrêta dans un lieu nommé Sichem & étendit ses tentes jusqu'à la vallée illustre.
> M. de V. demande fièrement les motifs de ce voyage. *Pourquoi le fit-il ?* parce que Dieu le vouloit. *Pourquoi quitta-t-il les bords de l'Euphrate pour une contrée aussi éloignée, aussi stérile, aussi pierreuse que celle de Sichem ?* Mais qui a dit à M. de V. que le pays de Sichem étoit aussi stérile qu'il l'est aujourd'hui ? Il est très probable que cette contrée étoit alors très fertile & que sa stérilité actuelle ne vient que de sa fécondité passée. Cette partie du monde ayant été la première habitée, le suc végétal a dû s'épuiser plutôt. Écoutons le célèbre Auteur de l'*Histoire naturelle*, M. de Buffon. « La couche de terre végétale d'un pays habité doit toujours diminuer & devenir enfin comme le terrain de l'Arabie Pétrée, & comme celui de tant d'autres

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[27] Christiane Mervaud asserts that "*Le Dictionnaire philosophique* est ressenti par ses contemporains comme la marque même d'une audace sans commune mesure avec ce qui l'avait précédé" ("Le *Dictionnaire philosophique*: combats et débats", 188).

[28] Louis-Mayeul Chaudon, *Dictionnaire anti-philosophique pour servir de commentaire et de correctif au Dictionnaire philosophique et aux autres livres qui ont paru de nos jours contre le Christianisme* (Avignon: chez la veuve Girard et François Seguin, 1767), v.

[29] Numerous dictionaries were published in response to Voltaire's *Dictionnaire philosophique*: the *Dictionnaire portatif*, by the abbé Paulian, in 1770, and the *Dictionnaire philosophique de la Religion*, by the abbé Nonotte, in 1772. See also Abbé François, *Observations sur la Philosophie de l'histoire et le Dictionnaire philosophique, avec des réponses à plusieurs difficultés* (1770) and the *Remarques sur un livre intitulé Dictionnaire philosophique portatif* (1766).

Provinces de l'Orient, qui est en effet le climat le plus anciennement habité, où l'on ne trouve que du sel & des sables : car le sel fixe des plantes & des animaux reste, tandis que toutes les autres parties se volatilisent ».[30]

The remarkably accurate quotation from Buffon's *Histoire naturelle* is solemnly and insidiously introduced by the imperative "écoutons" and the laudatory adjective "famous", although it covers a technical matter. It allows Chaudon to elaborate both a positive image of Buffon and a negative image of Voltaire. In the article "Amérique" in the 1769 edition, Chaudon even contributes to the debate over the human races and varieties by reiterating some of Buffon's arguments without referring to the naturalist's name:

Or, rien de plus constant […] que l'unité d'espèce dans les hommes qui peuplent la terre. […] toutes ces différences qui se trouvent parmi eux ne sont qu'accidentelles, & ne viennent que de la différence des climats, de la différence des nourritures, & peut-être de l'imagination.[31]

The strategy that emerges from this anti-philosophical dictionary takes place in the context of the generalized campaign targeting Voltaire. It is therefore not surprising that a resolute enemy of the Enlightenment like Chaudon deliberately dwells on the differences between Voltaire and Buffon. This example demonstrates that the controversy—if there is a controversy—first belongs to the polemics that took aim at the Enlightenment. The pragmatic or rhetorical function of the texts prevails over their epistemological dimension.

Buffon and the Enlightenment

The fact that these minor differences are recorded as the Buffon-Voltaire controversy can be attributed in part to the nineteenth-century historians, given that its reception reflects the contemporary debates between Catholics and non-Catholics.[32] An article in the *Journal des débats* regarding the

[30] Louis-Mayeul Chaudon, *Dictionnaire anti-philosophique* (Paris: Saillant & Nyon, 1769). Emphases are Chaudon's.
[31] Chaudon, 29.
[32] Buffon's disagreements with Voltaire over race and human varieties are commonplaces in histories of French literature in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. See for instance Buffon, *Morceaux choisis*, ed. A.-Édouard Dupré (Paris: Hachette, 1896), VIII; *Oeuvres completes de Buffon* (Paris: A. Le Vasseur, 1884-1886), 1: 134; Gustave Lanson, *Manuel bibliographique de la Littérature française moderne* (Paris: Hachette, 1925), 3: 808-812; *Histoire de la*

complete edition of Buffon's writings summarizes the issues raised by the
controversy, some of which seem still relevant in the mid-nineteenth
century. Firstly, it points out that if interest focuses on the eighteenth
century, it is essentially for moral and political reasons:

> Buffon occupe une place à part dans l'histoire littéraire du dix-huitième
> siècle. Ce n'est pas comme philosophe, comme apôtre des idées nouvelles,
> c'est comme écrivain qu'il y figure à côté de Montesquieu, de Voltaire et de
> J.-J. Rousseau. Mais à ce titre seul il est bien de son temps. Les gens qui se
> sont pris d'un si beau feu pour le moyen-âge nous reprochent notre goût et
> ce qu'ils appellent notre faiblesse pour le dix-huitième siècle. Ce goût, nous
> ne le nions pas ; cette faiblesse, nous la confessons dans une certaine mesure.
> Le dix-huitième siècle représente à nos yeux deux choses qui nous sont
> également chères. Il représente, en l'exagérant il est vrai, ce grand principe
> de liberté, le premier de tous les principes inscrits sur le drapeau de 89. Tous
> ceux qui font aujourd'hui la guerre au dix-huitième siècle renient-ils, oui ou
> non, le principe de liberté ? Voilà ce qu'il serait bon de savoir. Le dix-
> huitième siècle représente encore autre chose ; il représente l'amour des
> lettres, le culte de ces nobles études qui font l'honneur et la dignité de la
> nature humaine. […] Il y avait des hommes de lettres qui n'avaient pas
> d'autre profession ni d'autre titre ; mais toutes les carrières, toutes les études
> libérales aimaient à se parer du vernis littéraire et philosophique. Hommes
> d'État, administrateurs, financiers, magistrats, avocats se piquaient de bien
> penser, de bien parler et de bien écrire, en prose et en vers. La cour et la ville
> rivalisaient de goût et de fine critique pour juger les auteurs et pour décider
> les questions de style. Le roi de France était à Versailles ; le roi des salons
> était à Ferney. […] L'ascendant de l'esprit était universel, irrésistible ; la
> délicatesse du goût se réfléchissait dans le commerce du monde […]. Buffon
> était un homme de lettres dans l'acception la plus complète et la plus relevée
> que ce mot pouvait avoir au siècle dernier.[33]

This passage, in which Buffon appears as the epitome of the French
subtle refinement in the eighteenth century, conveys an idealized conception
of Enlightenment. The journalist closely associates Buffon with the period
of the Enlightenment and by doing so, departs from a certain tradition that
considered Buffon as an especially "acceptable" philosopher whose
"theories" were deemed consistent with the religious positions. Meanwhile,

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littérature française illustrée, ed. Joseph Bédier, Paul Hazard *et al.* (Paris: Larousse,
1938-1940), 2: 78. See also *La Revue des deux mondes* (Paris: Bureau de la Revue
des deux mondes, 1865), 60: 154-155. One of the chapters refers to "la théorie de
Buffon, établie sur l'expérience, contre les hypothèses ridicules de Voltaire, fondées
sur la passion ".

[33] *Journal des débats* (September 29th, 1854), 3.

he notes all of Buffon's contradictions. For instance, in his views, the biblical flood sent by God has supernatural causes whilst his hypothesis on how the earth was formed complies with the religious beliefs. Consequently, many were those who made of Buffon a sincere Christian. The journalist, who claims that Buffon's apparent religious conformity seems insincere, sarcastically rejects such an interpretation. In his eyes, Buffon pretended that he had religious beliefs in order to avoid trouble with the Sorbonne and the Parlement:[34]

> Il y a parmi nous des gens qui se sont échauffé l'imagination à ce sujet, et qui ont voulu se créer un Buffon de fantaisie, un Buffon sincèrement chrétien, auquel ils attribuent une profonde religion de cœur.[35]

Buffon's reception has two sides: the naturalist's works are subject to appropriation by the Catholics on one hand, and by those who defend the eighteenth century on the other hand, most of them supporting the republican and "progressive" ideas. In both cases, it implies a broad range of stakes attached to the Enlightenment's historiography and to the debate over the French Revolution that was revived in the nineteenth century. In the last third of the nineteenth century, French historians focused on the Enlightenment, seen as the origins of the French Revolution, as well as a consensual reference for the new republican government. This view goes hand in hand with the myth that in eighteenth-century Europe, French culture was superior to any other. Created after the disastrous Seven Years War, this myth of the French intellectual prominence in Europe is based on the idea that France continued to influence its neighbors to some extent. How then can we not draw a parallel between the defeat of 1763 and the loss of Alsace and Lorraine in the Franco-Prussian war?[36] In many respects

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[34] In January 1751, after having examined Buffon's *Histoire naturelle*, the Sorbonne disapproved of fourteen passages and demanded that Buffon make amends. In April of that year, Buffon wrote to the abbey Le Blanc: "J'en suis quitte à ma très grande satisfaction. De cent vingt docteurs assemblés, j'en ai eu cent quinze, et leur délibération contient même des éloges auxquels je ne m'attendais pas." The correspondence between Buffon and the faculty of Theology was published at the beginning of the fourth volume in 1753. See Stéphane Schmitt, in Buffon, LXVIII and 409-418. Buffon signed another retraction in 1780, following the publication of *Des époques de la Nature*, but never published it despite his promises.

[35] *Journal des débats*, 3.

[36] About the myth of France's superiority in eighteenth-century Europe, see Pierre-Yves Beaurepaire, *Le Mythe de l'Europe française au XVIIIᵉ siècle : diplomatie, culture et sociabilités au temps des Lumières* (Paris: Autrement, 2007), 7. Published in 1878, Henri Martin's book *Voltaire et Rousseau et la philosophie du XVIIIᵉ siècle*

the political situation at the end of the nineteenth century resembles that of the eighteenth century, when Louis XVI became king.

From this perspective, nineteenth-century French historians recorded and analyzed in detail the Enlightenment philosophers' "theories". Great importance was given to the history of ideas. For instance, Jean-Louis de Lanessan–botanist, zoologist, republican deputy and governor-general of Indochina–insists on Buffon's status as a thinker in this "preface" to the 1884 edition of the *Histoire naturelle*: "Faire connaître le Buffon savant et penseur, mettre en lumière la grandeur de ses idées".[37] By the same token, Henri Martin–republican historian, free thinker, deputy from Aisne, and then senator during the Third Republic–dedicates several pages of his book *Voltaire et Rousseau et la philosophie du XVIIIᵉ siècle* to the comparison between Voltaire and Buffon. After praising Montesquieu and Voltaire, he pays tribute to Buffon:

> Alors parut le grand historien de la nature. On voit, sur une hauteur qui domine la petite ville bourguignonne de Montbard, près de la route de Paris à Lyon, une vieille tour au milieu d'un bosquet d'arbres verts. C'est là que naquit Buffon.[38]

The melodramatic way in which the future "great man" is presented exemplifies the role of the environment in natural history and is a nod to Buffon's views on harmony between man and his natural environment. But according to Henri Martin, Buffon did not believe in God as a creator of the Universe, contrary to Voltaire:

> Mais y a-t-il un Créateur pour Buffon ? Cela est plus que douteux. Il ne paraît pas distinguer le Créateur de la création, et semble n'avoir d'autre Dieu que la Nature qui ne crée rien, mais change et renouvelle tout incessamment. […] Au contraire de Voltaire, Buffon ne croit pas au Dieu conscient, volontaire et libre, et croit à l'âme spirituelle et impérissable de l'homme.[39]

(see below) testifies to the continuing importance of this myth. It begins with the observation that French influence remained powerful in the second half of the eighteenth century: "Si l'on ne connaissait de l'histoire du dix-huitième siècle que les événements politiques et militaires, on croirait que la France, vers la fin du règne de Louis XV, était totalement déchue et l'objet du dédain des nations. Et cependant, à cette époque même, l'influence des idées et des mœurs de la France sur l'Europe était aussi étendue et plus profonde qu'au temps de Louis XIV". Henri Martin, *Voltaire et Rousseau et la philosophie du XVIIIᵉ siècle* (Paris: Publications illustrées, 1878), 5-6.

[37] *Oeuvres completes de Buffon* (Paris: A. Le Vasseur, 1884-1886), 1: i.

[38] Martin, 42.

[39] Martin, 46-47.

This passage breaks with the traditional view of Voltaire's struggle against religion. As Antoine Compagnon writes: "Le Voltaire au goût du jour n'est plus celui d'"Écrasons l'Infâme", il est celui de l'affaire Calas qui fut l'un des étendards de l'affaire Dreyfus".[40] Moreover, Martin's attempt to differentiate between the general ideas of Voltaire and Buffon concerning religion and to concentrate on their disagreement can shed light on contemporary political and religious issues. Voltaire's and Buffon's deepest insights into religion coincide with the political dilemmas faced by new republicans. For this very reason, Henri Martin and his contemporaries wish to show that whatever their beliefs, the two philosophers were in many ways the models for all the nineteenth-century men who believe in freedom, tolerance and republican values and that the Republic was able to unite various beliefs within itself. Both Voltaire's and Buffon's writings appeared as literature that suits to the education of citizens of the new French Republic.[41] Given the political context, this appeared as a response to the numerous enemies of the Republic and, furthemore, a way to produce a consensual and unanimous image of the Republic.

The conversion to Catholicism of many republican intellectuals in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries had an impact on Buffon's reception. Ferdinand Brunetière, one of the most influential literary critics–academician, editor of the *Revue des deux mondes,* anti-Dreyfus but not anti-Semitic–plays a major role in reconciling the positivism of Auguste Comte to Catholicism.[42] According to him, Buffon must be ranked as one of the major philosophers, especially on topics in philosophy of mind, ontology or even metaphysics. That is the reason why he takes the example of the naturalist to go beyond fundamental contradictions between science and religion. On this basis, it is possible to draw a comparison between Buffon and Pascal:[43]

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[40] Antoine Compagnon, *La Troisième République des Lettres de Flaubert à Proust* (Paris: Seuil, 1983), 24-25.

[41] See Compagnon, 24-25: "Le XVIIIᵉ siècle peut en revanche tout nous apprendre". He quotes Gustave Lanson who makes a similar point: "Nous reconnaissons dans ce temps-là les origines de l'ordre intellectuel et social où nous vivons. Nous y reconnaissons les sentiments qui sont encore aujourd'hui les moteurs de notre action".

[42] See Thomas Loué, "L'apologétique de Ferdinand Brunetière et le positivisme : un bricolage idéologique généreux et accueillant", *Revue des sciences philosophiques et théologiques* (2003), 87: 101-126.

[43] See Michel Faure, "Le retour au jansénisme dans l'institution critique : le cas de Ferdinand Brunetière et de Jules Lemaître", *Littérature* (1981), 42: 66-88.

Mais ce n'est pas seulement dans le domaine de la littérature, c'est encore dans celui de l'esprit humain qu'a étendu l'auteur de la *Théorie de la terre* et des *Époques de la nature*. Lorsqu'il commença de s'appliquer à l'histoire naturelle […], il n'était pas naturaliste ; et c'est ce qui peut servir à expliquer le désordre apparent des premiers volumes de son grand ouvrage. […] Mais on sait que Buffon n'a eu garde de s'y tenir, qu'au contraire, à mesure qu'il avançait dans son grand ouvrage, il s'en est davantage écarté. Supposé qu'il s'y fût tenu, son *Histoire naturelle* n'en aurait pas moins opéré son effet, qui semble avoir été, surtout au xviiie siècle, de détacher l'homme de la superstition de lui-même, de son espèce, et de lui donner pour la première fois la claire conscience du peu de place qu'il occupe dans l'espace comme du peu de durée qu'il remplit dans le temps. […] Ce lieu commun de la théologie chrétienne, si éloquemment développé par Pascal, dans un fragment célèbre, c'est Buffon, le moins « pieux » assurément de nos grands écrivains, qui l'a renouvelé en en faisant l'objet d'une démonstration proprement scientifique. Et c'est lui qui, de tous les philosophes du xviiie siècle, a le plus fait pour débarrasser la science de cette adoration de l'homme qui n'était pas le moindre obstacle qu'elle eût rencontré jusqu'alors à ses progrès. Tandis qu'en effet, la philosophie de Voltaire, celle de Montesquieu, de Rousseau, de Diderot, sont essentiellement des philosophies sociales, si l'on peut dire, des philosophies dont le progrès ou la réformation de l'institution sociale est le commencement et la fin, la philosophie de Buffon, prenant son origine dans celle même des mondes, et prolongeant ses suites au-delà de l'existence de l'espèce, a ouvert l'infini à la pensée humaine.[44]

Brunetière's appropriation of Buffon is part of the more general attempt of the republicans—who were strongly influenced by positivism—[45]to produce a new political and intellectual synthesis.

The controversy between Voltaire and Buffon over "race" and "human varieties" has been overestimated in some respects. Personal disagreements are not sufficient to explain the importance given to this episode. Admittedly, Buffon's and Voltaire's views on the unity of mankind were far from being similar. But if there was no internal coherence of the Enlightenment discourse, showing a united front in opposing the anti-Enlightenment campaign was still of great importance to the philosophers. As early as in the eighteenth century, the Enlightenment's enemies began to concentrate on the quarrel between Voltaire and Buffon, continually restated in the nineteenth-century historiographic debate together with the

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[44] Ferdinand Brunetière, *Nouvelles Questions de critique* (Paris: Calmann Lévy, 1890), 141-142.
[45] See for instance Claude Nicolet, *L'Idée républicaine en France, 1789-1924*, (Paris: Gallimard, 1982 and 1994), 189.

relationship between religion and the Enlightenment. It is therefore pertinent to insert this quarrel within the framework of a general history of nineteenth-century political and intellectual life. More broadly, the case of the Voltaire-Buffon controversy makes it necessary to think about the articulation between reception studies and historiography in order to promote a large-scale *history of reception*.