Cruel Operators: History, Empire, and Affect in the Global Anglophone Novel

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Dissertation submitted in partial fulfillment of
the requirements for the degree of Doctor
of Philosophy in the Department of
English in the Graduate School
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ABSTRACT

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Abstract

"Cruel Operators: History, Empire, and Affect in the Global Anglophone Novel," reanimates and repoliticizes the idea of "cruel aesthetics" within contemporary literature by placing cruelty at the crux of global capitalism's operational antihumanist logic. Historicizing this logic, the project uses a more nuanced definition of the field of Global Anglophone literature as a space to contend with the economic, racial, and emotional legacies of empire. In turn, affective and aesthetic readings of the diverse novels of Jamaica Kincaid, W.G. Sebald, Kazuo Ishiguro, and Rachel Cusk as Global Anglophone, rather than British, allows for a criticism of global capitalism that is grounded within legacies of empire. The project shows how Jamaica Kincaid's and W.G. Sebald's focus on everyday cruelties and historical anachronisms reestablish narrative connections between the networks of violence between colony and empire. It also illustrates how Kazuo Ishiguro's characters connect the mental and physical servitude within imperial power dynamics to current conditions of work. Finally, locating Rachel Cusk's novels within a financialized world shows the ubiquitous anxiety of neoliberal present. While the project embraces the universalism of capitalist realities and their imperial foundations, it is only through the concrete expressions and everyday realities of life that the universal architecture of global capitalism can be assessed. Ultimately, linking colonialism with contemporary capitalism formally carves out new "ways

beyond" the erasure, paralysis, and the anxiety of the crushing force of dominating world-systems by embracing a politics of refusal, allyship, solidarity, and the bolstering of a "collective intelligence" that comes from the systematic appraisal of cruel aesthetics.

Dedication

For Lilah & Mark

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1. Introduction: Hello, Cruel Globe

> The endemic perversion of cruelty inherent in the history of mankind is always described in the hope that the last chapter in that horror story will be written, and in a better time. The purpose of representing cruelty thus outlined, as we now know, has never been fulfilled and probably never can be, since our species is unable to learn from its mistakes. –W.G. Sebald, "On Memory and Cruelty"

> What if depression…could be traced to histories of colonialism, genocide, slavery, legal exclusion, and everyday segregation and isolation that haunt all of our lives, rather than to biochemical imbalances? –Ann Cvetkovich, "Depression and Racism"

> She refuses to remember the past without also remembering its cruelty. –Rachel Cusk, *Kudos*

1.1 Cruel Aesthetics

In *Slavery and the Culture of Taste,* Simon Gikandi observes a change in the way black subjects were depicted in European paintings at the height of colonialism and the slave trade. Prior to this moment, he writes that the Congolese, for example, were considered "equal partners in global trade and cultural exchange," and thus it was "not unusual" to have a Congolese ambassador at the "center of a European portrait" (8). And yet, in the period in which "slavery had replaced gold as the major commodity of trade," Gikandi notes the marginalization and degradation of black figures as "adjuncts" in the portraiture of wealthy families. In other words, imperial nations that engaged in the brutal political economy of the slave trade also engaged in a parallel cruelty: the creation of a narrative that "authorized itself by inventing a hierarchical structure" (10). This aesthetic shift, one that materialized "under the pressures of slavery" (8), was guided by the economic motivations in slavery's justification. I use this art historical

example to show my methodology is deeply embedded in the materiality of the aesthetic.

As my epigraphs show, I argue that studying cruelty within Global Anglophone literature primes us to make interventions in familiar narratives in order to connect the history of colonialism to contemporary global capitalism. This is done with novels that refuse to "remember the past without also remembering its cruelty";[1] with novels that also identify the "traces" of the structures of "colonialism, genocide, slavery" in both our contemporary life, and our emotional states; and in novels that can possibly allow us to "learn from our mistakes."[2] The gradual shift from a capitalism that created the cruel conditions for the slave trade and colonial extraction, to a current global capitalism occurs over a long span of time. My dissertation focuses on contemporary Global Anglophone novels written within the past thirty years, that use their connection with the present to straddle these histories. Pinpointing the operational logic of cruelty as a motivating concept in my study of contemporary literature gets at the heart of why global capitalism, and its colonial foundations, affect not just policy, world view, and power structures, but what it feels like to belong to such systems and (dis)function within them. Pointedly, my study of cruelty through the field of the Global Anglophone, affect theory, and a politicized aesthetic locates cruelty within the antihumanist,

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[1] *Kudos* 158.
[2] "Memory and Cruelty" 189.

antidemocratic, and antiegalitarian logic of capitalism. The novels I study innovatively detail the many different ways, styles, and forms of living in a world in which capitalism continues to fester.

In her book *Entrapments of Form: Cruelty and Modern Literature*, Catherine Toal usefully historicizes cruelty's changing definitions and focal points as important insights into different eras. Following its ancient understanding by Seneca as "indulgences of anger that transforms an otherwise aversive emotion into an experience of pleasure" (Toal 2) to Aristotle's definition as the "morbid pleasure of tyrants" (3) cruelty's oldest formulations locate it within personal affects that motivate abuses of power and justify use of excessive force. After the Enlightenment, as Toal writes, there appeared to be a reconsideration of cruelty as a more "natural" part of the experience of life. Montaigne, for example, presents it as an "organic malady that no reform of the state can fully abolish, one so banally endemic that it can seem pointless to speak about it at all" (10). The Marquis de Sade, known for popularizing the union of pleasure and pain,[3] too extends the eighteenth-century "celebration of 'nature' by proclaiming cruelty an ineradicable and *morally neutral component* of the arrangement of the cosmos" (13 emphasis mine). It goes without saying that "neutralizing" cruelty as a force refuses to

[3] Toal builds on James A. Steintrager's understanding of why it was "the eighteenth century that added pleasure in the suffering of others to the standard definition of cruelty" (11)—in addition to Sade's influence on these principles, I add that this move distracted from the real cruelty of the burgeoning slave trade by shifting the focus onto the individual subconscious desire for pain. This move, clearly, holds no structures accountable but the libidinal desire of humanity.

hold larger structures accountable in an effort to confront or overcome its causes. Therefore Nietzsche, in "the most uniquely radical modern perspective on cruelty" argues that "all civilizational and educational projects are realized by means of cruelty" (13), later echoed by Walter Benjamin's sentiment that "there is no document of civilization which is not at the same time a document of barbarism" (*Illuminations* 256).

Sade's attempts of aestheticizing cruelty to depoliticize it, or what Benjamin considers the "aestheticization of politics," is a dangerous one. This embrace of pure aesthetic, even in its most innocent avatar of "art for art's sake"[4] is violent on two accounts—the depoliticization of art enables an erasure of the agents of violence, both individual and structural, by justifying their behavior as a natural force in the world. Secondly, the aestheticization of something like politics, usually kept in check by strong oppositional forces, can lead to more violence, or even fascism, as Benjamin proclaims. What he means by this is an aesthetic that isolates its own engagement from politics enables politics' ills. As Benjamin writes,

> Fascism sees its salvation in giving these masses not their right, but instead a chance to express themselves. The masses have a right to change property relations; Fascism seeks to give them an expression while preserving property. The logical result of Fascism is the introduction of aesthetics into political life. (*Illuminations* 242)

Benjamin locates authoritarianism, economic control, racism, and everything that fascism has come to represent within the empty politics of aesthetics. Similarly, Toal

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[4] Even though, as Benjamin writes, fascism is "evidently the consummation of 'l'art pour l'art.'" (*Illuminations* 242)

writes that Sade's "opportunistic" attempt at the "critical dismantling of the revolutionary promise of civic equality" (13) is portrayed by an aesthetic engagement of cruelty as "natural." The use of Sade and Sacher-Masoch, whose work influenced the term "sadomasochism," in my third chapter, is not an embrace of this aestheticization of violence. Rather, it is an attempt to illustrate how a shallow politics places victimhood on the individual rather than locating it within the larger structures that engineer the conditions of reality.

Like the false "freedom" evoked in "free market" capitalism, understanding the modern world as naturally cruel, rather than as seeing the kernel of cruelty within the very projects that enabled modernity, removes the teeth from palpable critiques of the consequences of capitalism. Between Nietzsche's and Sade's "divergent pathways out of the legacy of the Enlightenment," (Toal 15) only one allows room to consider slavery, and its capitalist motivators, as that which was excised from formulations of Enlightenment philosophy. Thus, the other side to Gikandi's illustration of the marginalization of black figures in paintings is the oft-cited meditation on the "sublime" by Edmund Burke. Burke writes of a blind boy, who after having his vision restored, "upon accidentally seeing a negro woman…was struck with great horror at the sight" (Burke). As Burke reasons that "the horror, in this case, can scarcely be supposed to arise from any association… with any disagreeable ideas…They had both probably their

effects from their natural operation" (Burke).[5] The anecdote, dismissed by many philosophers for its gross subjectivity and empirical methodology, nonetheless gives us insight into a depoliticized aesthetic. The "horror"[6] of witnessing a black woman, without a political aesthetic, can only be attributed to a natural reaction to skin color. Yet this "horror," when contextualized within an Enlightenment philosophy that actively discounted the humanity of millions, can be read as more of a shocking reckoning of the cruelty nascent within racialized capitalism alongside the many schools of thought that looked uncritically at these liberal ideals.

In the contemporary moment, with a different breed of capitalism and a different pace of exploitation, locating cruelty within the history of colonial exploitation grounds and historicizes it as a concept for critique. Thus, when Toal writes that contemporary cruelty "turns on the question of equality…reiterating and reinforcing the subject's needless relegation to the status of indifferent and disposable matter" (Toal 15) it becomes vividly clear that turning the subject into disposable matter is not "needless"—it is the very crux of capitalism's logic. Contemporary cruel aesthetics, based in the material understanding of the history of capitalism, is based on the simple idea that

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[5] Franz Fanon writes of a parallel moment in *Black Skin, White Masks*: "'*Maman*, look, a Negro; I'm scared!' Scared! Scared! Now they were beginning to be scared of me…[those who had] woven me out of a thousand details, anecdotes, and stories." (91)

[6] At the risk of stating the obvious, this same word is infamously repeated by Kurtz at the end of *Heart of Darkness* in a moment in which he finally reckons with the evils of imperialism in the Congo and his role in it.

capitalism—and colonialism, slavery, and all the things it enables—is unequivocally antihumanist at its core. Cruelty is both the motivator, and is present, in the psychic and affective fallout of this antihumanism. This prompts a question: can a cruel aesthetic speak for a universal capitalist culture, in order to understand its effects, globally? As Vivek Chibber writes,

> There is no more dramatic illustration of capital's universalization than the fact that the entire world has been engulfed by its effects…for the first time since the 1980s, everyone is talking about capitalism—not alterity, or hybridity, or the fragment, but the ubiquitous, grinding, crushing force of capital. (*Postcolonialism* 294)

This sentiment has been echoed in modern considerations of capitalism's effect on generational inequality as well. As Malcolm Harris writes in *Kids These Days: Human Capital and the Making of Millennials*, as a system that is "accelerat[ing with a] historically unprecedented pace of change" capitalism is beginning to "hyperventilate," "desperate to find anything that hasn't yet been reengineered to maximize profit, and then it makes those changes as quickly as possible" (11). Harris connects the economic, the cruel and the affective, by understanding that the culture of "neoliberalism," or "late capitalism" is one in which "the rate of change is visibly unsustainable" (11). This culture, this cruel aesthetic, is known to "Millennials…as 'the world,' or 'America,' or 'Everything.' And Everything sucks" (11-12).[7]

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[7] "Millennials, [Harris] argues, are bearing the brunt of the economic damage wrought by late-20th-century capitalism. All these insecurities — and the material conditions that produced them — have thrown millennials into a state of perpetual panic. If 'generations are characterized by crises,' as Harris argues, then ours is the crisis of extreme capitalism." (Illing)

This understanding of a different emotionally- and politically-complex landscape, in literature and elsewhere, has prompted a reengagement with "feeling," as in Sianne Ngai's work. In her book *Ugly Feelings*, she theorizes that

> the nature of the sociopolitical itself has changed in a manner that both calls forth and calls upon a new set of feelings—ones less powerful than the classical political passions, though perhaps more suited, in their ambient, Bartlebyan, but still diagnostic nature, for models of subjectivity, collectivity, and agency not entirely foreseen by past theorists of the commonwealth." (5)

Ngai's engagement with "ugly feelings," or the aesthetics of negative emotions, such as envy, irritation, or what she calls "stuplimity,"[8] opens up contemporary literature and literary analysis to "minor affects" in order to "investigate impasses in contemporary theory and criticism that might otherwise remain unseen" (Ngai 8). In this way, an engagement with affect might "be recuperated for critical praxis in general, shedding new light on the intimate relationship between negative affect and 'negative thinking'" (8). My return to cruelty, a term theorized, defined and utilized in myriad ways and contexts throughout literary and philosophical history, is a measured reanimation of a term often used to describe interpersonal issues. Yet locating it at the center of a capitalist logic both lets us understand the material and affective actualization of capitalism's effects as well as contextualizes the cruelty witnessed at this everyday, interpersonal level. As Ngai writes, while "it is the discourse of philosophical aesthetics,

[8] For Ngai, "stuplimity" "highlight[s] certain limitations in classic theories of the sublime that prevent it from adequately accounting for the experience of boredom increasingly intertwined with contemporary experiences of aesthetic awe." (Ngai 8)

rather than that of political philosophy or economy, in which emotions have traditionally played the most pivotal role," understanding affect within political economy and fields considered off-limits to subjectivity now becomes "the ideal site to examine the politically ambiguous work of negative emotions" (5-6).

There are acknowledged dangers of the universalization of capitalist cruelties, including a generalization that broad-brush-strokes specificity out of existence. This is especially true when comparing literary works that consider the diverse realities of life within global capitalism. As Aarthi Vadde points out in her chapter on Zadie Smith and her "Scales of Injustice" in *Chimeras of Form* when considering a truly global capitalism, "many of those who belong to the 99 percent, intellectually and emotionally, might also belong to the 20 percent, economically" (184). Importantly, pointing out this complication is about "keeping visible the wealth disparities across the Global North and Global South" and "insinuat[ing] necessary scale-reflection into conversations about critiquing and resisting capitalism as a global phenomenon" in an effort to "think about how national and global scales of inequality fit together" (184). For me, what a universal outlook does in this respect, is not to flatten difference or relative economic wealth, though being wary of these pitfalls is crucial. Rather, it acknowledges that the mechanism of capitalism's intentions, however varied its consequences, begins with the baseline logic of "profits over people," a cruel ideal that initiates universal exploit with the same operational logic. "All capital's universalization requires," writes Chibber, "is

that the economic logic of capitalism be implanted in various parts of the world and that it be successfully reproduced over time" ("Subaltern.") While "degrees of cultural and political change" remain intact, Chibber believes that "it doesn't require that all, or even most, of the cultural practices of a region be transformed along some kind of identifiable capitalist lines" ("Subaltern").

Yet it is also important, in my view, to incorporate Vadde's justified concerns, that the study of the capital's universalizing aesthetic be tempered by the specific cruelties in which larger structures are realized. Universality, at its worst, is reductive, abstract, and ironically, depoliticizing.[9] But at its best, it may be able to perform some kind of solidarity in a world where capitalism promotes various kinds of cruelty, "violence" that, "whether intentional or systemic, physical or moral…seem to be, as is said, 'worse than death'" (Balibar 115). Michel de Certeau shows us how reading at the level of the every day doesn't favor abstraction nor does it "imply a return to individuality," but instead utilizes the "individual as locus…of an operational logic" (de Certeau xi). In other words, the every day, with the individual experience as its touchpoint, can connect the structural with the concrete. For example, using the every

[9] See Serwer. Serwer's article "Cruelty is the Point," whose title merited a certain virality online, reasons cruelty's pride of place (an interpersonal one) in the discourse as being the answer "to the loneliness and atomization of modern life." While Serwer does acknowledge larger structural issues in his assessment of cruelty, this is not distilled in the title; the catchiness of the phrase rests in a depoliticized aesthetic in which incivility is falsely equated to being as bad as the deeply racist immigration policies of a white ethno-nationalist state. However, I expand on the merits of the article as a whole—and not just the title—in my conclusion.

day in depicting art produced by the cruel reality of indebtedness, Leigh Claire La Berge and Delia Hanna's "Debt Aesthetics" shows how art can "explore the cost and consequence of the accumulation of private and government-subsidized student loans" ("Debt Aesthetics). These consequences are enumerated through the banal documents debt creates: a list of loans granted by fields of study; applications to economic programs; visualizations of national student debt and credit card debt. As they explain,

> anthropology no less than economics and political economy has played a particularly important role in elaborating our understanding of debt as a lived social relation and in emphasizing that *quotidian practice should be the ground on which debt's theoretical architecture is built.* ("Debt Aesthetics" emphasis mine)

Cruelty, then, can also exemplify structural injustice in its least abstract, most operational forms—ones that still plug into systemic issues without losing sight of the concrete ways in which injustice is performed, staged, and catalogued across ordinary interactions.

For students of literature, a measured study of cruelty can address Sebald's fear that "our species is unable to learn from its mistakes" ("On Memory" 189) by grounding his critique of cruelty within histories of capitalism and exploitation rather than simply aesthetics. In this instance, to "learn" must mean to engage with the contradictions of capitalism, intervene in our "master narratives," and trade in innovative and unexpected combinations of scholarship like that of affect theory, political aesthetics, and the Global Anglophone. These interdisciplinary methods might allow for the "cruelty inherent in the history of mankind" to finally be "described in the hope that the

last chapter in that horror story will be written" ("On Memory" 189), rather than resting in our failure to do so. The first step of writing "the final chapter" is to cast off cruelty as "natural" by locating it, with the help of literature, within the unnatural antihumanism of capitalism. As Mark Fisher writes,

> There is far too much toleration of failure on our side.…The odds might be stacked in such a way that we do keep losing, but the point is to increase our collective intelligence. That requires… at least some kind of system of coordination and *some system of memory*. ("No Honour" emphasis mine)

While Fisher speaks about the logic of capitalism and the need to coordinate a measured alternative to capitalist realities, this also applies to an understanding of the need to weaponize the study of history—and memory—in order to contextualize the present. In putting Sebald's cynicism together with Fisher's wary optimism, can we begin to see a way beyond our failure to "learn from our mistakes"? To reckon with and further understand a potential way out of these systems, as I detail below, includes the intrepid engagement with the politics of refusal, allyship, solidarity, and the bolstering of a "collective intelligence" with the systematic appraisal of cruel aesthetics, and its origins, within literature.

1.2 Angles of the Global Anglophone: "A Vanguard Mode of Critical Inquiry"

Choosing to use "The Global Anglophone" is part of a methodology that allows a deeper understanding of the racialized capitalism of global history. Yet while this label or optic resists certain trends and amplifies others within postcolonial scholarship, it is

often regarded with suspicion as to whether the new delineation of "global" or "Anglophone" necessitates an entirely new field. Of the significance of this new category, Amanda Lagji questions whether the term "merely rebrand[s] 'world literature' for the twenty-first century" in a way that "gloss[es] over postcolonial histories and decolonial projects" when using the word "global" (Lagji). Concerning for Lagji as well, is "of course," the "neocolonial charge of privileging the Anglophone over other languages, once again." This suspicion is, unfortunately to be expected in a discipline that is often marginalized, underfunded, or consolidated under larger umbrella fields. Too, many scholars of the postcolonial have expressed wariness of a term that first arose from "job-market-speak"[10] rather than from a more organic scholarship. The cynicism that using the "Global Anglophone" defangs a lot of what makes postcolonial studies challenging to more traditional scholarship is a worthwhile critique of the term. However, for reasons I will expand on, using the Global Anglophone as an opportunity to recenter Anglophone *criticism*—rather than Anglocentrism—is a way of contending with the economic, racial, and emotional

[10] See Anam; Srinivasan. Srinivasan writes that "In 2016, a few months before completing my doctoral dissertation on the rhetoric of New India, I discovered I was a 'global Anglophonist'... because I had applied for academic jobs in multiple fields, and the ones that recognized me were all positions in global Anglophone and world literatures within departments of English in the US academy." (309) Yet, for Srinivasan, this called for a greater understanding of "relatively new disciplinary configurations." She writes: "we might say that the global is the artist formerly known as the postcolonial; the world has supplanted the third world; discourses on shared literary heritages and futures, including the planetary, now stand in for what once was the commonwealth; and the Anglophone as a social and cultural system is increasingly replacing English-language literature as an object of critique." (309)

legacies of empire—one so greatly influenced by the culture of English imperial capitalism.

The term Global Anglophone, I think, better contends with the idea that "for almost three hundred years, literature from a substantial portion of the world *was* British literature, and it was made so by force" (Elam). J. Daniel Elam uses this sentiment as a way to critique the label of "Global Anglophone" particularly that the "violence" used to make things into Anglophone objects would be erased—and that the label of Anglophone would be dehistoricized, decontextualized and accepted at face value. Yet, it could be argued that when employed effectively, this categorization can *primarily* engage with texts through their histories of violence under empire. Literature marginalized as "other" sometimes cannot allow for diverse kinds of theoretical engagement—with, for example, global capitalism—under the rubric of "postcolonialism." Vivek Chibber, author of *Postcolonialism and the Specter of Capitalism*, writes about Subalternists' refusal to engage with radical class theory on the merits of its Eurocentrism:

> When Subalternist theorists put up this gigantic wall separating East from West, and when they insist that Western agents are not driven by the same kinds of concerns as Eastern agents, what they're doing is endorsing the kind of essentialism that colonial authorities used to justify their depredations in the nineteenth century." ("Subaltern")

Instead, seeing Anglophone texts for what they were—"forcefully made into British literature"—speaks to the strengths of such a method rather than as a homogenizing weakness. For the Global Anglophone to be what Nasia Anam optimistically wagers as a

"vanguard mode of inquiry," our methodology must, somewhat ironically, be ceaselessly critical of what the Anglophone has meant, what it has come to mean, and what has been erased, othered, or forgotten in the process.

Though it is not labeled as such, Gikandi's preface to *Slavery and the Culture of Taste* puts forth what I would consider a successful model of a critical Global Anglophone practice. Considered a work of cultural criticism, Gikandi's book is aware of its interdisciplinary methodology in scholarship as it stands, and shows how it may lead to the "structure of this book appear[ing] bifurcated" (xv). In addressing two different audiences, students of "modern British culture" and students of "slave culture and the black Atlantic" (xvi), he writes,

> For students of modern British culture, especially those invested powerfully in the aesthetic and the literary as the mark of cultural achievement, I think there is something useful to be learned about the cultural traffic between the plantations of Jamaica…and the emergence of forms of cultural expression. … It is still important to know…how colonial events entered the idiom of ordinary Englishness. (Gikandi xv-xvi)

For "students of "slave culture and the black Atlantic," Gikandi writes that his "wide-angled approach" is something that "underscores the existence of African slavery as a perversely unique global phenomenon" (xvi). In showing the different "audiences" of this book, it makes clear that this bifurcation exists to the detriment of "students of modern British culture" (xvi). In turn, this also invites "students of slave culture and the black Atlantic" to understand slavery as part of a "global phenomenon" rather than being allowed a marginalization in a field that should be critical to all students, of history or otherwise.

Thus, the Global Anglophone, in my understanding of it, should attempt to bridge "traditions that are often kept apart" (Gikandi xvi). There is a clear concern on the part of some postcolonial scholars, that using the term "Global Anglophone" would mean a reversion to the understanding of an Anglophone literature as "*the* mark of cultural achievement" (xv emphasis mine) rather than centering oppression, colonialism, and economic extraction as that which enabled this modern "achievement." In this sense, the term must become a methodology that also critically understands *why* certain traditions have been kept apart. In one sense, the label of the Global Anglophone can benefit from being conversant in more schools of thought not necessarily associated with postcoloniality, such as affect theory, which I will expand upon in my next section. In another sense, it is worth asking the question why the most historically influential postcolonial methods have moved away from Marxist economic theory, which seemed crucial to their nascent formulations. As I will discuss later, both these theories have and can further expand the projects of Global Anglophone criticism, at a time when "the stakes could scarcely be higher" (Anam).

Addressing the "global" within Global Anglophone studies is also key in making sure that this methodology is less of a buzzword than a "vanguard mode of critical inquiry" that has staying power. To be "global" has often come to mean, in its various avatars, exploring the surprising connections between nations and eras as more "entangled" in the literature and history than previously studied ("cosmopolitanism" is

one of these avatars). However, in an important delineation of boundaries in what a "politically engaging" Global Anglophone methodology must be, Hadji Bakar takes issue with this word "entangled," often used in Saidian postcoloniality to convey the interconnectedness of the world. Bakar writes that

> Rather than value and interpret Global Anglophone texts as markers and examples of the sublime complexity of a "global entanglement," we can be more unequivocal about what is so often evident in the narratives therein: *an asymmetrical relation of subjugation and domination*. … Our critical language and posture can afford to make the present battles over the rules of global connection more live and contestable and less a foregone conclusion. Doing so would be the beginning of a much-needed politicization of the field of Global Anglophone literature. (Bakar emphasis mine)

Bakar importantly calls out the flattening out of relationships of economic, extractive, and narrative control when referring to the term "entanglements." As I explained earlier, the violence of abstraction, and the aestheticization of the global, is dangerous when it comes to dealing with the specific horrors of colonialism; so much of the specific logic of cruelty behind these "asymmetrical relation[s] of subjugation and domination" is lost. Bakar agrees that words like "'complex,' 'fundamental,' or 'inextricable,' which are value neutral" are abstractions that have no place in a methodology in which the analysis of subjugation and domination is critical. As I argue in my chapter on W. G. Sebald, his formal politics of anachronism, in which seemingly unrelated facts are pressed against each other, reestablish narrative connections between the networks of violence between colony and empire. This provides the ability to parse dynamics of domination with much more nuance than "entanglement," which paints

these dynamics and histories of violence as "forgone conclusions" rather than brutal coercions.

Also much needed in the politicization of the field of Global Anglophone, something not actually denoted in Gikandi's text, is more engagement with economic theory. A more nuanced understanding of capitalism's logical cruelty can further bolster understandings of domination and subjugation that are inextricable from understandings of postcoloniality. For Thomas C. Holt, understanding the "slights of hand," that "make market-governed social relations" like slavery, colonialism, and subjugation, "into *natural* phenomena" is key in understanding the erasure of the fact that "that historically such relations initially were nearly always coerced" (Holt xix). The resistance to using "Eurocentric" theories as engaging in "part of the colonial and imperial drive of the West" and thus "implicated in imperialism" ("Subaltern") is understandable. And yet, again, in an argument for the importance of universalization, Chibber distinguishes between theories that universalize the European experience as the center of the world, and theories that simply came out of Europe. Chibber notes that "It's perfectly fine to say that people draw on local cultures and practices when they resist capitalism, or when they resist various agents of capital" (Subaltern). And for my methodology, the specificity of local cultures in their response to the logic of cruelty within capitalism, is engaging and inspiring. Yet, "it's quite another to say that there are no universal aspirations, or no universal interests" ("Subaltern").

Like the Anglophone can mean a return to the measured critique of the Anglosphere, using "Eurocentric" theories to understand universal concepts as Chibber believes global capitalism to be, means to distinguish a euro-centrism from a euro-supremacy. If this distinction is not made, as Chibber argues, the "postcolonial" simply turns into a theory which focuses on the conditions of oppression—a worthy cause—yet without the economic historicization which contextualizes and deepens understandings of colonialism. Chibber's argument for why the postcolonial requires a "class-oriented radicalism" further emboldens the choice for a "global" Anglophone that echoes a crisis of "global" capital. As mentioned earlier, in *Postcolonial Theory and the Specter of Capital*, Chibber writes that "the global economic crises has brought into relief the basic fact that the world is now part of the same universal history, subject to the same forces" (294).

For Yogita Goyal, left alone, postcolonialism continues to truly "[transform] the boundaries of what English literature means, and moves across disciplines to create new objects" (Goyal). She writes that by simply being, "postcolonial scholars" themselves

> have had to fight for the space we occupy…for the right to teach English literature to American students despite our foreign accents, dealt with visa troubles and employment authorization debacles, suffered the paternalism of senior scholars and administrators who…tell us about their maid…who comes from the countries we call home. (Goyal)

While all of this is certainly true, and close to my own heart, anecdotal evidence of the existence of "asymmetrical relationships of subjugation and domination" begs for this evidence to be contextualized within a class-based radicalism and historicized rather than exemplified as apoliticized cultures of oppression. This should be the model for all

marginalized fields as well—allowed to flourish outside of their silos and interact with the theories and specificities of the contemporary world, which is an affordance of the Global Anglophone.

Part of this work involves being unafraid of the raw data of money, of numbers—as Marx and Engels write in *The Manifesto for the Communist Party*, the "icy water of egotistical calculation"—and the subsequent historicizing that this data allows. For example, recent economic scholarship by Utsa Patnaik has detailed the amount England extracted from India, over the course of almost two hundred years of control, to be upwards of $45 trillion (Hickel). Before even understanding the logic of brutality or oppression, the number amount behind this structure provides insight (and horror) to the cruel logic of capitalism, and its subsequent effects on the postcolony. As a recent *Al Jazeera* opinion piece revealed,

> London ended up with all of the gold and silver that should have gone directly to the Indians in exchange for their exports. This corrupt system meant that even while India was running an impressive trade surplus with the rest of the world…it showed up as a deficit in the national accounts because the real income from India's exports was appropriated in its entirety by Britain. Some point to this fictional "deficit" as evidence that India was a liability to Britain. But exactly the opposite is true. Britain intercepted enormous quantities of income that rightly belonged to Indian producers…meanwhile the "deficit" meant that India had no option but to borrow from Britain to finance its imports. So the entire Indian population was forced into completely unnecessary debt to their colonial overlords, further cementing British control. (Hickel)

Whether it comes to India or the West Indies, beginning with a basic understanding of the universal drive of capitalism does not mean razing over cultural specificities but understanding the operational logic of different kinds of forces of domination and

submission. This allows for the particular and long-lasting cultural specificities of cruelty to be further informed and realized. As I write in my third chapter, power dynamics developed in pre-capitalist and capitalist colonies, even feudal relationships, still dominate workers and workplace dynamics to this day. Kazuo Ishiguro, for one, literalizes the different dimensions of these dynamics by putting so much of it—the history, capitalism, empire, and the troubled and "spiritually vexed" affect of a worker who struggles within this nexus—into conversation.

1.3 Economies of Affect

My approach to Global Anglophone literature also includes the study of affect in order to broker a more nuanced relationship between representations of oppression, economic domination, and the way these histories feel and make us feel towards the present moment. While theorists of affect don't always contend with the history of global imperialism, or the dark underpinnings of capitalism, I think affect works best when aiding these histories and theories of the Global Anglophone out of their logical ruts, or an understandable cynicism. In turn, affect theory's continued focus on the every day proves a potent combination of an awareness of a heightened economic language, a sensitivity to the affective atmosphere of their language, and a reckoning with a complex present in which general conditions are linked to the extreme specifics of material reality.

As David Harvey points out, in Marx's time, "political economy was a far more open terrain of debate than it is now" (xiii). Now, economics is "a *supposedly* scientific, highly mathematised and data driven field of study [that] has achieved the status of an orthodoxy…a fantasy [that] rests on the assumption that if something cannot be measured and condensed into data points then it is either irrelevant or does not exist," (xiii, emphasis mine).[11] This is stereotypically the way that critics of affect theory believe affect theory to function. While this way of understanding economics "[does] not help solve the problem of alienation or of deteriorating social relations," (xiii) together with affect theory, a new tool for understanding the present moment takes shape in the fleeting and flow of capital, and the hard and fast materialities of human emotion. In other words, looking at the emotional weight of novels is no more imprecise than the poetic justice licensed to economic thinking.

For my purposes, theories of affect are most generative when intervening in material issues and legacies of slavery, capitalism, and racism, by both acknowledging the tense emotionality around these subjects as well as providing a way beyond solely material analyses. This offers, as it were, a way out. Studying the affective qualities of

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[11] Thomas Piketty considers the abstraction of numbers within economics as avoidant of the realities of the world, painting economists as fantastical escapists. "To put it bluntly," he writes, "the discipline of economics has yet to get over its childish passion for mathematics and for purely theoretical and often highly ideological speculation, at the expense of historical research and collaboration with the other social sciences. Economists are all too often preoccupied with petty mathematical problems of interest only to themselves. This obsession with mathematics is an easy way of acquiring the appearance of scientificity without having to answer the far more complex questions posed by the world we live in." (Piketty 41)

literature can help unearth the individual effects of cruelty amidst larger factors, eventually asking the question as to whether the "individual" is the appropriate literary vehicle for the contemporary moment. Williams's "Structures of Feeling," a groundbreaking, proto-affective concept that identifies emergent thought, attitudes and ideologies that have not yet been solidified as appearing in novels, shows the subtle ways in which literature can pick up on feelings not yet completely acknowledged by societal opinion. Affect in literature can be a "tension...at once lived and articulated in radically new semantic figures,"[12] in the sense that these feelings can change the structures taken for granted by more classical understandings of the novel as a bourgeois object. Williams's literary theory, which provides another lens for this project, attempts what he calls a "cultural materialism," or "a theory of the specificities of material cultural and literary production within historical materialism" (212). This connection between "creative practice and practical consciousness" (212) unites atmosphere, emotion, and the lived reality of life as documented and illuminated by a type of novel that can teach and challenge.

Contemporary affect scholars that I have found most helpful do not fail to ground affect theory in "economics," race, and gender theory. Like Williams before them, they most often using political economy a la Marx to illustrate the way economic

[12] Williams 212.

logic influences emotional systems, and/or how these emotional systems trade within economies. In other words, at its best, affect theory can become a "hidden-in-plain-sight politically engaged work…attend[ing] to the hard and fast materialities, as well as the fleeting and flowing ephemera, of the daily and the workaday, of everyday and every-night life, and of 'experience'" (Seigworth and Gregg 7). The language used here—"hard and fast," versus "fleeting and flowing," "workaday" versus a more general understanding of "experience"— seem to outline the ways in which "economic" arguments as well as affective study are both, in a sense, "invisible" fields that must constantly be grounded in order to prevent abstraction and fantasy. The fact that they are so readily yoked together makes all the more sense.

In my second epigraph, Ann Cvetkovich, author of *Depression, A Feeling,* asks whether the cruel details that literature allows to haunt us, especially when historicized, can speak to the larger structures of global capitalism and its colonial foundations. Affect "takes seriously questions like 'How do I feel?' and 'How does capitalism feel?' as starting points for something that might be a theory but could also be a description, an investigation, or a process" (4-5). Investigating novels within giant, seemingly uncontrollable systems can provide "an alternative approach to master narratives about global conditions" by showing how these policies, world views, and power structures

operate on everyday levels.[13] Novels, which can be seen as "a means for modern societies to describe themselves, not from outside or above, but from within a system of social relationships of which the novel is a component part,"[14] then become the vessel for an attempt to mirror the social relationship between the personal and the policies that create the individual's place in, and feeling towards, modern society. As Cvetkovich has already done, historicizing a need for the question that affect must answer is crucial in bringing this field back in conversation with our historical realities.

The collection of novels and narrators in this project are all products of an intimacy with different types of cruelty. In *Autobiography of my Mother*, for example, Kincaid's Xuela sees the postcolonial Caribbean landscape as being one in which "brutality is the only real inheritance and cruelty is sometimes the only thing freely given" (5). Narrators created in extreme worlds like this aren't necessarily anomalies, but they do make the case that to completely understand the "aftermath" of

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[13] Other literary approaches use affect theory as more of a metaphor to describe the ways in which its logic can be easily borrowed by emotional study, a move that I apply to Cusk's novels in my fourth chapter. In her article "Affective Economies," for example, Sara Ahmed applies the Marxian critique of the logic of capital to emotion in order to show how "emotions work as a form of capital"—even the way we talk about feelings shows a kind of possession, i.e. "having" a feeling. (Ahmed 120) For Ahmed, "affect does not reside positively in the sign or commodity, but is produced only as an effect of its circulation" and the way emotions accumulate in places and within populations over time. Ahmed also borrows from economics in order to suggest that "emotions circulate and are distributed across a social as well as psychic field." In turn, this shows how "feelings appear in objects, or indeed as objects with a life of their own, only by the concealment of how they are shaped by histories, including histories of production (labor and labor time), as well as circulation or exchange." (Ahmed 120-121) To this, I add that feelings can appear in political geographies, or in the movement of capital, in ways that link together countries, ways of life, or common struggles under similar economic situations.

[14] Armstrong 445.

colonialism—the cruelty of an inheritance both bodily and economic—emotionality must be recast as something that is as significant as historical fact. In her article "The Affective Turn in Contemporary Literature," Nancy Armstrong turns her focus to the way novels make us feel by examining "protagonists that might more accurately be called human 'extremophiles,' a term for biological life-forms that survive under conditions thought incapable of sustaining biological life" (441). My project formulates "extremophiles" as survivors of intense emotional burdens—from colonialism to extreme debt peonage, mysterious debilitating illnesses to extreme masochism—those who survive under the cruel conditions incapable of sustaining mentally sound individuals. Seeing these extremophiles through the lens of affect theory puts the burden of illness on the conditions of life, rather than the individual, and it is with this sentiment and focus that I move forward with the analysis of these novels.

As I mentioned before, the novels in this dissertation, though they make larger interventions into narrative structure in relation to institutions, ideologies, and various oppressions, still depend on the very real personal, specific, and intensely peculiar observations. These are narrations that dote on and obsess about small memories, intense objective recollections, bizarre micro-happenstances within history and otherwise, and the historical facts that bring subjective and objective violence together in surprising ways. These "new ways of articulating the relations between the macro and the micro" (Gregg and Seigworth 2), and the cruelty of things large and small, is an

"effort to describe the present through attention to the felt experience of everyday life" (Cvetkovich 12). This includes "moments that might seem utterly banal in comparison with the moments of shock or moments of ordinary extraordinariness" (Cvetkovich 12).

It is worth restating that the dissonance between the scales of intimacy in which cruelty operates is where it is at its most helpful. While "[a]ffect is in many ways synonymous with force or forces of encounter," too, affect "more often transpires within and across the subtlest of shuttling intensities: all the minuscule or molecular events of the unnoticed. The ordinary and its extra-" (Gregg and Seigworth 2). Both Michel de Certeau's *The Practice of Everyday Life*, as I mentioned before, as well as the work of Eric Auerbach, which I use in my chapter on Kincaid's novels, are helpful in parsing a contemporary, political understanding of such affective scales. What de Certeau calls the "art of the weak" (37) can be seen as the politicization of these "miniscule" and "molecular events of the unnoticed" (Gregg and Seigworth 2), where ordinary tactics of personal resistance can simultaneously wage larger-scale battles.

Take, for example, a passage about "The New Age of Anxiety," as seen in Lauren Berlant's work. Berlant, of course, is known for her theorization on the emotion complexities of a "cruel optimism," an "attachment" to things that hurt us, like the ones that leave individuals trapped within the fallacious ideals of "the American Dream."[15]

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[15] See Berlant.

Berlant contextualizes this affect within predatory economic atmospheres. The following passage, however, benefits from being studied through the combined fields of the Global Anglophone and affect theory to connect it to a deeper history. Berlant's take on an economy of affect shows that novelistic tropes of dispirited characters and plotless stories create new kinds of narratives that try to define a certain "age of anxiety." Hsu writes that, through affect theory, Berlant

> provides a way of…framing uniquely modern questions: Where did the seeming surplus of emotionality that we see on the Internet come from, and what might it become? What new political feelings were being produced by the rudderless drift of life in the gig economy... [by] millennials resigning themselves to precariousness as life's defining feature? (Hsu)

While Berlant's specific conception of anxiety is particular to this age, historicizing the "surplus of emotionality" must critically contend with the long, cruel, and suppressed histories of global capitalism—including its seeds within economies of slavery and colonialism. Within this "boundless information", while logistically overwhelming, simply lies more examples of the anachronisms that we cannot reconcile. Perhaps it is the concentration of this information on the internet, and its accessibility, rather than its content, that provokes a "new" kind of anxiety. Regardless, contextualizing Berlant's observations is essentially the task of the Global Anglophone novel: reengaging the interior, psychological, and economic results of the cruel after-effects of colonialism in ways that frame our present moment.

1.4 Chapter Outlines: Traveling Through Forms of Empire, Global Capitalism, and Cruelty

My first chapter reclaims narratives of the aftermath of the colonized Caribbean by historicizing the banal realities of the postcolony, informed by a "monstrous" past. "Cruel Cultures of the Postcolony: Everyday Violence and Bitter Histories in Jamaica Kincaid's *Annie John* and *The Autobiography of My Mother*" shows how Kincaid portrays the inheritance of slavery and colonialism as something that materializes as intimate cruelty. As we see in Kincaid's *Annie John*, a childhood conversant in scales of violence because of the proximity that the Caribbean has to its history makes this violence more palpable. In *The Autobiography of My Mother*, the centrality of the African, Carib Indian, and Scottish ancestry of the main character show how colonialism's transitive cruelties register in personal and domestic violence. As James Baldwin writes, only "a creature despised by history finds history a questionable matter" and thus is in a position to "bitterly contest it."[16] In this way, as Kincaid reclaims narratives that speak to the affective fallout of racialized capitalism and its aftermath, her prose is marked by the bitter refusal of this erasure. Kincaid's characters actively undermine the culture of the postcolony, one haunted by the "spectre of colonialism's abduction of Caribbean's women's bodies," by refusing to "lie down and be still."[17]

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[16] Baldwin 48.
[17] Kamugisha 32.

Seeking the origins of colonial cruelty within the logic of empire, my second chapter, "A Politics of Anachronism: Cruelty of Empire and Affective Allyship in W.G. Sebald's *The Rings of Saturn*," approaches the reasoning behind brutal histories of slavery and colonialism. In his understanding of anachronism, Simon Gikandi writes that slavery appears "anachronistic" to those within empire, because it seems "at odds with the aspirations of the age [of Enlightenment]," even though it is slavery that "provided the economic foundation that enabled modernity."[18] Sebald's formal strategies to address the logic of cruelty within Eurocentric notions of greatness utilize what I call "literary anachronism." This method pushes together narratives from the "Age of Enlightenment" against the "quarantined"[19] histories of slavery and history, closing the discursive gap that keep the achievements of empire "innocently" separated from violent models of trade and profit. For Sebald, cruelty is the experience of violence upon revisiting the displaced narratives, narratives he later reconnects to the grand histories of global powers. Yet, Sebald's narrator also exhibits conditions of "psychic fallout"[20] from the cruelty of these histories. As I show in the chapter, this depressed position can actually provide an affective allyship with those more directly connected to the histories of the African diaspora.

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[18] Gikandi 32.
[19] Ibid.
[20] Cvetkovich 118.

Traveling further into the logic of cruelty within empire, my third chapter, "The 'Pleasures' and Cruelties of Work: Civil Servitude and 'Cluttered Intimacy' in Kazuo Ishiguro's *The Remains of the Day* and *Never Let Me Go,"* addresses the affective regulatory mechanisms that suppress criticisms of empire and personal freedoms. Using the labor critiques of Kathi Weeks and Mark McGurl, the chapter models the disciplining of the worker under colonialism as a prototype for the present dynamics of domination and submission in work under capitalism. In *The Remains of the Day*, Stevens, a professional butler, "sacrifices" his life for his profession, for dignity, and for empire in a way that shows how imperialist mental subjugation primes future generations for being model citizens under capitalism. The "cluttered intimacy" of these practices—including the sacrifice of the self, figuratively, in *Remains* (1988) and literally, in *Never Let Me Go* (2005),[21] informs the critique of labor, and how the imperial project is rebranded for a neoliberal era in the intimate cruelty involved in selling one's labor. Affectively, we can see how this coerced form of free labor, which has its roots in the cruelty of imperial ideology, performs a "spiritual violence" in a culture that appears to condone the taking away of agency, freedom, and choice.

In moving from a criticism of colonialism and slavery to considering the predatory nature of global capitalism and debt culture, my final chapter features

[21] [Spoiler Alert] In *Never Let Me Go,* the clones are created to donate their organs.

curiously alienated, cruel and troubling narrative atmospheres. "Matters of Life and Debt: The Cruel Economies of Rachel Cusk's Anxious *Outline* Trilogy," argues that Rachel Cusk, as heir to a Sebaldian method, uses a similar narrative structure to address how the contemporary moment is shaped by the financialization of language. Moving from Sebald's paralytic depression into these atmospheres of intense anxiety around the financialization of life—or what Mark Fisher has called "the privatization of stress"[22]—shows the ways in which global capitalism takes up the mantle of imperial domination under another name.

Cusk's observations locate the abstract violence of global finance within the every day—in qualities of life, mental health, and the general wellbeing of citizens. Set in Greece, in the aftermath of a debt crisis, *Outline* specifically seems to emphasize the centrality of debt narratives, or what David Harvey calls "antivalue," which I argue actually sets the stage for an antinovel that "undoes" the bourgeois novel. In turn, in breaking down the structures that uphold the novel, like narrative, plot, and character, Cusk shows how the novel is also upheld by capitalist virtues and myths of individual progress. The undoing of the novel, in this sense, may begin to reverse a blind belief in the other, making for a reality in which we are less bound by a "cruel optimism," in moving beyond narratives of false promise.

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[22] *Capitalist Realism* 19.

2. Cruel Cultures of the Postcolony: Everyday Violence and Bitter Histories in Jamaica Kincaid's *Annie John* and *The Autobiography of My Mother*

> I am speaking as an historical creation which has had bitterly to contest its history, to wrestle with it and finally accept it, in order to bring myself out of it. My point of view is certainly formed by my history and it is probable that *only a creature despised by history finds history a questionable matter*. –James Baldwin, "The White Man's Guilt"

> The sky, the moon and stars and sun in that same sky—none of these things were under the spell of history. Oh, to be a part of such a thing, to be a part of anything that is outside history, to be a part of anything that can deny the wave of the human hand, the beat of the human heart, the gaze of the human eye, human desire itself.—Jamaica Kincaid, *Autobiography of My Mother*

"To tell the history of the Caribbean is to tell the history of the world," write Laurent Dubois and Richard Lee Turits in *Freedom Roots*; "for centuries the region has remained at the center of global transformations, at once a crossroads and a crucible for their unfolding" (1). The ways in which this history—one that modeled an imperialism based in coerced labor, slavery, extraction, and violence on many levels for the world to recreate—has been "told" also influences the process of this unfolding. Dubois and Turits write that while "the Caribbean is a region deeply shaped and in enduring ways dominated by European and U.S. imperial projects," it nevertheless "is also a place where subjected people have never ceased, even under the most severe duress, contesting, imagining, and reinventing their worlds" (1). Walter Benjamin famously wrote that "brushing history against the grain" (257) is the crucial way of "contesting" a history written for the "victors."

In this chapter, I argue that Jamaica Kincaid's difficult, non-compliant, singular narratives brush against the grain by providing specific histories that focus on the cruelty of persisting colonial ideologies at the level of the everyday. Kincaid's narrators illustrate the specific materialization of the way in which imperialism has shaped life and culture. "Imagining" and "reinventing" worlds by accounting for and reckoning with the minute, and the seemingly miniscule, cast the cruel nature of imperialism, its influence on global history, and its experiments in human suffering at a register that makes these imaginings more redeemable.

As Thomas C. Holt points out in *The Problem of Freedom*, while some of the challenges to coloniality "involved dramatic collective actions of the dispossessed within the West Indies—including the slave revolt of 1831, the Morant Bay Rebellion of 1865, and the labor rebellion of 1938," there was mostly the "quiet reality of ex-slaves' refusal to follow the scripts envisioned by either planters or policy makers" (xxiii). Literature, and Kincaid's writing in particular, can capture the idea that these challenges can gain their power from the "quiet realities" of narratives that resist, that make connections at smaller levels, and that reveal the cruel pervasiveness of the idea that capital be produced at the cost of human enslavement. In Kincaid's *My Garden (Book):*, for instance, she writes of how unsuspecting vegetation can, upon closer inspection, reveal the logic of a sinister global marketplace.

> The breadfruit…sent to the West Indies by Joseph Banks, the English naturalist and world traveler… was meant to be a cheap food for feeding slaves…It grows readily, it

> bears fruit abundantly, it is impervious to drought. … In a place like Antigua the breadfruit is not a food, it is a weapon. (*My Garden (Book):* 135-137)

In *Annie John*, Annie's mother tricks her into eating breadfruit by saying it was "a new kind of rice imported from Belgium" (83). Her mother takes pleasure in seeing her daughter suffer through the meal. "When she laughed, her mouth opened to show off big, shiny, sharp white teeth" (*Annie John* 84). Kincaid locates the history of breadfruit within sinister notions of global trade, insinuating different registers of violence; the history of force-feeding forced labor mingling with present-day dysfunction of violence in intimate relationships; the weaponizing of nourishment.

Kincaid, in her fixation on how violence is expressed and why, shows that transitive conditions of colonialism morph into subtler forms of domination.[1] Comparing emancipation to national independence in the Anglophone Caribbean, Holt writes "as in 1838, what was envisioned was a 'freedom' drained of the power of genuine self-determination: materially, a freedom stripped of control over basic material resources; ideologically, a freedom that internalized its own antithesis" (xxv). In other words, even after emancipation, and after independence, the struggle—"the fundamental structure of the contest—the combatants, the ideological content and

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[1] Aaron Kamugisha writes, in "The Coloniality of Citizenship in the Contemporary Anglophone Caribbean," that "the coloniality of citizenship is the complex amalgam of elite domination, neoliberalism and the legacy of colonial authoritarianism, which continue to frustrate and deny the aspirations of many Caribbean people. It is this that lies at the heart of the postcolonial state." However, like Dubois and Turits, Kamugisha posits that "It hardly needs saying… that the Caribbean people have often refused brilliantly, and with an amazing cultural inventiveness…the hegemonic state practices…that act as constraints." (21) Kincaid voices these constraints at an intimate level that brings voice to this refusal of the practices of these constraints.

discourse—remained much the same" (xxv). Kincaid's details of life contend with the fact that while the abject brutality of slavery may be gone, the conditions, policies, and ideologies that maintained this system continue. In Maggie Nelson's 2011 book of essays *The Art of Cruelty*, she shows how violence is both "readily apparent eruptions of violence in everyday life with discernible agents and victims" as well as the large-scale, institutionalized forms of oppression that she labels "systemic or symbolic violence, often as invisible as dark matter, that underlies and mobilizes the structure of capitalism itself" (73). As with the example of the breadfruit, Kincaid's focus on the "readily apparent" oppression in Caribbean life is nuanced and powerful by trading in the systemic and symbolic as well.

Nelson expands on Slavoj Žižek's understanding of subjective versus objective violence, expounding that in literature, and life, we must "read explosions of subjective violence" through the lens of structural violence, instead of at the level of the everyday. What ends up being at stake for both Nelson and Žižek is the idea that acts of subjective violence may seem more dangerous and "more horrifying" due to their immediacy, but that "structural violence…is their truer and more heinous cause" (73). It is hard, however, to imagine something more heinous than the brutality of slavery, even when considering its structural components. The case of the *Zong* massacre made it clear that that the British imperial approach to slavery meant both insuring slave bodies as if they were cargo, like any shipping syndicate would, *alongside* the horrific act of throwing the

slaves overboard to drown upon approaching Jamaica in order to be able to file the insurance claim. I use the work of Jamaica Kincaid to argue for more of a dialectical relationship between types of violence, and to make a case for a closer study of texts that detail cruelty at the local level as crucial to making a more profound connection between concrete and abstract forms of violence. Only with this foundation can we appropriately reckon with and make palpable the violence of the structure itself.

As I mention in my introduction, postcolonial and Anglophone criticism as well as the focus on large-scale, universal structural critiques of capital and neo-imperialism in global studies have varying focal points and approaches.[2] Though Nelson calls attention to the "heinous forces of structural violence" as the real danger, her book's subtitle actually highlights the act of "reckoning," which translates into everyday, commonplace forms of book-keeping or account-settling. These petty descriptors end up suggesting that larger structural critiques are inseparable from "smaller" subjective truths. Similarly, Žižek's comparison of structural violence to the undetectable forces of "dark matter" seems only to draw importance to tangible violence that makes the invisible visible. His use of "dark matter" as a cosmological material that effects change

[2] While canonical postcolonial theorists like Gayatri Spivak and Homi Bhabha spoke more of the complex national, ethnic and cultural identities of the subaltern subject, in a turn towards global Anglophone and postcolonial studies noted in my introduction, a more interconnected and transnational approach has been rediscovered in established figures—including James Baldwin—as well as with scholars like Simon Gikandi and Vivek Chibber in considering a more spatially, economically and politically "entangled" global subject. See Bakar for a refusal of the phrase "entangled" in favor of a more nuanced understanding of "an asymmetrical relation of subjugation and domination." (Bakar)

but cannot be seen symbolizes the forces that "underlie and mobilize" structures of capitalism, vestiges of colonialism, neo-imperialism and conquest. In this way, the antidote to unsustainable abstractions of structural violence is a more sustained meditation on ordinary and visible forms of cruelty in everyday life, which is the thematic and formal focus of my chapter. Cruelty, as reckoned with in Nelson's text, is a shocking placeholder for larger institutional critiques, but I think in its most useful state focuses on the "everyday" violence that often bears the traces of these invisible forces.

As I showed in the example of the breadfruit, the first part of my chapter shows that in Kincaid's earliest novel, *Annie John*, cruel conditions of colonialism in Kincaid's writing weave together and entangle miniaturized notions of violence with global and historical forces. When these extremes of scale are in conversation, even the littlest moments, the petty and the unnecessary, provide inroads to addressing larger systems of oppression. In the second part of my chapter, I will show how Kincaid's later work, *The Autobiography of My Mother,* uses the narrative of our "anti-hero" Xuela Richardson, to contest the way in which global histories are narrated, and give voice to those whose minutiae have be excised from world-making. Xuela's extreme resistance to domesticity, patriarchy, and subliminal oppression brushes against the grain of expectation and politicizes the affect of refusal. Kincaid embraces narrative forces that use a cruel, unforgiving, or challenging persona to find productive ground. As my epigraphs suggest, both Kincaid, and Baldwin seem burdened to "bitterly" challenge history, and

use the fact that they are positioned as "despised subjects of history" to question it.[3] Kincaid's epigraph reveals a vulnerable moment in which the prickly façade of Xuela's constant refusal and contestation drops to reveal a desire to exist outside of history's Caribbean "crucible." And yet, this would mean to forego being human, given that the history of the Caribbean is the history of the world. In the end, the chapter shows that Kincaid's texts are unapologetically human in their "reckonings" that both address forms of cruelty and use them to critique, denounce, and move beyond the abstract and ultimate erasing potential of historical and globalizing forces.

In Peter Linebaugh's historical text about the "Revolutionary Atlantic" and the launch of the global economy through the slave trade, *The Many-Headed Hydra,* he writes that the "historic invisibility" of the subjects he writes about owes much to "the violence of abstraction in the writing of history" (7). This keeps "connections that have, over the centuries, usually been denied [and] ignored…but that nonetheless profoundly shaped the history of the world," from being seen. In one sense, the eponymous "hydra" can be the decentralized forms of protest and rebellion, impossible to quash, immortal and regenerating; but in this era of globalization, structural violence has mirrored resistance, making for a tricky battle. "Decentralized" versions of violence—harder to stop or prevent—must be addressed in their concrete manifestations in an effort to avoid the act

[3] This "bitter contestation" is what Aldrich theorizes as what puts the force in Kincaid's "bite." (Aldrich)

of abstraction that can prove as destructive as the structures of violence themselves. Interestingly enough, the second part of the Baldwin epigraph avers that "people who imagine that history flatters them (as it does, indeed, since they wrote it) are impaled on their history like a butterfly on a pin and become incapable of seeing or changing themselves or the world" (47). The image of an impaled butterfly is not an entirely pleasing one, inferring that the "victors" ossify history in a way that is damaging to themselves—and the world—as well. Everyone, certainly not just those "creatures despised by history" has a stake in the creation of narratives that are different than those we are used to hearing, that are brought to life by the painful moments that lie beneath "human desire itself."

2.1 "Only people I did not know died."

Baldwin, an important figure to critical race theory and American radical thought, also discussed and considered the centrality of the global and the transnational, especially when holding Europe accountable for its role in American slavery. In Rob Waters's article "Britain is No Longer White," subtitled "James Baldwin as a Witness to Postcolonial Britain," Waters writes that Baldwin's love for London, and Charles Dickens would always be colored by the fact that "London was the capital of the slavers" (715):

> For Baldwin, the visions of the city in Dickens's prose needed to be confronted by those other, silenced histories that also made the city. By speaking the history of slavery as the suppressed story behind Britain's capital (and the double meaning here is instructive), Baldwin was situating Britain within a wider black Atlantic conjuncture which, in his

> various British addresses, connected it to colonialism in Africa and slavery in the Caribbean. (Waters 715)

Being a creature "despised by history" means to question lauded works of literature, world cities, and in Kincaid's case, childhood experiences that are influenced by the often-overlooked centrality of the global slave trade. One of Kincaid's biographers notes that "as she reached adolescence, Kincaid began to draw more into the world of books, reading her favorites, like Charlotte Brontë's *Jane Eyre* over and over" (Paravisini-Gebert 7). And yet, "her delight in English books, the revered *Jane Eyre* in particular, belied a growing rebellion against that legacy British colonialism had left on Antigua" (7).

Baldwin's similarly conflicting relationship to English literature shows how the act of reading can also be an act of refusal when marking his place (or absence) in relation to those literary works. Kincaid's obsession with the Brontës was also at odds with her complicated relationship to British literature, and in *Annie John* we can see her attempting to translate this love for Anglophone novels into her need to write a new narrative with alternative concerns; a Caribbean *bildungsroman* about Annie's struggle to simply exist as a young girl in a post/colonial world. Antigua and Barbuda were under British rule until the relatively late date of 1981, in respect to the independence of other Caribbean nations, and this fact of living in an "underdeveloped" colony which prioritized the extraction of agriculture, free labor, and eventually the tourism industry,[4]

[4] In another form of erasure, Kamugisha writes, for example, of present-day "[a]dvertisements aimed at potential foreign owners of real estate in Barbados" that "*present a historical timeline where black Barbadians do*

meant a childhood conversant in scales of violence both invisible and visible. From the colonial violence of her island's history and the postcolonial disciplinary institutions that make up her educational upbringing,[5] to the squabbles between schoolchildren, Annie must negotiate the dramatic injustices inscribed in the postcolonial moment. We follow Annie through her pedestrian descriptions of life at home with her mother, her close friends, and "growing up," witnessing more concrete forms of structural violence that shape the every day, from the age of ten until she leaves Antigua at sixteen to, in fact, sail to England.

In *Annie John*, the narrative is flush with stories of ordinary, local cruelties—the harsh teasing of friends, the punishment of copying out lines in the classroom, obsessions with the dead—but ones that are informed and created by more "monstrous" violence that spans continents and centuries. In her initial formulation of violent scenes, Nelson posits that "haunting each of these scenarios is the notion of excess—the sense that while the emotions behind the violence might be understandable, the act itself...is always in excess, out of scale, hysterical, monstrous" (75; 74). Kincaid, however, does the

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not exist, or they attempt to create a colonial reality for the European imagination, an 'atmosphere of plantation gentility and charm'" making for the "re-inscription of colonial tropes in the Caribbean." (30, emphasis mine; 28) The fact that this erasure is necessary for the enjoyment of the tourist industry puts the violence of the impaled butterfly on full display. Interestingly enough, the directive to "excise the bloody colonialist within," as Sartre wrote in his preface to Fanon's *The Wretched of the Earth*, still applies.

[5] To further clarify a point in the footnote above, Kamugisha writes that the "reinscription of colonial tropes" actually was led by "the economic/developmental policies adopted by [the] nation states since independence" not necessarily by democratic choice, but by the fact that "development in countries exploited for their wealth has resulted in the power of this exploitative potential being transferred to governments and the upper-middle class, who have perpetuated a legacy of underdevelopment." (28)

very opposite, scaling down the acts themselves to the immediate and showing that the extraordinary can only be measured through the ordinary. It is, then, the ordinary itself that is being haunted by the "excess," the "out of scale," and the "monstrous," instead of the other way around. This need to scale down violence in order to make sense of it is a move that Kincaid often utilizes, even at the age of fifty: in *My Garden (Book):*, Kincaid miniaturizes the history of the global conquest of the Caribbean in steps—from global to local, then to personal—in order to begin to talk about it. "It dawned on me that the garden I was making (and am still making and will always be making) resembled a map of the Caribbean and the sea that surrounds it," (7-8) in an attempt that for Kincaid, was "a way of getting to a past that is my own…and the past as it is indirectly related to me" (8).

Within the garden itself, the unpredictable blossoming of her wisteria, which blooms two months late, directly represents a moment from her childhood in which her hair refused to be disciplined as well. She compares the unruly plant to a younger version of herself "appearing at the proper time to have your hair examined by the headmistress" only to find that it "is not the way it should be…in a way that pleases her…in a way that she understands" (12). This example is just a brief glimpse into the way Kincaid works with scale, by reducing the violence of colonial education and beauty ideals to the small tyrannies of the school room, where subjective violence is reduced in size but not in importance—where comb use or choice of hairstyle is as

significant as the structural motives of discipline. Throughout Kincaid's work we see that instances of petty cruelty are in fact more palpable understandings of larger-scale issues, in a marriage of subjective and objective cruelty.

One of the ways in which Annie begins to push back against an abstract history is to examine the lives of the dead. She sees them not just as nameless bodies, and refuses to deny them, as Kincaid writes in the epigraph "the wave of the human hand, the beat of the human heart, the gaze of the human eye, human desire itself" (*Autobiography* 218). As Annie, age ten, begins to contend with the deaths of people around her, she is forced to go from thinking that "only people I did not know died," (3) to realizing that she "had not known that children died" (4). As mortality becomes more immediate, the monstrous banality of a child's death becomes her newfound obsession. Annie's Proustian *madeleine* becomes the coffin shop's "smell of pitch pine and varnish in the air," (5) and her curiosity leads her to attend funeral after funeral of people that are strangers to her. When a classmate, who she only knows as "the humpbacked girl" dies, Annie thinks, "at last, someone I knew was dead," (10) and while she regrets not having "tapped her hump to see if it was hollow," still she is too "excited" by having seen the humpbacked girl's corpse to worry about being late for dinner (11). While Annie's curious apathy towards lost life strikes us as odd, it is simply the way she begins to make sense of larger violence—the Carib Indian genocide and simultaneous African slave deaths still haunt the history of her nation, for one—by scaling down the

monstrosity of mass death to the deaths of strangers and acquaintances. Death itself is made more palpable, more visible, and less able to be appendixed in a history textbook.

As Annie walks home from a wake, she worries about the dead, wondering "if one day while going somewhere alone, I would see the humpbacked girl standing under a tree, and if she would…[ask] my father to make a coffin for me" (11-12). Annie imagining the dead coming back to life in an uneasy, malicious way evokes Saidiya Hartman's claim of the "inevitable return" of the retributive dead "as both…one who haunts the present, and as disposable life" ("Venus" 5). Combining the words "haunt" and "ain't," Hartman calls the actions of victims of unjust deaths a "hainting," a critical portmanteau that both is and isn't present, just as symbolic violence that functions at the level of the every day both is and isn't present by virtue of its relative invisibility. Returning, too, to Nelson's understandings of haunting as a reminder of violence, Annie's immediate imagination of what it would be like for the dead to "follow you home…wait for you…follow you wherever you went" and "never give up until you joined them" (4) has added significance. For Kincaid, this insistent, relentless, and tenacious stalking on the part of the dead speaks to an abstract violence that demands to be translated into concrete terms, to be brought back into the world, and asked to become human again in the form of narrative.

Dehumanizing the countless dead by abstraction is one way in which a larger scope fails in truly understanding abjection. Of these very limitations of recounting the experiences of the dead, Hartman asks what narrative is to be told

> by those and about those who live in such an intimate relationship with death? … How does one revisit scenes of subjection without replicating the grammar of violence? … If to read the archive is to enter a mortuary, then to what end does one open the casket and look into the face of death?" (4-5)

Hartman's exact phrase "grammar of violence" shows her own exploration of the way violence can function on larger and smaller scales, from the structural monstrosity that is the violence of slavery to the miniscule attention to detail on the syntactical level that informs the "grammar." I think Kincaid's answer to Hartman's "concerns about the ethics of historical representation," (5) as someone who has her main character entering mortuaries, opening caskets and looking into the faces of dead children, would be that the "grammar of violence" is worth utilizing as long as it makes structural and systemic violence more concrete, immediate, and impossible to ignore, pave over, or simply label as something that happened in the "past."

In her coffin, the humpbacked girl "looked the same, except her eyes were closed and she was so still…I had seen a person asleep, and this girl did not look asleep" (11). In fact, Annie's only way of calculating the difference between a sleeping child and a dead child, a difference so delicate and painful, is to compare what she sees in the coffin to the image of an improperly working View-Master. A cartoonish, bright-red child's toy that looked like binoculars, the View-Master had allowed Annie to bring to life,

stereoscopically—in 3-D—Wonders of the World from the distant past. Used by the U.S. military during WWII "as especially commissioned sets of reels produced to aid with artillery spotting and aircraft identification," the toy involved pulling a black lever that rotated a collection of circular slides (*60 Years)*. This button "changed the scenery" while simultaneously recreating the motion of a tourist taking a picture as a souvenir.

> When [it] worked properly, all the scenes looked as if they were alive, as if we could just step into [them] and sail down the Amazon River or stand at the foot of the Pyramids [or] the Taj Mahal… [but] when the View-Master didn't work properly, it was as if we were looking at an ordinary, colorful picture. When I looked at this girl, it was as if the View-Master wasn't working properly. (*Annie John* 5)

The militancy, imperialism, and globality evoked by the View-Master—the histories of the slavery and violence in the building of the Taj Mahal and the Pyramids especially—evoke spectacular structures (even with a backdrop of the global histories of oppression). And yet, Annie feels deflated upon looking at the dead hump-backed girl, because doing so strikes her as ordinary. Annie attempts to equate the viewing of a casket with the dramatic vistas and vivid wonders of nature, in an effort to see death as extraordinary and transportive. And yet, death is ordinary. The fact that objects and histories "come to life" when seen through the View-Master, yet the economic, social and personal humanity remains "dead" speaks to the historical erasure of that narrative.

For the View-Master to work, it must trick the brain into forming one, multi-dimensional image (using two slides from the slide reel). It is interesting, then, that Annie claims to be denied the double vision of the View-Master because she did not actually know the person who died, and is therefore unable to make a comparison. "I

had never seen the person laugh or smile or frown or shoo a chicken out of a garden" (9). Of the girl who died, she writes: "I didn't know her name or anything personal about her except that she was my own age and that she had a humpback" (10). When it comes to empathy—in many ways, the opposite of cruelty—Annie needs the stereoscopic vision that causes a life, a concept, or even a history, to animate. Empathy is at the level of the everyday, both intimate and immediate, focused around acts of ordinary life such as gardening, herding chickens, and laughing at jokes. This begins to tease apart the complex nature of intimacy and abstraction when it comes to violence. The tableaus seen through the View-Master are not real, but what makes the image three-dimensional is the illusion of being able to experience it. Kincaid complicates this empathetic turn, asking, of the history of violence, whether we must know something intimately, as if "we could have been there," for it to have real consequences and repercussions in our present, and whether this semblance of reality is a productive or destructive illusion. Moreover, this paints large- and small-scale violence as complex paradoxes, ones that are devoid of empathy, but also that are unable to be understood without the empathy of those immediately affected, showing the erratic shifts in scale that are crucial in narrativizing this kind of history.

In Sharon Marcus's article "Erich Auerbach's *Mimesis* and the Value of Scale," she shows how valuable literary criticism "often aligns with scale: big claims, minutely close readings, and the ability to move gracefully between them" (300). Auerbach wrote

Mimesis while he was in Turkey, a place in which extremes of scale and history are pressed up against each other, and was influenced by this structural metaphor and reality. What Marcus values in Auerbach's literary criticism, I value in Kincaid's work: the "fluid" movement "between the micro and the macro, zooming in and out from close readings to panoramic surveys and back again…and [an] ability to work on disparate scales" (300). In fact, Marcus too argues that Auerbach mimics his "favored authors" in their attempts to "amplify the small into the large" and "compress the large into the small" (311):

> Auerbach values description most when authors use it to move from the small, the particular, the visible, and the low to the great, the general, the invisible, and the universal. His preferred point is where the common reaches the high and the high meets the common…and reaching that point almost always involves not only a transition from the concrete to the abstract or figurative but also a dramatic shift in scale. (311)

The View-Master literalizes Kincaid's theorization of colonial upbringing with the ability to bring together more large-scale concepts—like the idea of animating a dead history—with the concrete of the every day—like a malfunctioning View-Master.

Another example of this kind of scalar tactic is in a chapter entitled "Columbus in Chains." The chapter begins with "outside, as usual, the sun shone, the trade winds blew," (*Annie John* 75) immediately engaging the everydayness of weather with the fact that Annie's very existence is based on the history of those winds, so monetized in memory that they are named after the "trade" which they enabled. Later in the chapter, we move to the schoolroom, where facts from the textbook, *A History of the West Indies*, are to be memorized and regurgitated. But more importantly, while the rest of her class

is rote-learning that "on the third of November, 1493, a Sunday morning, Christopher Columbus discovered Dominica" (77), Annie is fixated on a later section of the textbook. In this chapter, Columbus appears in a full-page illustration, "his hands and feet...bound up in chains…looking quite dejected and miserable [as]...a man named Bobadilla...had sent him back to Spain fettered in chains attached to the bottom of a ship" (77). Annie embraces this "reckoning," and cherishes this picture as "just deserts (77). "How I loved this picture—to see the usually triumphant Columbus brought so low," (77-78) she writes about his voyage, in which he reverses the journey made by so many forced slaves to the Caribbean through the middle passage.

Kincaid's ability to bring together history with the everyday act of reading reaches its "preferred point" when Annie leans into her retributive glee and writes on the textbook "The Great Man Can No Longer Just Get Up and Go." This act both vandalizes history and blasphemes its heroes as she "defam[es] one of the great men in history...discoverer of the island that was my home" (82). Annie's impertinence takes on historical measure, and in turn, her minor disobedience becomes part of an act of resistance that is most achievable at the scale of the ordinary. Imbued by her sensitivities toward cruelty and desire to balance, correct, and at times engage in the *schadenfreude* of the moment, this becomes a way beyond a paralytic and abstract understanding of a monstrous past. These moments, in turn, transcend the cruelty itself that is enacted subjectively or objectively, by becoming about the kind of active response it incites, and

the resistance that it inspires. As a small note, the fact that the textbook would specify the day of the week that Columbus "discovers" Dominica, a detail almost comical in light of his legacy, also speaks to the detail that is poured into narratives of empire that puts the erasure of alternative narratives into context.

To conclude this section of the chapter, I want to return to figure the View-Master and rework it as a helpful tool and representational technique when it comes to describing involved and erased histories. Marcus ends her article with a coda that theorizes the slide projector, arguing that the functions of Auerbach's literary critiques can productively imitate the technology available in the time it was written. "Like a projector that enlarges a small slide into an image that fills a large screen, Auerbach's criticism magnifies passages like the details that slides enabled art historians to isolate from larger images" (316). For Kincaid, the View-Master is the veritable "technology" that illustrates the idea that "to tell the history of the Caribbean is to tell the history of the world" (Dubois and Turits 1). For Marcus, "awareness of new technologies alert us to how we take in information and how we express our insights…[and] can improve our observation of sensory particulars, enabling us to see better what is already there, to visualize a previously unseen realm" (Marcus 317). What the View-Master enables Kincaid to do is to bring different landscapes and realities into the immediate space around her. Marcus's idea about the "visualizing [of] previously unseen realms" shows how a physical toy, in conversation with both the very distant and the very long ago,

acts as a crucible in the same way an untold history of Caribbean struggles determined so many global historical patterns.

At the risk of overreading the use of "Master" in toys created in the 1930s, I want to return to the idea of a hegemonic history that must be wrestled with and contested, one that despises certain "creatures," one that casts its spell on subjects and should be challenged by being brushed against the grain, agitated, and deconstructed. It seems clear from the work of Holt, Kamugisha, and Giles, among others, that colonial cruelty did not cease after slavery was abolished, or in the postcolony, but was peacefully transferred to a new elite. In both policy and action, this "new" order traded in similar dynamics of power and control, not to mention forces of "fairly untrammeled neoliberalism" (Kamugisha 28) that were ushered in as traditional "imperialism" retreated. "Master," then, is a contested word in this history. The figure that owned slaves, according to scholars of West Indian history, is replaced with the figure who "owns" the narratives of nationhood and chooses who they prioritize, and who becomes dispossessed, forgotten, and displaced. The View-Master, mass-produced, affordable, popular, gave the option to see things differently, symbolically at least; perhaps not the visualization of "unseen realms," but the idea that history was something to be held in your hands, much like the novel; only seeing it from all the points of view made it worth knowing.

2.2 "In my defeat lies the beginning of my great revenge."

The Autobiography of My Mother is a novel that chronicles the life of septuagenarian Xuela Claudette Richardson in colonial Dominica. Kincaid describes her world as one that is dictated by cruelty and illustrates Giles's formulation of "rotat[ing] upon an axis where positions of domination can be exchanged but not eradicated" (371). Xuela's mother dies soon after her birth, and she is raised by an assortment of caretakers, from Ma Eunice, a Caribbean Anglophile, to her violent father and stepmother, to the racist and sexist colonial educators that doubt her ability because of her indigenous and African heritage. Yet this world is refused, resisted, and violently rejected by Xuela through her choices, and the centering of her Carib Indian and African heritage. Alongside M. Jacqui Alexander, Tracy Robinson, and anthropologist Deborah Thomas, Kamugisha insinuates that this erasure is exacerbated by the understanding of women in both colonial and postcolonial Caribbean nations as second-class citizens, who only receive rights through the men they are connected with, and how well their sexuality is controlled:

> The Caribbean state repeatedly reinscribes the patriarchal understanding of the public/private domain, which has been tirelessly critiqued by generations of feminists, and, as a result of women's second-class status, can claim that the fundamental rights and freedoms provided by Caribbean constitutions do not protect against gender discrimination…This is nothing more than the spectre of colonialism's abduction of Caribbean women's bodies that just will not lie down and be still. (Kamugisha 32)

Kincaid's "unconventional" narrative, one in which words and phrases are repeated over and again, and biographical reality is cut with a magical prose that disorients and

invents, forms a mythography that battles against erasure, and patriarchy. She, unlike Annie, dies in Dominica.

In a moment early in her childhood while being watched by a paid caretaker, the laundress "Ma" Eunice, Xuela unintentionally breaks her bone-china plate. Ma Eunice cherishes the plate for its material as well as its Edenic painting of the English countryside:

> a wide-open field filled with grass and flowers in the most tender shades…the sky had a sun in it that shone but did not burn bright…clouds were thin and scattered about…not harbingers of doom. (8-9)

Everything, in other words, that Dominica was not. As a final touch, the word "HEAVEN" is inscribed under the image in gold lettering, showing a flattened and idealized representation of England, a world totally inaccessible to Xuela and Ma Eunice, who "did not know that such a thing as the English countryside even existed" (9). Nonetheless, the plate, for Eunice, radiated an "atmosphere of secret abundance, happiness, and tranquility," a valuation so informed by the very absence of those things in her current life, that when the plate breaks, Eunice is "thick with grief…so deep…as if the death of a loved one occurred" (8).

Xuela observes that even for some of the most miserable of postcolonial subjects, "heaven" is still associated with the very country that created much of the misery. As a subject so removed from the reality of her situation, Eunice also ends up replacing the intimacy of a "loved one" with the obsession of an object whose material promise is an

impossibility. In an alienation of extremes, Eunice is not unkind to Xuela, but "*could* not be kind because she did not know how" (6) in a place like Dominica where "brutality is the only real inheritance and cruelty is sometimes the only thing freely given" (5). When Xuela breaks the plate, she shatters an illusion that cannot be maintained. Most importantly, Eunice values the ideal of an object's promise more than solidarity or intimacy with her community—most disturbingly, not because she doesn't want to, but because she has been rendered unable to.

This subconscious internalization of domination, and subsequent cruelty, can be elucidated by a passage in Kincaid's *A Small Place,* a non-fictional polemic about empire. In this passage, Kincaid casts her "fellow" Antiguans as beings blinded by impossible desires, paralyzed by a limited world view, and over-disciplined by a colonial education, all things which render them both complicit and helpless in their current situation.

> The people in a small place cannot give an exact account, a complete account, of themselves. The people in a small place cannot give an exact account, a complete account, of events. This cannot be held against them: an exact account of anything, anywhere, is impossible. … The people in a small place can have no interest in the exact, or in completeness, for that would demand a reconsideration, an adjustment, in the way they understand the existence of Time. (53-54)

Kincaid critiques the inability of "the people in a small place" to conceive of themselves, or their histories wholly, as well as their inability to make connections between their everyday suffering and larger cycles of violence. This inability to give a complete account of themselves or of events (though Kincaid also argues that "completeness"

itself is a fallacy) is too an interrogation of the kinds of narratives available for consumption and an appeal to those alternate narratives that haven't yet been created. Echoing Kincaid and Alexander, Kamugisha writes that "here, again, we see the technocratic Caribbean state in full flower…without the slightest trace of knowledge about the colonial provenances of those concerns" (33).

Returning to Ma Eunice's inability to recognize patterns of domination, after all the unkindness she witnesses and experiences, she still decides to punish Xuela for the broken plate. This punishment is made more severe due to Xuela's refusal—and inability—to apologize:

> When I broke the plate and would not say sorry she… made me kneel down on her stone heap...with my hands raised high above my head and with a large stone in each hand. She meant to keep me in this position until I said the words 'I am sorry,' but I would not say them. It was beyond my own will. (9-10)

Xuela writes that her experience with Ma Eunice was "redolent...in every way of the relationship between captor and captive, master and slave, with its motif of the big and the small, the powerful and the powerless, the strong and the weak" (10). This sentiment bolsters Kamugisha's understanding of the postcolonial state that internalizes and recreates the violent conditions of colonialism (35). Yet, unlike "the people in a small place," she is able to recognize these legacies of unkindness to which she was victim, unconsciously contributing to this cycle. And yet, like "the people in a small place" Xuela cannot always acknowledge, and stop, these cycles when it comes to her own actions, at least as a child.

Xuela recreates the conditions of her own misery—more specifically, the irrationality of expectation—by passing on the act of cruelty.

> I took all three turtles and placed them in an enclosed area where they could not come and go as they pleased and so were completely dependent on me for their existence. I would bring them the leaves of vegetables and water in small seashells. I thought them beautiful...but they would withdraw into their shells when I did not want them to, and when I called them they would not come out. To teach them a lesson, I took some mud from the riverbed and covered up the small hole from which each neck would emerge, and I allowed it to dry up. I covered over the place where they lived with stones...and...forgot about them. When they came into my mind again, I went to take a look at them in the place where I had left them. They were by then all dead. (11-12)

In a scene of colonial parallelism, the turtles recreate the scenario of a forced dependency—an imperial state engineering these conditions—which then turns into a punitive abandonment upon the expression of the desire for independence. The turtles also mediate Xuela's relationship to Eunice, to her home, and to her upbringing. The acts of caretaking—feeding, watering, and keeping safe—are precipitated by the creation of the enclosure. The act of exoticization—"I thought them beautiful"—seems to justify the brutal relationship and implied ownership over these beings. This intertwines caretaking and vulnerability, and domestic enclosure and cruelty. In addition, Xuela ends up killing the turtles, during efforts to "teach them a lesson," highlighting violence, and power dynamics inherent in spheres otherwise considered nurturing and "safe," and speaking to the intimate and impetuous control over the lives of others. But Xuela refuses to "die" when colonial powers "forget" about her and go to "take a look" where they left her.

In other parts of the novel, especially in her older years, Xuela's narrative both acknowledges legacies of unkindness *and* attempts to disrupt these cycles when it comes to her own actions—at times violently. This occurs in recollections of her mother and father, as well as her own agency when it comes to becoming a mother and potentially exposing a future generation to the same perpetual misery. While Annie ultimately leaves Antigua, physically removing herself from the cycles of violence and cruelty that are stuck spinning out on the island, Xuela, once a part of those cycles, stays and makes deliberate attempts to disrupt them. Throughout the novel, Xuela grieves her mother in a recurring dream in which she sees her oddly truncated, not unlike the photographs that demarcate each section of the text. "She came down the ladder again and again, over and over, just her heels and the hem of her white dress visible; down, down, over and over. I watched her all night in my dream. I did not see her face" (31-32). Xuela is robbed, over and over, of her mother's presence, yet she must write the narrative that explores the history of her own lineage. Part of this narrative includes incorporating her Scottish ancestry, and the ways in which the global slave trade—indentured servants, slaves, and masters—make a crucial link in understanding the diversity of the Dominica's citizens.

Xuela's father, who she paints as both a victim of colonial upbringing and as a cruel opportunist and usurer who "suffered no consequences for his behavior," is shown to be a man who "was part of a whole way of life on the island which perpetuated pain"

(38-39). By linking these actions to a calculated intentionality, and then further, to a culture of cruelty, the goal of which was to "perpetuate pain," Kincaid shows not only the morphing of violence from positions of colonial dominance, but also between men and women. Kamugisha elaborates on a gendered dynamic:

> Like women throughout the world, Caribbean women's citizenship is constrained by gendered violence, poor access to reproductive health rights, lower wages for comparable work, higher rates of unemployment and the burden of a disproportionate amount of caring work. The legacy of structural adjustment has been the destruction of the capacity of the state to provide social services…thus, tracing contemporary coloniality forces an interrogation of the masculine dimensions of creole nationalism" (30-31).

Thus, Xuela's refusal to procreate is informed by her conception of intimacy, which her surroundings have configured to mean a cruel mixture of duty and violence.[6] "No love:" she writes, of her stepmother's home, "I could live in a place like this. I knew this atmosphere all too well. Love would have defeated me. Love would always defeat me. In an atmosphere of no love I could…make a life for myself" (29).

By disrupting familial structures, she is able to seek solace in ending these patterns rather than perpetuating them. When she is impregnated by her father's friend Monsieur LaBatte, recreating so much of the sexual abuse perpetuated by slavery, Xuela "carries her life in her own hands" by having a painful self-inflicted, life-threatening

[6] In speaking about the rules for postcolonial citizenship, Kamugisha writes of the refusal of public health professionals and elites to speak of "how the painful experiences of slavery and colonialism have historically and contemporaneously colonised desire and demanded a fashioning of the self that polices any sexual desire marked as illegitimate, vulgar and barbarous." (33)

abortion. "Perhaps because I no longer had a future I began to want one very much," she thinks, upon learning the information that she is "with child" (82). "I was standing in a black hole. The other alternative was another black hole, this other black hole was one I did not know; I chose the one I did not know" (82). By choosing an unknown variable, rather than perpetuating a known one, she has the potential to change future narratives of violence; at times the unknown is the only known cure to a cycling narrative malady. Xuela continues this steadfast rejection of familial lineage, with her lovers and later, her husband.

> For years and years, each month my body would swell up slightly, mimicking the state of maternity, longing to conceive, mourning my heart's and mind's decision never to bring forth a child. I refused to belong to a race, I refused to accept a nation. I wanted only, and still do want, to observe the people who do so. The crime of these identities, which I know now more than ever, I do not have the courage to *bear*. Am I nothing, then? I do not believe so, but if nothing is a condemnation then I would love to be condemned. (227 emphasis mine)

Xuela cannot bear to pass on these "crimes" by bearing future generations, yet also refuses to only be legitimized through the act of procreation.

In understanding race and nation as constructs that enable cruelty, subjugation and terror, Xuela learns to think about kinship as something that is formed through cruelty, and then pity, rather than through identity, or genealogy, bolstering the need to establish an alternate space in which to talk about a black politics (Best 453).[7] By

[7] Kincaid's biographer emphasizes how the author "insists on seeing race not as an essence in itself but as 'a shorthand for something broader, an imbalance of power,' and can't imagine inventing an identity based on the color of her skin." (15) Stephen Best doesn't engage directly with Kincaid's work yet argues that "a sense

outwardly rejecting the kind of genealogical understanding that leads to repetition and recreation, Xuela exists amongst alterity. However, though she is aware of the hemispheres of the globe that separate the vanquished and the victors, and is part of bringing that narrative into being, she remains desirous of being truly free from any global narrative in general:

> The sky, the moon and stars and sun in that same sky—none of these things were under the spell of history… not mine, not anybody's. Oh, to be a part of such a thing, to be a part of anything that is outside history, to be a part of anything that can deny the wave of the human hand, the beat of the human heart, the gaze of the human eye, human desire itself. (218)

For Xuela, this "spell" of history, a mystical, inexplicable, and unjust force, is also one that is inherently substantive, and undeniably human.

Kincaid's cataloguing of the inhumane, the cruel, and the abject, while "revealing…ubiquitous global relations"[8] also breaks apart more abstract conceptions of "globe," and "race" by narrating the world of a woman who "brushed history against the grain" and into existence. This does not deny the forces of history, and though she

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of racial belonging rooted in the historical dispossession of slavery seems unstable ground on which to base a politics," (454) echoing a suspicion towards oversimplification of any identity. While situated within the specific context of the Caribbean, Kincaid can also abstract from certain predetermined categories, in what seems like a response to Best's entreaty to "clear some space for a black politics *not* animated by a sense of collective condition or solidarity." (454) While Best's desire for this alternate, supplementary space of non-identitarian politics is not an effort to completely dismiss collective action, what Giles, Paravisini-Gebert, and Best all seem to be identifying is the way in which Kincaid's narrative functions at the categorical level as well as at the universal. Again, Xuela believes that "my impulse is to the good, my good is to serve myself. I am not a people, I am not a nation," (215-216) narrating a side of globalism that complicates "'fairytales' comprised of enlightenment progress narratives and neoliberal discourses of economic individuation." (Hansen, 41)

[8] Hansen 41.

entertains ideas of transcendence, she finds her space, somewhere beyond the accepted forms of identity, but just short of renouncing her humanity. "The past is a fixed point," she writes (215). "For me the future must remain capable of casting light on the past such that in my defeat lies the seed of my great victory, in my defeat lies the beginning of my great revenge" (215-16). Her project has an unceasing duty towards the everyday, but only so much in that it can aggressively "cast light" on the past, on structural and symbolic violence, making the present a place that is "always perfect...the moment for which I live," (205) in which to address and reckon with these cruelties. The narratives that Xuela makes possible not only put her personal experiences in relation with other times, but also show how they are reenactments occurring at the micro- and the macro-levels of cruelty, violence, and exploitation. Xuela, in turn, has moments of transcendence, sometimes narrative, sometimes illustrative, in which she removes herself from a supposed cruelty, and instead, locates it within a context. Now, no longer is it only the day-to-day occurrences of her life that reflect these violent structures, but the ability to remove specific experiences from the vise of the victors' grip and, in doing so, more accurately portray "the severity of history that has," for so long, "been [held] captive" (Linebaugh 7).

Kincaid's largely nomadic, episodic narration allows Xuela to be "home" on her island of Dominica yet never *at* home, due to the death of her mother at the moment of her birth, and her general alienation from any family, nation, or race. Xuela is constantly

mobile, yet she never leaves the island; her home is found within her homelessness, her self-love found within her inability to love others or find others to love. While Xuela believes that "my impulse is to the good, my good is to serve myself. I am not a people, I am not a nation," (215-16) abstracting the entire world into vanquished and the victor, Xuela's very project is the beginning of her "great revenge." In a move that is both universalizing, global, and encompassing of individual experience, Kincaid not only details suffering, but sees it as an aid in "forget[ting] one's outward appearance and concentrate[ing] on what one looks like inside," (Paravisini-Gebert 15) in the crafting of an interiority that subscribes to no existing identity. It is with this particular mindset that Kincaid is able to go about writing the vanquished globe into existence.

2.3 "Since I do matter, I do not long to matter, but I matter anyway."

Xuela's desire to be apart from the cruel "spell of history" (218) is something that Agamben identifies as a critical act of literary resistance. For Agamben, resistance is most aptly reckoned with when people, characters, or works don't truly belong to their time, neither perfectly coinciding with it, nor adjusting to its narrative hegemony. In turn, because of this "disconnection" and "anachronism," they are more capable than other texts of "perceiving and grasping their own time" (40). Xuela is very literally out of place in a number of ways and is thus able to write into being the world of the vanquished, "perceiv[ing] not an era's light, but rather its darkness" (44). Upon hearing this phrase, I can't help but think about the world that belongs to the "victor" as one of

light, and that which belongs to the "defeated" as a darkness that needs to be perceived, upon which Xuela must remain "capable of casting a light" (*Autobiography* 218). Darkness, then, becomes not just a negative or cruel space, or a symbol for defeat, but a potential place from which untold stories can germinate and photographs can develop. The "black room of the world" (3) that Xuela mentions having lived in could be seen as scary or isolating, but in the context of the ability to perceive this darkness, is suddenly recast as a photographic darkroom, one in which creative and productive forces can develop where otherwise impossible.

Like with the technology of Annie's View-Master, we can view the darkroom as an illustration of what occurs formally over the course of *Autobiography*—a slow development of a complete image that can only come to light in the darkness of an era, a narrative that has not only been refused to be told, but unable to. It is not a coincidence, then, that each of the sections of the text are divided by the same photograph repeated five times, in increasing increments of wholeness—the first as just a head, the second, a head and a neck, etc. This photograph of a person who we assume to be Xuela's mother slowly develops as Xuela tells the story of her life and the life of the vanquished, as an "autobiography." Yet again, a critique lobbed in Kincaid's *A Small Place* is taken up narratively in *Autobiography*, and the issue that Kincaid takes with "those who cannot give a complete account of themselves, of events" (*A Small Place* 52) is directly addressed by the complete formation of this picture, this "autobiography." The "adjustment" that

is required, then, for "the people of a small place" to achieve any kind of totality is through a narrative that accurately depicts their lives, including the violence that they have intimately known. This becomes one of those moments in which Xuela "wish[es] from time to time to make my actions be the actions of a people, to make my actions be the actions of a nation," (216) in a rare gesture of individual, national, and even global solidarity.

Annie's critical resistance, as we have discussed, deals more intimately with the every day. For de Certeau, contending with minute details and personal archive is "the ingenious way in which the weak make use of the strong, thus lend[ing] a political dimension to everyday practices" (xix). The place of the "tactic," as opposed to "strategy" which is guided by established rules, belongs, instead, to the "other." He includes that "talking, reading, moving about…are tactical in character…in our societies, as local stabilities break down, it is as if, no longer fixed by a circumscribed community, tactics wander out of orbit" (de Certeau xix). This straying politicizes, and enables those "in a system too vast to be their own, too tightly woven for them to escape from it" with a way out (xx). In an echo of the moment where Annie vandalizes the picture of "Columbus in Chains" in her history textbook, de Certeau writes that tactics are

> protean in form, blending in with their surroundings, and liable to disappear into the colonizing organizations. ... The child still scrawls and daubs on his schoolbooks; even if he is punished for this crime he has made a space for himself and signs his existence as an author on it. (31)

Using this moment and seeing it as representative of Kincaid's body of work and authorial existence, we can see how she politicizes both small acts of resistance by schoolgirls, and large acts of resistance by seventy-year-old women, making the narrative a concrete, critical, and personal one that simultaneously wages larger-scale battles. This act of politicization is what prevents Hartman's fear, that the revisitation of "scenes of subjection might replicate the grammar of violence," from materializing (Hartman 5).

Though Kincaid decries nation and identity, and emphasizes her own personal good, there is an implied collectivity; "[the use of tactics] does not imply a return to individuality," instead showing the "individual as locus…of an operational logic whose models may go back as far as the age-old ruses of fishes and insects that disguise or transform themselves in order to survive" (de Certeau xi). In this sense, Kincaid's texts are catalyzed by cruelty, by making marginality universal, by "refusing to become familiar" (228) with any known variable or category, including the self, and by reinventing episodic literature to be equally as representative, thematic, and ordinary. As she writes at the end of *Autobiography*, where the picture of her mother has fully developed:

> All that is impersonal, I have made personal. Since I do matter, I do not long to matter, but I matter anyway. I long to meet the thing greater than I am, the thing to which I can submit. It is not in a book of history, it is not the work of anyone whose name can pass my own lips. (228)

The thing greater than herself is in fact her own ability to catalogue, collectively, the miniscule, the miserable, the forgotten, and not only to make it matter and to reckon with it, but also to write this book of history that urges, presses and transforms the available narrative into something greater.

What I wanted to show in this chapter, then, is how the concept of cruelty is a tool for unlocking silent geographical spaces and global narratives that are often shied away from due to the lack of terminology for these productive, yet "ugly feelings" (Ngai). Earlier conceptions of this chapter had interest in how this narrative cruelty informed the modern-day "internet trolls," seen often as "agents of chaos" who disrupt, aggress, and whose "antisocial personalities" give them subversive capabilities in the form of political messages or anti-hegemonic tactics (Buckels 100). As we have seen, Kincaid's refuses to submit to the colonial and postcolonial politics of obedience and writes her characters into a bristly existence that create a sort of chaos simply by refusing to be disciplined by patriarchal, imperial, or elitist dictates. I want to theoretically position cruelty as not just a tool, but as something that points to a specific breaking open of genre, discourse and academic study; a necessary disruption of protocol; and a compass that points us in more depraved directions and funky connections in the global Anglophone realm than we have been able to previously chart. To conclude with Nelson, Kincaid's power is in being able to "expos[e] the cruelties of others…by [giving] others the option, or the opportunity, to behave cruelly" (Nelson 75)

and then archiving each and every instance. Though these individual instances of cruelty would be "nothing…that would make the world hesitate to spin," (*Autobiography* 212) amassing the particular, the every day, and the small begins to narrate a different Caribbean into existence, one that can give us more insight into how the "history of the world" actually happened.

3. A Politics of Anachronism: Cruelty of Empire and Affective Allyship in W.G. Sebald's *The Rings of Saturn*

> With this story in my head, I made my way out of a town on which the marks of an insidious decay were everywhere apparent. –W.G. Sebald, *The Rings of Saturn*
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> Walking through the archive of empire and the colonial library, I discovered, as have other scholars before me…that the strange and incomprehensible signs of a black presence in the making of high culture often tended to slip away, not because of the invisibility of the enslaved but because the construction of the ideals of modern civilization demanded the repression of what it had introjected.—Simon Gikandi, *Slavery and the Culture of Taste*

In Kincaid's narratives of refusal, I argue that colonialism, and its brutal, persisting ideologies, effect day-to-day life in the postcolonial Caribbean. In this chapter, I show how contemporary fiction, like W.G. Sebald's formally innovative novel, *The Rings of Saturn*, reasons with the cruel effects of colonialism from within empire. More often than not, the inhumane conditions of coloniality—and specifically the slave trade in Anglophone and Dutch colonies—were only marginally registered in imperial histories.[1] Knowing this, I argue that *The Rings of Saturn* is an attempt to reestablish narrative connections in literary form, both the minute details and sweeping arcs, between colony and empire, that "haunt" present-day ideals of Western enlightenment and civilization. These connections, established by Sebald's narrator through seemingly unrelated, "anachronistic"[2] stories, musings, and random tales—perform an

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[1] Gikandi writes that his goal is "not to recover the figure of the black from the margins of the modern world picture and to restore it to an imaginary nonexistent center" but rather to "recognize this marginalized figure, often denied even the status of the human, as occupying an essential and constitutive role in the construct of the interiority of modernity itself." (10)

[2] Gikandi 32. I will explain how I use Gikandi's concept to inform Sebald's process.

"interdisciplinary investigation"[3] into the empire's narrative displacement of cruel practices, and allows for the administering of historical and affective accountability.[4]

The muted chaos of Sebald's unsettled, anxious global and historical narratives end up deconstructing ossified mythologies[5] of "white supremacy and Western civilization" through points of view that skew, morph, and challenge traditional perspectives. According to Rob Waters, in his writing on "the global dimensions of race and modernity" in Baldwin's writing, Baldwin cast "a new way of seeing the landscape of postcolonial Britain through which Britain could recognize its past…The postcolonial moment refuses the operation of "innocence" in Europe" (725). By displaying colonial powers as haunted, deformed interiorities of the remnants of empire, *The Rings of Saturn* refuses Europe and England their "innocence" by revealing the effects of a cruelty "at

[3] Cvetkovich 119. As I will consider in my final section in this chapter, "pursuing the links between racism and depression is no ordinary research question; it requires unusual tools and imaginative forms of interdisciplinary investigation." (119)

[4] For Amir Eshel, "Sebald's prose is significant not simply as a case study in postmodern 'historiographic metafiction,' that is, because of the ways it thematizes memory, the manner in which it is concerned with historical figures and events while blurring the distinction between fiction and history." (90) Drawing on the work of Ursula Heise on time, narrative, and the postmodern, Eshel writes that Sebald's prose is also significant because he uses a "poetic 'chronoschism,'" one in which the "the narrative organizes and reconceives temporality, regardless of its references to history, the manner in which it manages to escape … didactic pedantry in its suspension of 'time' as a category of perception and progress." (90) In this way, the uniqueness of Sebald's prose is "because of its poetics of suspension: a poetics that suspends notions of chronology, succession, comprehension, and closure - a poetics that rather than depicting and commenting on the historical event in time, constitutes an event, becomes the writing of a different, a literary time." (74)

[5] Walkowitz 155.

home" that was displaced and quarantined onto bodies and lands that were spatially elsewhere.[6]

In other words, while "to tell the history of the Caribbean is to tell the history of the world," to tell the history of the world is to reestablish the fact that "the very bricks and material wealth upon which the West was built, those signifiers of Western modernity, came from the labor power of black slaves,"[7] exploited labor, and silenced protest.[8] I want to briefly return to Ma Eunice's "HEAVEN" plate, which "had an

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[6] Like Gikandi's attentiveness to the distance between Europe and its colonies, Rob Waters also points out Baldwin's attunement to the spatial disparities of colonialism that allowed Europe to avoid contending with their brutal slave economies and the ramifications of these creations:

> it was the spatial distance separating the white European metropole from its black colonial possessions that allowed questions of race to remain in the abstract within Europe, and European cultural identity to be displaced through less directly racial symbols proved remarkably accurate, as the wealth of research into the effects of decolonization and black immigration on British postwar culture now attests. (724)

[7] Waters 719.

[8] In terms of these silenced and silent histories, as Roy writes,

> Sebald's narrative is not just about aimless wanderings in the English countryside betraying an ontological restlessness symptomatic of the dispossessed or the unhoused but is also…*a riposte to the conspiracy of silence over the atrocities* of the Third Reich and the subsequent destruction of Germany by the Allies during World War II. In *Luftkrieg und Literatur* (*On the Natural History of Destruction*), Sebald draws our attention to the 'half-consciousness or false consciousness' characterizing the works of authors and historians in postwar Germany that did not allow the devastating experience of the air raids over German cities to take root in the collective memory of the German people. (31 emphasis mine).

However, as Rebecca Walkowitz writes in "Sebald's Vertigo," "it is also significant that Sebald does not correct Conrad's silences"—the "consipiracy of silence" of the slave trade and colonialism— "by offering non-European voices, such as those that might belong to those 'black bodies' that the British and the Belgians exploited. And he does not correct Casement, who expressed racist stereotypes in private even while he opposed exploitation in public." (168) In not "correcting" these specific silences by voicing the oppressed, as Walkowitz argues, Sebald purposely only focuses on the contradictions within European liberalism. Thus the silence described in both Roy and Walkowitz is one of complicity on the part of those that had the option to speak out. In this sense, "In the context of British literary history, Sebald's analysis of imperialism appears not simply as an analogue for fascism but as an investigation of liberalism and other ideologies that have claimed to oppose tyranny." (Walkowitz, 161)

atmosphere of secret abundance, happiness, and tranquility" (*Autobiography* 8) to illustrate the metaphor of utopia as something that is inherently exclusive. The ways in which the British Empire was able to achieve "an atmosphere of secret abundance, happiness, and tranquility," for many, involved its dissociation with the source of such wealth. As Simon Gikandi writes in *Slavery and the Culture of Taste*, an important work that I will be referencing alongside Sebald in this chapter, "without the massive profits made in sugar production in the Caribbean, conspicuous consumption could not have been possible" (111). However, as Gikandi points out,

> Such connections were not always visible. Although British consumers certainly knew that [things like] sugar [were] produced by slaves in the West Indies, they operated in a world in which a discursive or conceptual gap separated the leisure of drinking coffee or tea from the brutality of slavery. (111)

The centrality of Ma Eunice's plate in Kincaid's story, one that depicts a "a picture of heaven, offering as it did a secret promise of a life without worry or care or want" (8-9) shows that this heaven is only possible with the exploitation and extraction of an "other"—that this is the "secret" in the "secret promise" of the lack of "care or worry or want."

Refreshingly, Sebald refuses to paint Europe, especially England, as a heaven, bridging the "discursive gap" that separates leisure and brutality by metaphorically making the conditions of enjoyment—ignorance—impossible. Atmospherically, as his narrator walks through England and recalls visits to the Netherlands, the people are miserable and deformed, while monuments symbolize narrative erasure rather than

memorialization, purposefully evoking the idea that this displaced history continues to "haunt." This, in a word, is Sebald's strength in his equally anachronistic approach towards the recounting of history, where the annals of slavery and exploitation are immediately accessible and can be drawn upon to reconnect to its apparent counterpart, "civilization." For Gikandi, slavery was

> anachronistic simply because it seemed to be at odds with the aspirations of the age; however, it provided the economic foundation that enabled modernity. And yet, because of this anachronism, slavery informed and haunted the culture of modernity in remarkable ways. (32)

Modeling a literary anachronism informed by the global slave trade makes violence in history "so palpable, so visible, and so phenomenal that it could not be buried in an underground economy of representation" (32). It is no wonder that Sebald is obsessed with what is buried beneath memorials—figuratively and literally—and sees monuments to empire as "sepulchral" (122).

In Sebald's work, cruelty is the experience of violence upon revisiting these narratives of displacement, an experience that in turn "taints" his narrator's entire existence and ruins the "civility" in and grandness of European civilization.[9] Aaron Kamugisha notes the "specular and narcissistic" Western "narrative of origins," when it comes to thinking about history, in Ella Shohat and Robert Stam's *Unthinking*

[9] Paraphrasing Gikandi, whose recovery of stories of transatlantic slavery informs the "conditions of civilized culture." (x)

Eurocentrism.[10] In an especially poignant moment, they show how the tourist industry can speak volumes about the way history is remembered, namely as Europe as creator of the modern world, and the Caribbean as a history-less void:

> Europe looks in the mirror and is dazzled by its own beauty. Ads for the equally crystalline waters of the Caribbean, by contrast, appeal not to historical origins but to 'get-away-from-it-all' sensuality, evincing little interest in the indigenous myths and history of the region…and [is] implicitly, about forgetting history. The former forges links to a European past, the latter obscures historical connections. (56)

My previous chapter understands the cruel conditions that shaped Caribbean history (and that of the world). This chapter addresses literary attempts to remember exactly how Europe was afforded a modernity from other parts of the world, and the ways acknowledging this process tarnishes some of the dazzling beauty ascribed to narratives of civilization. Recreating this history means, for Gikandi, to "[work] through the crypt of empire" in order "to fashion a method for reading the ghostly inside the symbolic economy of civility and civilization" (x). While I don't entirely embrace the word "haunt"—it can ascribe a kind of grotesqueness to the act of "haunting," and an ethereality to that which is incredibly material—it nevertheless demands a corrective in perspective that holds empire accountable.

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[10] First noted by Kamugisha in "Postcolonial Citizenship," (29) which I talked about in my first chapter. Kamugisha shows how "Shohat and Stam's observations speak to the reality of the Caribbean's marketing of itself"—in this case, I am understanding why the Caribbean must be painted this way for "western consumption." (29)

Sebald's fashioned method of reading, similar to Gikandi's, seems to look at history's monuments, museums, and tokens, and see only the "ghostly" and not the great. Like his formal and stylistic mantra, Sebald makes it essential to look at history as if "through a reversed opera glass and through a microscope at the same time," (*Rings* 19) allowing for the study of its long-term effects without losing sight of its concrete ramifications. This method of reading can clearly transcend period, locations, and medium, and studying cruelty within Anglophone history, in literature, and alongside global violence, illuminates older networks of violence. These histories were previously indeterminable when viewed with a Eurocentrism that "managed, contained, or excluded" the "imperial condition," instead viewing slavery and exploitation as "peripheral in the discourses that concerned themselves with the reconstruction of the moral and cultural geography of modern life" (Gikandi 33-34). Sebald sets up his narrative so that the seeming randomness of his observations, his wanderings, and his semi-autobiographical detailing is in fact a foil for an organized system that enables the perpetuation of violence.

Specifically important to my understanding of Sebald is how his use of anachronism in literary narrative shows the emotional ramifications of the way we remember—or perhaps, continue to forget. As I show later in the chapter, Sebald's narrative affect is one of depression, melancholy, and perturbance. He is not a well man, and after his narrative reveries that delve deep into the crypts of history, he is

bedridden, and paralyzed, from what I see as the burden of this knowledge. This affect, alongside the anachronistic perspectival manipulations of history, are registered in the text. Upon the shattering of historical ideals, including the very understanding that "the most virulent demands for freedom in Europe" were happening alongside the height of the slave trade (Gikandi 33) underscores many of the paradoxes of a Eurocentric world history that, once revealed can be devastating. The "conceptual or discursive gap" that kept these truths away from the modern imaginary of empire seems to be paralleled with an equally disturbing emotional gap, that displaces a collective sadness or anger only onto the descendants and inheritors of these brutal regimes.

Gikandi too speaks of the importance of a politics of melancholy in the face of a "calculated production of happiness" in imagery of slaves in the colonies, a production that attempted "to obviate the violent presence of slavery" (188-189). Gikandi concludes that "melancholy constituted an important aesthetic reaction to the violence of enslavement, an alternative to the sensibility of high European culture" (192). Ann Cvetkovich too talks about the importance of reengaging with depression as the "psychic fallout" of colonialism, slavery, and subjugation, an affect that may be felt differently by different people, but is not limited to descendants of the African diaspora. In a different, but important way, Sebald is able to channel some of this melancholy into his own deconstruction of Eurocentrism and white supremacy, and engage with a

politics of "inconsolability"[11] that refuses the cold objectivity of this history. In this way, the typical Sebaldian moment of wonder—whether at a building, a museum, or some interesting trivial factoid—comes to fruition not at the moment of knowledge transmission, or at the sharing of an observation, but at the moment at which this object becomes a cruel one—i.e. situated within a history of violence, and perpetuated by ignorance.

Thus, Sebald's narrator himself, and the way in which he acts as a vessel to center the periphery, is an important part of the way in which to model a kind of justice-based literary anachronism founded upon an emotional understanding of history. In some ways, this is what underlies Lauren Berlant's analysis that sentimental novels illuminate the ways we operate, interact with, and temper larger forces (24). Sebald's way of tempering these larger forces, specifically violent ones, is to actively translate them to the page in a way that doesn't mute them or glorify them, but undoes the historical quarantine put in place to justify or displace some of the most brutal actions, actions that involved large movements of bodies, enabled consumer culture, and fetishized goods. Berlant points out that studying affect this way "registers the conditions of life that move across persons and worlds, plays out in lived time, and energizes attachments" (16). While Sebald is definitely one for the bizarre and

[11] Saidiya Hartman qtd in Cvetkovich, 127.

unexpected combinations that history actually holds, he uses this inclination to expose more intimate elements of abstract forces. His affect, one of revelatory melancholy, has a gravitas that both "registers" cruelty and "energizes [its] attachments" by showing how it functions, resonates, and revolves throughout history.

3.1 "To this day, one sees in Belgium a distinctive ugliness"

Gikandi's epigraph to *Slavery and the Culture of Taste* evokes Derek Walcott's famous poem, "The Sea is History" which, like Gikandi's book,

> is about the interlaced experiences of the enslaved—those people without monumental histories, battles, martyrs, or tribal memories—and those others, the cultured subjects of modernity, whose lives are available to us through the monuments and institutions of European civilization. (ix)

In changing the usual meaning of "those others" to mean Europeans, Gikandi defamiliarizes a Eurocentric history in order to "[sketch] both the visible and invisible connections of…two realms of experience that have been kept apart so they can continue to do their cultural work, separately and unequally" (ix). What does it mean that the "lives that are available to us" are only those "cultured subjects of modernity"? Gikandi writes that "slavery and enslavement were considered anachronistic to the modern imagination" because they were "considered antithetical to the moral geography of Englishness" (90). Because the practice of slavery couldn't be "reconciled to ideals of English liberty" (91) this only meant that slavery had to be physically, historically, and narratively dissociated from in order to maintain the material wealth that enabled civilization.

Sebald devotes a large portion of *The Rings of Saturn* to retracing the histories of these monuments, memorials, and museums as arbiters of the violence of erasure. These memorials to history enable, reaffirm and strengthen narratives of Western civilization, white supremacy, and justifications for the incredibly cruel political economy of slavery. For Sebald's narrator, I argue, the act of meditating on monuments of history involves engaging with a literary anachronistic style of his own, one that makes connections radially, randomly, and rhizomatically. This effect has the purpose of making what is seemingly "anachronistic"—the practice of slavery alongside the ideals of liberty—the ideological norm within narratives of civilization. Monuments, specifically the ones that Sebald speaks of, are often conduits to cruelty that have been perpetuated prior to said monument, and persist afterwards. This can be a painful place to inhabit, a constant paradox to experience, a disturbing nightmare—and yet it does the important work of undoing the violence of complete erasure.

Motivations behind the perverse reunification of the histories of those with and those without monuments include rewriting narratives quite literally written in stone. In an effort to make visible the violence of capital, Sebald spatially reconnects Belgium's brutal colonization of the Congo—and the money made from forced labor—to structures built in Belgium with that same money. Naming the author Joseph Conrad, in an homage to the contested, though important beginnings of anticolonial literature, aids Sebald's narrator in piecing together the anachronisms between the turn-of-the-19th

century Belgian buildings and the "madness of the whole colonial enterprise" (117). Mapping Conrad's semi-autobiographical journey into the Congo, in his novella *Heart of Darkness*, Sebald shows how "indigenous people were all but eradicated by forced labor, and [other laborers] died in droves" from exhaustion and disease (119). And yet, as horrific as this all was, the money pouring in from colonial exploits allowed King Leopold to erect "bombastic buildings" (119). Sebald's narrator recalls that after Conrad returned to Europe, he saw buildings, the statues, and memorials that were funded by the horrors in the Congo "as a sepulchral monument erected over a hecatomb of black bodies" whose labor allowed for their creation (122).

The word that seems to stick out in Conrad's description is "hecatomb"—a concept that has come to mean "mass slaughter." A word that brings anachronism to the level of violent grammar, in its original Greek (*hekaton*—one hundred, and *bous*—ox),[12] it means the public sacrifice of one hundred oxen in a ceremony to appease the gods. The idea of slaughter as sacrifice when it comes to humans—the idea that civilization is only possible with subjugation—is recast with horror. Sebald identifies the buildings themselves as abnormally monstrous because of the way the capital collected from imperial enterprises erased the violent conditions in place to create that capital. What he seems to be acknowledging is that when the means and ends of a violent undertaking,

[12] See "Hecatomb."

like colonial slave labor, is transformed into another shape—buildings or monuments—it is more than erasure: it is an obstruction that allows the dissociation of civilization from the violent acts that maintains it. As Baldwin writes, this kind of spatial, and material separation enables the lack of accountability for "civilization"—instead, a bringing together of uncomfortable realities shows a Europe that can no longer be afforded its innocence.[13]

In this way, an anachronistic reading is something that, in the words of countless scholars of the Black Atlantic, allows for the "haunting" of the structures of empire. What can then be easily glossed-over as the dramatic and gloomy words of an ill man—"sepulchral monument," "hecatomb," and "bodies"—now becomes recast as revelatory in the context of this history. The fact that the "bombastic buildings" evoke "sepulchral monuments," (where a body is entombed above ground), and that they are erected *over* the "hecatomb of black bodies," shows that these buildings do not memorialize the dead, but act as something that erases their existence, in a physical manifestation of Benjamin's oft-quoted phrase, "there is no document of civilization which is not at the same time a document of barbarism" (256). While the Congo's Léopoldville had lofty aims "to open up the last part of our earth to have remained hitherto untouched by the

[13] This innocence that can no longer be afforded to Europe—or has been extended to Europe for far too long, for Walkowitz, "suggests that irrational perception—the *disruption both of bliss and of clarity*—is necessary for and often prompts the analysis of naturalized histories. [Sebald] does this by introducing not yet relevant details and by retracting details that are too well known." (155 emphasis mine)

blessings of civilization," it is clear how it actually perpetuated barbarity (118). While the "blessings" of civilization appear to "justify" suffering, greed, and treachery, this is a story that we've heard, and become inured to. The ways in which this cruelty is documented—through an ironic celebration of its own barbarism—shows that the power of cruel practices that transcend nation, time, and generation by never being held accountable.

The haunting, in fact, goes further, according to Sebald. As I note in my introduction, while it was unlikely that citizens of empire would "make a direct link between such pleasurable activities and the suffering of slaves" the fact was that they "most certainly knew" that, on some register or another, this was happening (Gikandi 111). Sebald's narrator makes it clear that this complicity is not to be taken lightly; it is an ugly dissociation, this blind eye, an erasure that has physical manifestations in the citizens even generations later. Sebald's narrator writes that when Conrad returns to Belgium after visiting the brutal colonial outpost in the Congo, he notices that "all the passers-by…seemed to him to bear that dark Congolese secret within them" (122). Sixty years later, for Sebald's narrator, the deformity persists:

> To this day, one sees in Belgium a distinctive ugliness, dating from the time when the Congo colony was exploited without restraint and manifested in the macabre atmosphere of certain salons and the strikingly stunted growth of the population… I well recall that on my first visit to Brussels in December 1964 I encountered more hunchbacks and lunatics than normally in a whole year. (122-123)

While there is no justice, necessarily, in the forms of reparation, Sebald sees how the suppressed history of violence in the Congo is potent enough to disfigure entire

populations and infect minds. While the hunchback may be the vengeful aesthetic of a sardonic author, the physical deformation of a back, hunched under the weight of an untold counterhistory, could also be the reification of and retribution for the brutal regime of a country. The "ugliness" associated with the lineage of a nation proud of its "civilizing" missions may not be "karma" enough. However, to figuratively tarnish the legacy of white supremacy with the physical deformity of its citizens is a powerful literary anachronism with which to fill the gap between idealized and actual histories of empire.

Sebald the author seems to be a little less optimistic than his narrator about how useful writing history, even with accountability, eventually proves to be. In his lecture "The Remorse of the Heart," subtitled "On Memory and Cruelty," he writes

> the endemic perversion of cruelty inherent in the history of mankind is always described in the hope that the last chapter in that horror story will be written, and in a better time. … The purpose of representing cruelty thus outlined, as we now know, has never been fulfilled and probably never can be, since our species is unable to learn from its mistakes. Consequently such arduous cultural efforts can no more come to a conclusion than the pain and torment they seek to remedy. The torture of those never-ending efforts is the true wheel of Ixion on which the creative imagination is always binding itself again… ("Memory and Cruelty" 189-190)

Cruelty is represented in art and literature in the hopes that humanity will learn to be different. The fact that this is unfulfilled and will never be, according to Sebald, is due to our inability to learn. The effort of documenting cruelty in the history of mankind is never-ending—and efforts to document it are as fruitless as trying to end cruelty itself. However, while Sebald seems wary of the ability for our "species" to "learn from its

mistakes" the books he has written, namely *The Rings of Saturn*, are attempts to take up this mantle. Like Peter Weiss, the artist who Sebald focuses on in "The Remorse of the Heart" notes, while we may not be able to write "the last chapter in that horror story," writing a narrative that is "an expression of the *will* to be on the side of the victims" can be the first step for representations of cruelty (190).

Echoing Nietzsche, Sebald writes that "memory logically consists almost inevitably in the recall of past torments" ("Memory and Cruelty" 184). For Sebald, these "past torments" must be "increasingly merge[d] with a realization that the grotesque deformities of our inner lives have their background and origin in collective history" (184). Sebald once again makes the connection between a larger understanding of cruel patterning throughout history, and its smaller, everyday manifestations—i.e. what we see through the microscope as well as through the opera glass. Sebald's narrator makes the connection between "inner deformities"—complicity with imperialist violence—and that of collective deformities—hunchbacks and their "dark Congolese secret"—to give us the micro- and the macro-perspective all at once (*Rings* 104).

It is worth revisiting the fact that the disjunction between the ideals of civilization—liberty, justice, and decency—and the existence of slavery is, obviously, not only ideological. The material and behavioral disjunctions that took place also involve physical "censoring mechanisms" that displaced slavery's "capacity to provoke what was unpleasurable" so that things like sugar, tea, and other goods produced from forced

labor in the colonies would "continue to satisfy instincts and desires that had become integral to modern culture" (Gikandi 109). Eventually, I will get into the specific transformations of the "laundering" of sugar money by slave owners into the more acceptable form of art patronage, and the clear low/high cultural divide between these two products. For now, I want to show how Sebald begins to metaphorize this kind of material metamorphosis. First more generally, through the evocation of the figure of the Baldanders, Sebald helps us understand how material can be transformed, and be physically and thus ideologically differentiated from the conditions of its production. Yet, with our sights set on the "ghostly" our reading methodology can still identify the initial brutality—a kind of "dark Congolese secret"—which still exists, even after attempts of dissociation.

The Baldanders, a creature from Jorge Luis Borges's collection of tales, *Imaginary Beings*, is "a successive monster, a monster in time" (*Rings* 23). Its name translates into "*Soon-another* or *At-any-moment-something-else"* (Borges 26). This ever-morphing creature illustrates not only the anachronistic nature of history but also the way cruelty materializes in transformative and transferable ways that dislocate points of origin. Sebald explains

> Baldanders is first seen as a stone sculpture lying in a forest, resembling a Germanic hero of old and wearing a Roman soldier's tunic… Then, before [our] very eyes… Baldanders changes into a scribe who writes these lines, and then into a mighty oak, a sow, a sausage, a piece of excrement, a field of clover, a white flower, a mulberry tree, and a silk carpet. Much as in this continuous process of consuming and being consumed, nothing endures, in Thomas Browne's view. On every new thing there lies already the shadow of

> annihilation. For the history of every individual, of every social order, indeed of the whole world…leads without fail down into the dark. (*Rings* 23-24)

If there is meaning in this succession of images, while the stone statue is a monument to a "Germanic hero of old and wearing a Roman soldier's tunic," seeming to represent two giant empires, it still lies somewhat forgotten to history. Yet, the first thing it changes into is a scribe, who then begins to write the story itself. This first transformation is not a coincidence. The jump from historical statue to present scribe connects the trajectory from the way we memorialize, to the way we narrativize. From material resource (wood) to domestic animal (sow), to food (sausage), to waste and back again to grass, mulberry, and finally to material resource made from the mulberry tree (silk), Baldanders also tells a story of capital's reincarnations. In the "continuous process of consuming and being consumed"—consumer culture—"lies already the shadow of annihilation." If consumer culture is indeed the history of the world, then it is a history that "leads without fail down into the dark" (*Rings* 24).

It's not clear why Baldanders—a successive monster—changes into what it does, and why it is "at any moment something else." But it is clear that this understanding of consumption is dangerous and can be applied to the materiality of larger historical forces. Poignantly, Sebald shows patterns of transferable ideologies within the history of sugar. He writes of a "curiously close relationship that existed between the history of sugar and the history of art" in that places such as the Tate Gallery in London "were originally endowed by the sugar dynasties" (194). When examining "capital amassed in

the eighteenth and nineteenth century through various forms of slave economy" it becomes clear that "one of the most tried and tested ways of legitimizing this kind of money has always been patronage of the arts" (194). Gikandi writes that without sugar, "elaborating a direct connection between the slave regime and the construction of a culture of taste" would be impossible:

> …the production and consumption of beautiful objects needed moneyed patrons. And at a time when the patronage of art and culture had shifted from the courts…the only people with amounts of money large enough to *patronize* the institutions of cultural production were colonial barons, those who had made their money in slavery and related colonial enterprises. (110-111, emphasis mine)

The money extracted from the labor of West Indian sugar plantation slaves was used in ways that displaced the origins of the money, "legitimating" it either through the physical distance between these works of art and the money that produced them, or forced justification of the artistic production of high-culture civilization.

Sebald's narrator extremifies the disconcerting way money materializes in art. Like the "distinctive ugliness" that haunted Belgium and revealed the source of civilization to be so tainted, the legitimization of sugar plantation money made it seem like "all works of art were coated with a sugar glaze or indeed made completely of sugar" (194). An example of this is "the model of the battle of Esztergom…which Empress Maria Theresia, so it is said, devoured in one of her recurrent bouts of melancholy" (194). This final example literalizes the connection between consumer culture and art production. Maria Theresia's literal consuming of art made from sugar shows the haunting anachronisms between art and the violent legitimization of slave

labor, something Sebald's literary style makes deliberate.[14] The coating of works of art in a malicious "sugar glaze" makes this, ironically, a very bitter realization for Sebald's narrator. What was once the abject exploitation of black bodies (i.e. the slave economy), is turned to a material resource—sugar—which, through the money it garners, is turned into edible artwork. As "sugar provided the vital and inescapable link between white consumption and black labor,"[15] *The Rings of Saturn* models the inescapability of association by illustrating how "curiously close" a relationship this actually was.[16]

3.2 "Not prepared to switch to the side of the powerful."

Some nuance can be lost by painting empires as hegemonic wholes that act and think the same. It is important to remember, as Eric Williams points out in *Capitalism and*

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[14] One of defining characteristic of The Rings of Saturn: its sheer physical emptiness, one that rivals the consumer culture that enabled the blind eye turned to slavery. Going back to his very first chapter, Sebald's narrator "set off to walk the county of Suffolk, in the hope of dispelling the emptiness that takes hold of me whenever I have completed a long stint of work." (3) Of a train station in Herringfleet: "There was not a soul about...at one time, I thought...things would have been quite different here...and now there was nothing any more, nobody...It takes just one awful second, I often think, and an entire epoch passes." (31) In a demolished palace in Somerlyton, "one is not quite sure whether one is in a country house in Suffolk or some kind of no-man's- land...Nor can one readily say which decade or century it is, for many ages are superimposed here and coexist." (36) The "nightmare temporality" in Sebald's work paints a kind of post-apocalyptic wasteland in which past and present pool together and all signs of humanity are erased. For more on cruelty in this "nightmare temporality" see Toal.

[15] Gikandi 109.

[16] In relating to my footnote on the "sheer physical emptiness" of *Rings*, as a foil for the excessive materiality and consumption of colonial praxis, Roy writes,

> to Sebald's narrator, the abandoned buildings of Orfordness—some of which resembled temples or pagodas—on closer inspection appeared to be nothing other than the melancholy remains of an extinct civilization, one whose place on earth has been irrevocably lost. …*This, certainly, is also the malady of the global and postglobal world where the tyranny of unbridled consumerism coupled with the unmitigated desire for control has led to the reification of man together with his experience of the world and his situatedness in it.* (Roy 38 emphasis mine)

Slavery, that at the zenith of Britain's role in the global slave trade, supporting it "was at one point expected of every true English man and woman."[17] I wonder, though, if there is also room for an anachronistic allyship. I fear being too simplistic in this proposal, but it is clear that Sebald both condemns the complicity of certain citizens—by modeling their deformity—and also leaves rooms for narratives of those implicated in empire who resisted it. These figures, like Joseph Conrad, Roger Casement, the unknown soldiers forced into battle at Waterloo, and even Sebald's narrator himself, push back by entertaining alternate histories, identifying with the "victims of history," othering themselves in order to center different kinds of narratives with different kinds of victors. Is this enough? We can't be sure, but the small ways we adjust to which historical narratives we value can make for larger revelations. Modeling allyship begins with a small change in perspective.

As previously mentioned, Conrad's travel to the Congo, which ultimately inspired the famous novella *Heart of Darkness*, is what led Sebald to parallel the connection of empire to colony. While I've used Joseph Conrad's anglicized name for the purposes of this passage, Sebald's narrator actively does not. Sebald's choice to highlight the differences between using Conrad, Konrad, and Korzeniowski shows that the minutiae of linguistic rules evoke the complexities of the ways in which we remember.

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[17] Gikandi 112.

Yet, in the spirit of reconnecting inner lives and collective history, Sebald's narrator reconnects the "Anglophone author" we know as Joseph Conrad—one who refused knighthood in 1924— to his anti-imperialist and revolutionary family name, Korzeniowski ("Chronology" 223-227).[18] We learn from Sebald's narrator that his father, Apollo Korzeniowski, had given up a managerial position in Russian-occupied Ukraine "with the intention of helping pave the way for a revolt against Russian tyranny through his writings and by means of conspiratorial politics" (104). His mother, Evelina Korzeniowska, only wore black, even though it was "expressly forbidden by law, as a token of mourning for her people suffering the humiliation of foreign rule" (105). In death, their memories are celebrated with "great demonstration," rather than with a statue or a shrine, and "conducted in silence" (108). In the end, Apollo Korzeniowski, much loved, was just the "dead man in the pit" (109). In stark contrast with the bombastic buildings, sepulchers, and monuments that Conrad later balks at, the death of the exiled individual remains underground.

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[18] "By withholding familiar details," Walkowitz writes of Sebald's impulse to change the names of famous figures in history, "Sebald moves celebrities from the world of myth into the world of fiction…[t]his transformation…make[s] readers perceive familiar stories analytically rather than automatically [and]…introduce[s] political contexts for which celebrated figures are not yet known." (161) For Eshel, "[t]he continuous tension between fact and fiction, authorial or auto-biographical narration and fictional narrative…is constitutive to all of Sebald's work." (76). Keeping this tension "unresolved" is crucial, Sebald says in an interview with James Wood, because "we largely delude ourselves with the knowledge that we think we possess, that we make up as we go along, that we make fit our desires and anxieties and that we invent straight line or a trail in order to calm ourselves down.'' (Eshel 76)

In his signature anachronistic parlance, Sebald's narrator notes a different "conspirator," Roger Casement, who is said to have brought about "the first news of the nature and extent of the crimes committed against the native peoples in the course of opening up the Congo" (127). Though King Leopold offers Casement knighthood as a kind of silencing mechanism, much like Conrad, Casement "was not prepared to switch to the side of the powerful; quite the contrary, he was increasingly preoccupied with the nature and origins of that power and the imperialist mentality that resulted from it" (129). Eventually, Casement is found guilty of high treason, hung, and thrown into the lime pit of Pentonville prison, a pit reminiscent of the "hecatomb" of bodies previously mentioned, the potential mass grave of soldiers beneath the panorama, and the pit in which Apollo Korzeniowski was buried (134). These subversive, subterranean spaces seem to be in direct contrast with more visibly erected monuments. Here, Sebald suggests that there is always a connection between surface structures and what lies beneath—and is often purposely hidden, whether threats to flows of money, power, or enterprise. Like Casement, and like Weiss before him, to identify with the victims of history, and not to "side with the powerful" will always remain a subversive act.

The inception of a statue or memorial, and the funding and labor that go into its creation are essential to uncovering exactly which structures and ideologies are being upheld and protected. Learning that certain confederate statues were erected decades

after the Civil War to terrorize free slaves, under the guise of memorialization,[19] show that monuments, panoramas, statues, and memorials, all use the past as a technique and a tool to inform and filter the present. (Uncovering that the same body cast was used for memorials honoring confederate and union soldiers,[20] and that only the memorial plaque changed, shows how much statues can become representations and symbols, rather than serve as functions to accurately document history.) Similarly, when Sebald discusses the Waterloo Panorama, located in Brussels, he notices the general tendency of these types of artistic representations of war—"a favourite subject with panorama artists" (124)—to act as agents of a larger system of power.

Like with the "sepulchral monuments" in Brussels, erected over the "hecatomb of black bodies," the Panorama glorifies war and national imperative, and not, as it seems, the soldiers who died. Sebald's narrator stands on a platform in the middle of a room in order to get a 360-degree view of the battle scene, paused in time. "…[I]n the blood-stained sand, lie lifesize horses, and cut-down infantrymen…eyes rolling in pain or already extinguished" (124). Yet, on this "horrific three-dimensional scene…the cold dust of time has settled…. Now there is nothing but the silent brown soil. Whatever became of the corpses and mortal remains? Are they buried under the memorial?" (124-

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[19] See Marc Fisher, who too shows that the statues of the soldiers were "a way to assert their doctrine of white supremacy at a time when they were passing Jim Crow laws to codify the separation of the races." (Marc Fisher)

[20] Ibid.

125). The 360-degree view of the battle is an ironic one, in that it suggests a complete perspective, yet provides little more than a narrow agenda. The Panorama was painted in 1912, almost a century after the Battle of Waterloo occurred, and its memorialization had almost nothing to do with these dead soldiers, or the overthrow of Napoleon.

Sebald's narrator makes clear that the Panorama, built a couple years after Belgium's crimes became public, was created and commissioned as a distraction from Belgium's "utterly merciless exploitation of the blacks" (127). Whatever the exact story behind the memorial, Sebald's narrator refuses to consume the official "tourist" version of this narrative, Sebald distances himself from the overbearing violence by choosing to listen to the narrative in a language he does not speak. He "inserted a couple of coins in a slot machine to hear an account of the battle in Flemish. Of the various circumstances and vicissitudes described I understood no more than the odd phrase…. No clear picture emerged. Neither then nor today" (126). By purposely obfuscating the means through which history is controlled, Sebald's narrator shows his refusal to belong to such a narrative.[21] Directly after leaving the memorial, Sebald's narrator sees yet another "hunchbacked pensioner…who would have been born, it occurs to me now, at about the

[21] Walkowitz writes that "The panoramic view allows Sebald to show… that the accomplishments of English civilization—the novel, the country house, and the art museum—were nourished by acts of exploitation and violence. The panoramic view also makes a point about geography: the monuments that define what seems to be a specific and exceptional nation owe many of their characteristics to the cultures that nation has conquered, destroyed, or excluded." (164)

time that the Congo railway was completed" (126-127). With this observation, Sebald, who always does his own research that, for him, supersedes any official account of history, a connection is made between the violent panorama and the cruelty previously discussed in King Leopold's exploitation of the Congo.

Though Sebald can construct his own narrative apart from the ideological violence of his surroundings, as evoked by the figure of the hunchback, many cannot. The subterranean rather than the erect, the hidden rather than the obvious—these are all invitations, as Gikandi writes in his epigraph, to "work through the crypt of empire" in order to commune with the ghostly, and its buried knowledge. Time and again, Sebald's narrator wonders what has happened to the bones, and all the mortal wisdom that is buried with a body, as opposed to all the garbled knowledge immortal monuments and histories can forever represent. In regards to the Waterloo Panorama, or the "bombastic buildings," or the pits in which the brave have disappeared, he asks, "whatever became of the corpses and mortal remains?" (125). When armed with specific narrative strategies of anachronism, Sebald's text is able to compare problematic objects, resources, and capital that are no longer displaced, dissociated from, or justified by history.

It is never enough to simply acknowledge the fact that each document of civilization, including written language, is one of barbarism— these documents need to not only be undone, but held accountable, revisited, unwoven. Bringing sudden

attention to the decapitated busts of Christopher Columbus,[22] and the ongoing desire for University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill to protect certain confederate memorials, ones used to terrorize freed slaves in the Jim Crow south, show this very immediate, and affective response to controversial figures and the violent laws that uphold these symbols (Molina). For physical action to parallel the intellectual work that literature is doing is of course essential. Yet rather than being limited to the physical realm, Sebald has the entire anachronistic history of memorials at his fingertips, and uses it to inform practices of deconstructing history, even if figuratively. Sebald's narrator stands in direct contrast to the things that surround him. In his descriptions of the countryside, he is often the only living being, surrounded by the weight of historical happenstance. In the footsteps of Casement and Conrad, then, it is Sebald's narrator who performs his historical allyship, and has seemed model it for another literary generation, in the likes of Teju Cole, Ben Lerner, Kate Zambreno, and the focus of my final chapter, Rachel Cusk.

[22] "The 2-foot plaster statue in Yonkers' Columbus Memorial Park was clobbered by an unknown instrument — knocking it off its pedestal, splitting it in two, and leaving it lying on the ground. Police discovered the replica of Columbus' face Tuesday at the foot of the pedestal. The back of his head was at the top of a hill." This case where Columbus was literally "defaced" echoes the fact that protestors have felt the need to go around the "law," which usually ends up upholding and protecting the right for violent statues to remain in public squares and buildings. (Tacopino)

3.3 The Possibility in a "Paralyzing Horror"

I want to spend the remainder of this chapter understanding how, in addition to an anachronistic approach to history, affective reactions to difficult experiences can make room, spatially and emotionally, for alternate narratives. Sebald's narrator is an anemic, nameless, and disembodied narrator, disposed to melancholy and, relatedly, attuned to the hidden patterns of history.[23] Over the course of the novel, Sebald's narrator walks the county of Suffolk, perambulations that lead to the ruminations discussed in my first section. Importantly, in recognizing the "traces of destruction, reaching far back into the past" (3) and the "marks of insidious decay everywhere" (45), he is often left exhausted from the effort. Affected by the "paralysing horror" that the world holds, he begins his story from a hospital in Norwich, about two hours northeast of London, depressed and "in a state of almost total immobility" (3). As we saw earlier, Sebald's narrator sees a world paralyzed by horror, like he is—especially while walking England and experiencing the invisibility of its brutal history. I will get more into the

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[23] Without necessarily using the lens of "affect theory" per se, Walkowitz notes that in Sebald's writing, "The destruction of objects at once numerous and absurdly various must have led to 'paralysis of the capacity to think and feel,'" as Sebald writes. (157) Walkowitz concludes that "[b]y including these objects in his narrative, Sebald hopes to rectify that paralysis (by asking readers to think and feel about loss, including the loss of rationality) and also to imitate it (by asking readers to learn about details whose significance cannot be rationalized)." (157) For Amir Eshel, Sebald "is convinced that most subjects of the modern consumption suffer under 'the conditions of the present' and that the mountains of painkillers used in a country like Germany deliver the *proof of collective mental pains - pains whose causes lie ultimately in the beliefs and practices of the 'enlightened' capitalist world*."(87) Eshel uses the natural-unatural/unmedicated-medicated dichotomies of *Rings* to analyze nature as "'the context' in which humans 'originally' belonged, and out of which they are being driven at a rapid pace. In light of the narrator's journey through the threatened, partly moribund nature of the eastern coast of England…Sebald's literary archaeologies amount to chapters in a universal history of catastrophe." (88)

specifics of Sebald's narrator's illness, and the perspective it affords him, but for now I want to mention the necessary politicization of this emotion.

As I write in my epigraph to this dissertation, in "Racism and Depression," a chapter in Ann Cvetkovich's larger work *Depression: A Feeling*, she asks: "What if depression…could be traced to histories of colonialism, genocide, slavery, legal exclusion, and everyday segregation and isolation that haunt all of our lives, rather than to biochemical imbalances?" (115). The same word evoked so often in the first section of this chapter—haunt—is worth examining. For Gikandi, looking at the "ghostly inside" is a way to animate structures of feeling that have been suppressed, and reawaken so much of the perversity that connects humans, without which "narratives could provide a seemingly untroubled identity for those in power" (Waters 718). Cvetkovich writes of the necessary creation of a new way in which to question, redefine, and revisit our experiences in the world, alongside Baldwin's "'frames of reference' that gave one's world meaning" (Waters 718). As Cvetkovich writes,

> pursuing the links between racism and depression is no ordinary research question; it requires unusual tools and imaginative forms of interdisciplinary investigation that ideally would yield not just scholarly insight but new cultural practices and social policies. (119)

As I have discussed, and will further explain, Sebald's way of reading history seems to be aligned with these unusual tools and "interdisciplinary investigations" that have inspired the change many people feel about the way literature can be written.

It is important to point out, as Cornel West does, that when it comes to histories of enslavement and colonialism, there exists an "emotional color line that separates black sadness from white sadness," in the way this melancholy is felt.[24] Using this sentiment from West, Cvetkovich centers the "scholars of the African diaspora and critical race theory who have taken up the category of sadness in order to discuss the all too vivid afterlife—including the ghosts—of colonialism, slavery, and genocide" (116).[25] Yet for Cvetkovich, and for Sebald's narrator as well, it is important to note that while these things effect different people, with different lineages, more or less intimately, it still "haunt[s] all our lives":

> One way to cross this emotional color line would be for white people, too, to acknowledge this African diaspora lineage, which makes a very different starting point for a study of depression than histories of Western medicine, the dsm, and pharmacology, or stories of white middleclass women and their anxieties, or literary and psychoanalytic traditions of melancholy. (118-119)

In centering the history of the "African diasporic lineage" rather than continuously bracketing it as something which only affects its direct descendants, we can begin to understand the "social change" that might "'cure' the psychic fallout of colonialism and

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[24] Cvetkovich "formulates melancholy as a productive substitute for the concept of depression, and…also suggests alternative genealogies of melancholy that foreground the presence of colonialism and race in its Western historical lineages." (116)

[25] As I mentioned in the introductory section of this chapter, Gikandi wrote that "Slaves did not, of course, consider their condition to be one of freedom and happiness; instead, many enslaved Africans conceived and performed sorrow as the true representation of their state and drew on the reserves of their unhappiness and depression to find a language for expressing the integrity of the self against overwhelming conditions of oppression.... In the culture of slavery, the performance of sorrow often went hand in hand with the arduous task of recovering the self from psychic bondage and re-representing it in public space." (191)

slavery across a range of generations and different kinds of people" (119).[26] Perhaps there is a simplicity in this view. But I think it is important that writers, especially those, like Sebald, whose literature is a part of a "high culture" that can be enabled by the exceptionalism of Western civilization, address the "psychic fallout of colonialism and slavery." This should happen, even if, especially if, it means that the pain Sebald's narrator may feel is incomparable to the past and contemporary experience of "black sadness," something quite poignant for our moment in time. Perhaps it is important to point out that what paralyzes Sebald's narrator may be something more akin to shame. Whatever the case, the very acknowledgement that these histories have intensely intimate, violent, and long-lasting effects can often be more successfully employed in literature than it expected to in history.

As Waters recalls Baldwin saying in an interview, "'I like London…I like the space, I like the sky,' but he also added that 'he could never forget that London was the capital of the slavers', which was 'the backbone of European affluence'" (Waters 715). This example shows that even the "innocent" act of enjoying travel, experiencing nature, walking around a historic capital city weighs on those who "acknowledge the African diaspora lineage" and have a knowledge that can, at times, be paralyzing and

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[26] As Walkowitz writes of *Rings,* "the experience of marginality generates a kind of vertigo that is politically useful in two ways: it makes people more aware of their own materiality (their physical bodies but also the particularity of their views); and it makes people question the comforts of inclusiveness." (169)

burdensome. The silver lining, for Cvetkovich, is that the melancholy of some of these realizations, and the negativity often associated with illness and depression "might in fact be a productive corrective to a naïve politics of hope" (Cvetkovich 117). The fact that "a politics of melancholy operates when tending to feelings" often means "the disruption of politics as usual" (117) in that room is allowed for different tools to be utilized, different senses to be centered. As West writes, this "naïve politics of hope" *doesn't* "dwell in sadness," and in that, it doesn't allow us "to explore [the] full measure [of sadness] without seeking immediate redemption" (117). This discomfort allows grief, resentment and melancholy to make room for a more complex, nuanced, and radical way forward.

Alongside a politics of melancholy, radical shifts in perspective are another way in which the narrator's ill health allows him to use his place of privilege to embody difference and acknowledge the "psychic fallouts" resulting from brutal, displaced histories. The second of two epigraphs that Sebald begins with quotes a letter from Conrad to his aunt Marguerite Poradowska in 1890. Conrad writes

> Above all, one must forgive those unhappy spirits who have chosen to make their pilgrimage by foot, who follow the shoreline and look out without understanding the horror of struggle, the joy of victory, or the profound despair of the defeated.[27]

On one hand, this epigraph seems to address Sebald's narrator, whose journey includes walking large stretches of the English coast on foot. Yet, the story is told while Sebald's

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[27] *Rings*, epigraph, trans. Brendan Higgins.

narrator recollects his journeys in the hospital room and after he has considered his experiences from afar as well. He too feels these horrors, joys and despair, and the "unhappy spirits" who Conrad references seem to be more akin to those who blindly, unknowingly, follow. By walking through the English coastline, like those pilgrims in Conrad's epigraph who voyage by foot and know only the "shoreline" and not the "horror of struggle, the joy of victory, or the profound despair of the defeated,[28] Sebald is consumed by history's trivialities. In the style, form and individuation of his narrator, Sebald's attunement to these emotions is the ability to cast new intricacies and oddities as the norm. However, by using the particular affordances of his position in the world, he can also maintain a larger-scale perspective—with bird's-eye-view, longue durée, and distanciation in mind. In maintaining sympathy with the "victims of history," he is able to see how the very experience of walking the coastline *is* that of struggle, victory and despair.

The close-up of the shoreline and the bird's-eye view that he so greatly values burdens him with scope, but frees him of nearsightedness. Another way of speaking of "dwelling in a sadness" that doesn't "seek immediate redemption" but allows feeling on a different register is through Lauren Berlant's understanding of the "irreconcilable" in her work *Cruel Optimism*.[29] Berlant argues that "the political context that is mutely

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[28] Ibid.

[29] Cvetkovich, similarly, mentions Saidiya Hartman's politics of "inconsolability" (127) and of "unrepentant crankiness." (128)

present does not trump the pleasures and openings either: what's irreconcilable measures the situation" (35). In this sense, irreconcilability might be the ideal way to sum up the "productive corrective" of an anxious relationship with history.[30] It is these two operational modes that make Sebald more, and less, human, and allow a view of history that is so skewed one cannot tell if it is extremely up close, or far, far away, zoomed out beyond recognition. This echoes a phrase I mentioned in the introduction, which praises looking at the world as if "through a reversed opera glass and through a microscope at the same time." For Sebald's narrator, looking at the earth this way means that "the greater the distance, the clearer the view: one sees the tiniest of details with utmost clarity" (19).[31]

In this sense, perspective that lends us distance is absolutely essential in seeing beyond narratives of convenience. For Lauren Berlant, faith in these narratives to either heal themselves or provide any kind of respite from violence is what she calls "cruel optimism," similar to what Cvetkovich's "naïve politics of hope." Rather than hoping for something to change, however, the difference in these fantasies of the "good life," is that they attempt to "[maintain] an attachment to a significantly problematic object"

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[30] "Rambles from Southwold to Dunwich, through the windblown fields of sedge, work…like a sedative…" (*Rings* 160)

[31] Walkowitz writes that "Sebald's combination of panoramic and microscopic views produces a relentless vertigo: whereas the panoramic view gathers context and locates agency, the microscopic view introduces details that rests any one context and often seem to point to a context that eludes specification." (155)

(24), which in this case, would be the narratives employed by a Eurocentric history. There is certainly an attachment to those grand narratives of civilization as, I mention in my epigraph, an introjection that allows for the evasion of accountability around the realities behind slavery, colonialism, or massive subjugation. In decentering this specific experience, many lose that which gave their narratives meaning—"people/collectivities face daily the cruelty…of losing the binding that fantasy itself has allowed" (48)—and do not want to experience the discomfort of facing the idea that history, and the things they held dear, may not have been so great after all. Sebald, on the other hand, inhabits a "politically depressed position," an affect that can be "cool, cynical, shut off, searingly rational, or averse" in order to "navigate" around these kinds of cruel attachments that are nonetheless difficult to shake.

Affectively, this is one of the many ways in which Sebald holds on to clarity and perspective. His novel could be read as the literature of "impasse," or the contemporary quality of "stuckness," of being in a "holding pattern" that sifts through the same cycles of naïve hope again and again (48). For Berlant, this would mean a literary world that "demands both a wandering absorptive awareness and a hypervigilance that collects material that might help to clarify things" (48). For Sebald, the collected materials are the violence that consist of cruel histories of the world. While he might desire "a circuit of repair for a broken relation to the world" he also has no fear of "the consequences of detaching, even for a moment, from the consensual mirage" (Berlant 27). In fact,

detachment from the consensual mirage is seen as an inevitable calling, in his life. When he sees an airplane crossing the sky from his hospital bed, he sees it as "a vapour trail…[that] marked the beginning of a fissure that has since riven my life" (*Rings* 18). This fissure forcibly carves out his perspective as that which is apart from the world, and allows him to see its patterns anew, while simultaneously leaving him stuck inside, unable to move on.

What we end up seeing in Sebald's narrator is this very desire for a circuit of repair, a detachment from this consensual mirage, and a measured description of the immeasurable and irreconcilable scope of history's cruelty in order to begin apprehending it. For Sebald, the "practices of self-interruption, self-suspension, and self-abeyance that indicate people's struggles to change" (Berlant 27) are essential to the "impasse" that the novel rests in, and for repair, via detachment and perspective, to take place. As he wanders the isle, with its history of brutality, and its effects on the material fiber of the contemporary, time seems at a standstill. He explores ruins of mansions and estates, "relics of an extinct civilization" (*Rings* 30), that contain "ghosts bowed with sorrows" (36) and foundations that were "imperceptibly nearing the brink of dissolution and silent oblivion." From the hospital, too, the narrator describes a "colourless" (4) "cheerless" (5) and "alien" world. While Berlant shows us that impasse is something we

have to write through, Sebald also demonstrates how writing from the impasse[32]—the fissure, the rift—is a productive way in which to stop time in order to deal with it. The possibility that time can be stopped—however momentarily—increases the possibility of the present to be examined without "seeking immediate redemption" (Cvetkovich 117).

For Sebald's narrator, another way of exercising the ability to maintain perspective is through physical distance. This kind of distance is the antithesis to the "out of sight, out of mind" ideal that so conveniently dulled the immediacy of slavery's ills; instead, it is one that is key, counter-intuitively, to clarity. It is these distances—from the earth, from methods of historical mapping—that allow him to see the universe "with the eye of an outsider" (5), unclouded by the lens of habit. Eventually, it is this mantra of "clarity through distance" that allows us to identify the stories that obsess Sebald's compulsive narrator and frustrate his relationship to the way narrative is produced. This distance, first and foremost, is a spatial one. Fixated on the bird's-eye view that he gets from various plane windows, hospital buildings, and imagined satellites, Sebald always takes a moment to reflect on what it feels like to be apart from the perspective that we are used to. "If we view ourselves from a great height," he writes, "it is frightening to

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[32] Another way of understanding "impasse," or a "stuckness" is in its violence. For Catherine Toal, in addition to cruelty connoting "the cyclical recurrence of violence perpetrated through ignorance and prejudice," it also connotes "the nightmare temporality of irrationality" (11-12). This helps us to understand a different aspect of presence—as a nightmarish hellscape in which the ills of history are ever-present, something that "sums up the structure of 'perverse' narrative form, which endlessly repeats a threat posed to the protagonist and his hairsbreadth evasion of annihilation." (25)

realize how little we know about our species, our purpose and our end, I thought, as we crossed the coastline and flew out over the jelly-green sea" (92).[33] When speaking of 17th century Dutch painter Jacob van Ruisdael's *View of Haarlem with Bleaching Fields*, he writes that his "vantage point was an imaginary position some distance above the earth. Only in this way could he see it all together" (83). As we can see even from his brief meditation on aerial vantage points, the space itself demands distance from a historical hegemony. Spatial distance enables Sebald's narrator to enter a mindset of separation, a perspective that physically minimizes that which often overwhelms us. Physical removal, for Sebald, enables mental detachment.

Continuing to play with perspective, specifically within Sebald's understanding of art, also allows his work to identify once again with the "victims of history."[34] In looking back to Rembrandt's *The Anatomy Lesson*, one of the first paintings Sebald's narrator mentions early on in the book, our attention turns to a 17th-century dissection, in which Descartes "teaches that one should disregard the flesh, which is beyond

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[33] In another utilization of perspective, Sebald conflates the vantage-point of "above" with that of "hindsight," ultimately realizing that "representation of history…requires a falsification of perspective. We, the survivors, see everything from above, see everything at once." (125) As George Santayana has been paraphrased, myriad times, "those who do not learn from history are condemned to repeat it"; in a lesser-known phrase of the same treatise, Santayana writes that "progress, far from consisting in change, depends on retentiveness." (Santayana)

[34] While the use of "victim" can often appear to take away agency from the figure of the survivor, I use it more as an alternative to the "victors" of history—more of an homage to the "wretched" than evoking a kind of helplessness. Too, Thomas C. Holt uses the phrase "blaming the victim" as a way to show how contemporary notions of progress and selfhood put the burden of proof on the individual, who then gets blamed for what should be considered a failure of society. See Holt.

comprehension, and attend to the machine within" (13). Sebald, disagreeing, argues that there is an intended flaw in the composition (the backwards, inside-out rendition of the hand being dissected): the

> unshapely hand signifies the violence that has been done to [the thief] Aris Kindt. It is with him, the victim...that the painter identifies...He alone sees that greenish annihilated body, and he alone sees the shadow in the half-open mouth and over the dead man's eyes. (17)

It is with the victims of violence—especially those victims that are mistreated for the "progression" of science or civilization—and the retroactive justification of this violence—they were a thief! they were inhuman!—that *The Rings of Saturn* illuminates.

Another way of describing a Sebaldian understanding of history is presenting it as "a long account of calamities" (295), one that "blindly staggers from one disaster to the next" (256) and which consists of "nothing but misfortune and the troubles that afflict us" (153). More than this, however, is the fact that perspective allows us to see these random occurrences as connected grievances. What Sebald can offer us, just short of death's vantage point, is an effort to document cruelty in a way that allows for "the transfer of the horrors…into an aesthetic pattern that helps…more than the rational explanation of its social basis" ("Memory and Cruelty" 188). We return, then, to perspective and Sebald's fixation on bird's-eye views, extreme zooms, microscopes and opera glasses. Patterns of human existence, also seen as patterns of unbreakable cruelty, can be identified through the extreme perspectives with which Sebald narrates the past. Sebald's politically depressed position is one that is able to navigate these attachments in

order to properly record violence and all of its incarnations. Without the premise of optimism, Sebald can use a multifaceted perspective in order to actively address history without being blinded by the fantasy of the Western-civilizational supremacy that it purports.

Placing a very flawed, very vulnerable, easily exhausted being at the center of a novel, one who is interested in things like him, historical figures that read between the lines and artists that savor the inaccuracies and understand the wonder and horror of triviality, is a worthwhile gamble. His pages are filled with the recluse, the weary, the skeptic, those who are "sensitize[d]…to the continuing oppression, exploitation, enslavement and destruction, across the borders of social class and race, of those who were furthest from the centres of power" (*Rings* 36). These individuals are different because of their ability to empathize even at a time when empathy meant death. While Sebald's narrator's wanderings bring up Benjamin's figure of the *flâneur*, who writes that "empathy is the nature of the intoxication to which the *flâneur* abandons himself," Sebald's narrator does not "possess" people but instead repossesses those discarded by history ("Paris" 55).

This "possession"/"repossession" duality speaks again to those histories of the enslaved, the forgotten, those that own history, and those who are owned by it. While Sebald does encompass some of the ideals of the *flâneur*, he roams not through the city, but through the ruins of history. He goes as an ally willing, perhaps, to cross the color

line and acknowledge the depression, emptiness, and anxiety that can be brought on by the "fissure" that is the burden of truth. The "intoxication" Sebald's narrator feels is not that of "entering people" but of roving through space—"the opiate of time," as Thomas Browne has referred to it. Sebald's narrator enters his own conception of a cruel history in the same way that Benjamin's *flâneur* enters people. In this case, it is not out of a voyeuristic urge, but out of desperation for answers, for an allyship; for a desire for a narrative that rests, as long as needed, in the lost histories of a violent world in order to begin to reengage with "a hopefulness that remains stubbornly faithful for no good reason in the midst of despair."[35]

[35] West qtd. in Cvetkovich 117.

4. The "Pleasures" and Cruelties of Work: Civil Servitude and "Cluttered Intimacy" in Kazuo Ishiguro's *The Remains of the Day* and *Never Let Me Go*

> It should never be forgotten that while colonization, with its techniques and its political and juridical weapons, obviously transported European models to other continents, it also had considerable boomerang effect on the mechanisms of power in the West, and on the apparatuses, institutions, and techniques of power. A whole series of colonial models was brought back to the West, and the result was that the West could practice something resembling colonization, or an internal colonialism, on itself.—Michel Foucault, "Society Must Be Defended"[1]

> The English landscape at its finest—such as I saw this morning—possesses a quality that the landscapes of other nations, however more superficially dramatic, inevitably fail to possess… and this quality is probably best summed up by the term 'greatness.' … I would say that it is the very lack of obvious drama or spectacle that sets the beauty of our land apart. What is pertinent is the calmness of that beauty, its sense of restraint. … In comparison, the sorts of sights offered in places as Africa and America, though undoubtedly exciting, would, I am sure, strike the objective viewer as inferior on account of their unseemly demonstrativeness. –Stevens, *The Remains of the Day*

Understanding colonialism's "boomerang effect," as Foucault writes in my epigraph, can offer a more rounded understanding of critical Global Anglophone studies, where cruelty practiced on "others," "over there," makes its way home—beyond Sebald's observations of physical deformity. I use "home" in this context to mean both within empire and within domestic settings. Foucault suggests that the disciplinary policies of colonialism are a blueprint for the dynamics of domination and

[1] I will be engaging later in this chapter with Franz Fanon, whose greatest philosophical contribution, according to Homi Bhabha, is in extending decolonization struggles beyond the body and beyond the here and now. As Foucault writes, understanding a similar ideology of empire that works abroad can harness the duty and minds of classes of people with less educational, cultural and economic resources brings a related kind of affective cruelty to the doorstep of empire.

submission within the borders of empire, a power dynamic that extends the cruel work conditions of imperial control to its citizens. That colonialism and practices of subjugation were used to enrich empire, distills, unsurprisingly, an extractivist work culture that controls value production within empire. In addition, as we see in *The Remains of the Day*, what Foucault calls an "internal colonialism" is both internal to empire as well as internal to the self; and even when translated into less offensive terms—decency, professionalism, dignity, etc.— shows similar methods of control. Eventually I show how this understanding of "internal colonialism," something that controls the expression, affect, and freedom of workers in an increasingly cruel and demoralizing work culture, is adopted by neoliberal capitalist corporations to extend profit and power.

The Remains of the Day is a novel written as Stevens's traveling diary, and catches him reminiscing about the devoted service to his master Lord Darlington. In the text, Stevens seems to internalize the dichotomy of "politeness"[2] and the dominating

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[2] As Gikandi wrote on the "politics of manners,"

> politeness came to define what the English were, or thought themselves to be; it provided the singular visual aesthetic and discourse through which generations of students have come to see and imagine modern England. … There was, however, another side to the ideal of politeness: it was also intimately connected to commercial activities and the rather impolite business of moneymaking. (60)

As I noted in my previous chapter, Gikandi exposes the roots of high culture to be an aesthetic distanciation from brutal regimes abroad, a separation that afforded empire its "modernity." In this chapter, I want to further this understanding of what can also be used to regulate "the management of feelings, behavior, and government" within empire. For Gikandi, the politics of manners "arose as part of a concerted effort to stabilize the potentially excessive and disruptive aspects" of wealth and power "in an age of extraordinary enterprise." (59-60)

ideologies of empire; in Stevens's case, "politeness" belies the true nature of Lord Darlington's expectations of his workers, imminent anti-Semitism, and fascism leading up to WWII. Using Stevens's actions, obsessions, and ideas about the world and his place in it, I argue that the novel eventually shows the ways in which servitude, both mental and physical, is influenced by imperial ideologies of domination, and this "ruler and ruled" dynamic becomes a model for the present-day ethos of work under capitalism (Weeks 8). It is no coincidence, as Mark McGurl points out, that the character of Stevens, feverishly slaving for his employer, served as inspiration to Jeff Bezos while creating Amazon. Bezos fetishizes Stevens's "work-ethic," as a model for his own employees, and embraces the novel's "complex psychology, where it is…a matter of emulating Stevens, the butler, who has his own 'psychotic' obsession with service" (455).

Holding "decency" accountable reveals how it masks the brutal and cutthroat economies and colonial practices of empire. In the same way, Stevens has been held accountable, by scholars from Rebecca Walkowitz to Bruce Robbins, for the way this "psychotic obsession with service" ends up enabling a warmongering, and ethno-nationalist elite. But can Stevens's story be more than just a tale of complicity to the British empire? Reading *Remains* with a diverse combination of theorists, from the imperial critique and colonial psychoaffectivity of Fanon, and Deleuze's formulations of inner turmoil, to the neoliberal work critiques of Weeks, McGurl, and David Graeber can show how unusual collaborations can extend the boundaries of colonial, imperial and

capitalist theory. Extending the half-lives of these theories beyond their own historical and categorical silos, as exemplified through Stevens's character, helps to deeper understand the influence that historical/colonial mental and physical servitude have over modern-day struggle. As Ishiguro himself stated in an interview with *The Paris Review*, the "essence" of the story "doesn't lie in the setting" ("The Art of Fiction"). I take that to mean that Stevens should be seen as both an imperial servant as well as a mirror for modern work practices and their strenuous emotional and psychological effects. Further, knowing that the "workaholism" our economy demands today is based in the colonial labor practices of domination and submission, changes the way we historicize our relationship with work—specifically the sacrifice and suffering that has become the norm under current forms of global capitalism.[3]

Cruelty, when defined as an abuse of power, is epitomized by "feudal" understandings of worker submission, a dynamic that remained beyond feudalism, through colonialism and into the present. As I will discuss in this chapter, with the employment of theories of labor and the novels of Ishiguro, this feudal relationship, reawakened by global imperialism, has become the basis of how we view work under capitalism. Guided by Ishiguro's protagonists Stevens the workaholic butler, and Kathy

[3] In this instance, I take global capitalism to mean an acceleration of capitalism that concentrates corporate wealth at the top and is supported by lawmakers and policies, ultimately making democracy seem like an impossibility.

H., the sacrificial clone, this chapter uses the "cluttered intimacies"[4] of cruelty located within domestic work. The work that takes place within the home is something that, as Kathi Weeks has pointed out, is often regarded as privatized and thus out-of-bounds for societal critique; therefore, I want to use this setting as a jumping-off point to understand and critique the labor practices that systematize this cruel intimacy. Ishiguro's novels, and literature in general, is able to take these abuses to their logical extreme and reveal a reality of the unseen dynamics of domination and submission in the labor contract. Through this logical extreme—like the "psychotic" devotion of Stevens to his employer, or the organs that Kathy H. sacrifices to the system she was born into—attitudes and ideas about work become defamiliarized enough so that "it's like walking past a mirror you've walked past every day of your life, and suddenly it shows you something else, something troubling and strange" (*Never Let Me Go* 36). It is then that we can begin understanding how to historicize and deconstruct the dynamics that we are often inured to.

In *The Problem With Work*, Weeks observes that "we tend to focus more on the problems with this or that job, or on their absence, than on work as a requirement, work as a system, work as a way of life…we are better at attending to the problems with this

[4] Deleuze uses this term to portray the environs of a masochistic setting (34). Distilling the essence from Deleuze, I use this term to mean the complicated politics of domination and submission within domestic settings. A false notion of caring and being cared for is crowded by the paradoxical effect of force, free labor, and economic manipulations.

or that boss than to the system that grants them such power" (4). Fortunately, literature allows us the option to both closely analyze the problems within relationships, as well as apply these specificities to an analysis of the power structures they inform. Specifically in *The Remains of the Day,* Ishiguro sets Stevens up as a purposefully disempowered figure, one who misguidedly seeks an intimacy from the relationship between servant and lord, one that ends up stripping its subjects of foresight and the tools of dissent. This complexity of position is shown through the small, stylistic specificities and micro-moments of Ishiguro's text, ones that highlight the very brief exchanges or changes in interior monologue, as the place of action, rather than the policies being made on the grand stage of diplomacy and war. While I absolutely agree with Weeks's compelling argument that that the labor market individualizes work so much so that we are unable to see the power structures that enable this inequality, it is worth taking a closer look at the individual relationship of Stevens to work in order to better understand the complex forms of mental and physical submission that take shape.

In the spirit of theoretically embracing strange bedfellows, it's worth pointing out that the novel itself makes odd, seemingly anachronistic choices. *Remains* addresses a span of history that stretches from Victorian imperialism in India to the fall of the empire and the rise of American interests post-WWII—and was published in 1988. To me, the mistaken intimacy with which Stevens describes his relationship to Lord Darlington calls for a direct assessment of the effects of colonialism, and a globalized

free market ideology, on labor relations. Weeks questions "less the acceptance of the present reality that one must work to live than the willingness to live for work," concluding that

> places of employment and spaces of work…are structured by relations of power and authority; as hierarchical organizations, they raise issues of *consent and obedience*; as spaces of exclusion, they pose questions about *membership and obligation*…once we enter the workplace we inevitably find ourselves enmeshed in the direct and personal relations of *rulers and ruled*. (2 emphasis mine)

While Weeks is clear that she is referencing the contemporary workplace, the type of language she uses—"obedience," "obligation," "rulers and ruled"—lends itself to an understanding of work through duty and discipline, rather than a more typical focus on contracts, job security, and fair wages. Using an examination of language and tone as a way to connect past and present attitudes towards labor, we can understand the question that her book begins with—"why do we work so long and hard?"—by examining Stevens's example of the "willingness to live for work" (Weeks 2).

As I will show in the first section of the chapter, Stevens lives to serve, and his stunted emotionality, anxious, obsessive prose, and desperate need to be of service is a direct condition of the servitude of his employment. Looking backwards, then, and examining Stevens's affect in comparison to theories of subjection and struggle in the colonial (and feudal) realms may not be uncalled for. Around the same time that Stevens grapples (somewhat) with enabling a fascist and elitist international politics, Franz Fanon writes of Europe's colonial conquests that "brought the progress of other men to a

halt and enslaved them for its own purposes and glory" (*The Wretched of the Earth* 235).[5] Specifically, this imperial mode "for centuries…has stifled virtually the whole of humanity" because of its transformation of the world into ruler and ruled. Extending the decolonization struggle to Stevens, a white Englishman who acts as a servant to the Empire, cannot do justice to the struggles that England's colonies have faced. The violence and harm, some of which I addressed in my first and second chapters, of forced labor extracted wealth to enrich the colonizer; theft on the grandest scale. However, similar types of ideological cruelty, or "abstract modes of domination" also, and relatedly, existed within class politics so much so that "world-building practices are corralled into…capitalist relations of work" (Weeks 8). Even within nations, imperial ideology effects domestic modes of control, in which work becomes "the site of many of the most palpable and persistent relations of domination and subordination that people confront" (23).

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[5] Like Fanon, Ishiguro associates the affective with the political. Stevens's "failed" endeavor to free himself from his identity as a butler isn't just the result of a willing complicity with empire, but an inability to protect himself at the individual level from global structures of capitalism and colonialism. Fanon's deliberate focus on how this kind of affectivity, registered through the domestic interiority, speak to the battles raging on larger levels, and "frame his reflections on violence, decolonization, national consciousness, and humanism in terms of the psycho-affective realm—…dreams, psychic inversions and displacements, phantasmic political identifications" (*Wretched* xix). Expanding the realm of the domestic to include the psycho-affective realm is critical, for Fanon, in understanding intentions and motivations surrounding national consciousness and identifications that don't necessarily align with an individual's best interests. The fragmentation of the colonial psyche, and that of Stevens's, emphasizes Fanon's claim that we must "endeavor to invent a man in full." (*Wretched*, 236)

It is easy to lose track of work as "a social convention and disciplinary apparatus" (Weeks 7-8) especially with the kind of domestic, intimate service Stevens provides for Lord Darlington. As Anne McClintock has written about the household during the era of British imperialism, "domesticity was not simply a trivial and fleeting irrelevance …but an indispensable element both of the industrial market and the imperial enterprise" (5). Domesticity was often overlooked as a space in which the imperial enterprise functioned because they were feminized spaces. In addition, Weeks contributes the fact that an "inattention to work within political theory" is due to the privatization of the spheres of work and the domestic:

> We seem to have a hard time grasping the power relations of both work and family systematically; we often experience and imagine the employment relation—like the marriage relation—not as a social institution but as a unique relationship…the province of human need and sphere of individual choice rather than a site for the exercise of political power. (4)

The chapter eventually shows how the privatization of work manipulates labor relations into being egregiously intimate. This fact undergirds both *Remains* and Ishiguro's later novel, *Never Let Me Go*, with the small difference that while Stevens lives to work, Kathy H. was born to make this sacrifice.

Ultimately, at the heart of both these novels is a struggle between whether individual agency or larger institution factors are to blame. This meditation on choice is something that Ishiguro has expressed as important to his work. In a recent interview, though he calls some of his earlier novels "naïve," he ends up concluding that "actually, you discover you do not have that much control over your life" (Elgot). At the risk of

sounding cynical, suspicious, or paranoid—and perhaps these are the three adjectives crucial to contemporary literary global studies—this chapter examines exactly why that is, and why novels that represent the cruelty within this rationale are as crucial as those breaking free from it. While it is easy to dismiss Stevens as a sycophant, an important aspect of imperialist and capitalist work dynamics is that he, and other workers like him, may not be allowed the agency we are quick to ascribe to them. In other words, with the affective demands (some might say "emotional labor" although this term is contested)[6] and limited protections in modern labor practices, as with colonial exploitation, Stevens says, "I can't even say I made my own mistakes"; that being the very point. While there wasn't hope for Stevens, perhaps literary characters can make the mistakes for us, ones that we can learn from, within which we can find ways to disobey, de-individualize, and transcend the dominating relationships with the institutions that try to manage us. Institutionalizing the problem of work endeavors to imagine an alternative through avenues that will actually change the conditions for the many, not the few. As Weeks makes very clear, "as a world-building practice, freedom is a social—and hence

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[6] Sociologist Arlie Hochschild coined the term in 1983, and in a recent interview, clarified her initial definition as being specific to the emoting occurring at work. As she says, "Emotional labor, as I introduced the term in *The Managed Heart*, is the work, for which you're paid, which centrally involves trying to feel the right feeling for the job. *This involves evoking and suppressing feelings*. Some jobs require a lot of it, some a little of it. From the flight attendant whose job it is to be nicer than natural to the bill collector whose job it is to be, if necessary, harsher than natural, there are a variety of jobs that call for this. Teachers, nursing-home attendants, and child-care workers are examples. The point is that while you may also be doing physical labor and mental labor, *you are crucially being hired and monitored for your capacity to manage and produce a feeling*." (Beck emphases mine) Though it may be self-policed, the affect that Stevens must display relies heavily on his remarkable ability to suppress most of his feelings, or at least, attribute them to other causes.

necessarily political—endeavor…and demands not the absence of power but its democratization" (22-23).[7] In unpacking the imperial roots of labor abuse through its dramatization in literature, we can begin to understand not just its history but address its future impact.

4.1 "You look as though you're crying."

When approaching Stevens's harsh requirements for himself, his intense devotion to his "profession," and his limited time to enjoy relationships, alone-time, or family, we must ask the questions: is Stevens a masochist? Does he take pleasure in his mental anguish—pride, even? In *Imperial Masochism: British Fiction, Fantasy and Social Class*, John Kucich argues that the imperial masochist chooses to suffer in order to create "fantasies of control over others, fantasies about the annihilation of others, fantasies that maintain the omnipotence of others, and fantasies of solitary omnipotence" specifically in the imperial British context (25). For Kucich, imperial masochism in fiction has rewarded characters who "cherished suffering" with class mobility, and the same power and control of an imperial project over its colonies. Yet Kucich also sees masochism as a

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[7] In *Chimeras of Form*, Vadde writes that texts that deconstruct "large-scale processes" like globalization, must "provoke counterintuitive understandings of wholeness, in which forms do not contain contradictions but construct and channel them." (7) As mentioned in a previous footnote, Fanon's call to defeat structures of colonialism in order to "create a man in full" is contradicted by Stevens's failure to be a "whole" person independent of his duties in the shadow of colonialism. Connecting colonialism to neoliberal capitalism, David Graeber sees the effects of a cruel work culture as the recipe for a "spiritual violence that [is a] genuine scar across our collective soul." (*Bullshit Jobs* 143) The incompleteness, the violence, the scar, all seem to point towards fissured forms of wholeness as catalyzed by structures of violence. As Vadde suggests, constructing and chanelling the contradictions within these large-scale processes can help provide productive critiques of the movements within them.

choice, claiming "it generates delusions in order to change the self and the world in specific ways" (210). Voluntary suffering as a "vehicle for social action" (208), is a point of privilege. However, in Stevens's case, this kind of seemingly self-induced suffering, is one that can only be coerced by the minute, unspoken rules around fear, discipline and order of domestic work.

It might be possible to argue that Stevens's masochism is, in fact a choice. In *Coldness and Cruelty*, a philosophical examination of the novels of Leopold von Sacher-Masoch, Deleuze explains the key characteristics of masochistic practice as an alliance, or contract, between the sufferer and their torturer: "the masochist appears to be held by real chains, but in fact he is bound by his word alone" (25). This "pact…is the masochist's *particular form of madness*" (25, emphasis mine). Along these lines, Stevens has set into place his own, seemingly unenforced guidelines for his employ, and makes clear where, above all else, his loyalties lie—with the "dignity" of his "profession." More than loyalty, being a butler, for Stevens, is an identity. For some people, "being a butler is like playing some pantomime role; a small push, a slight stumble, and the façade will drop off to reveal the actor underneath," he writes (43). But for Stevens,

> the great butlers are great by virtue of their ability to inhabit their professional role and inhabit it to the utmost; they will not be shaken out by external events, however surprising, alarming, or vexing. They wear their professionalism as a decent gentleman will wear his suit: he will not let ruffians or circumstances tear it off him in the public gaze; he will discard it when, and only when, he wills to do so, and this will invariably be when he is entirely alone. (43)

Stevens lays out these "rules" for his own profession. They are not a contract that he has been forced to sign—in fact, he takes the guidelines for the elite butler's club, the Hayes Society, and make their standards for the profession more sacrificial, more severe, and all the more encompassing. The language used here, and the threat of ruffians or circumstances "tearing" the dignity of his profession from him is alarming, reactionary, and protective. Stevens makes these rules for himself. He is bound by his word, alone.

Returning to critical modern understandings of work, Weeks problematizes "this tethering of work to the figure of the individual" because it essentially becomes "a criticism of workers" than of the structure. "As a result of work's subordination to… individualization, thinking about work as a social system—even with its arguably more tenuous private status—strangely becomes as difficult as it is for many to conceive marriage and the family in structural terms" (4). In *Remains of the Day,* it is important to see that ideas about the life sacrifice demanded by the profession as ones that are formed and epitomized during the height of England's imperial agenda. Along these lines, seeing Stevens as a masochist prioritizes a reading of the individual over seeing him as part of a larger issue of the domination of ideology and the demand for workers to submit to their "duties." Stevens's understanding of life—or rather, what he must devote his life to—shows how and why the sacrifices that are demanded by work have extremely personal, cruel consequences. Understanding Stevens's narrative as the only one that exemplifies a "particular form of madness," is one that prioritizes an individual

reading. Instead, the important move of contextualizing disciplinary effects of empire on psyche and labor practices alike connect individual and structure in a more generative way.[8]

As an extension of the imperial servant, in the novel, Stevens exhibits "submission and inhibition"—a learned behavior passed down from his father—as the form of "dignity" so elemental to his profession. That Stevens polices himself and his staff with almost no prompting from his employer, whether it is Lord Darlington, Mr. Farraday after him, or his father's old boss before him, shows that they all depend on exactly these "moral reflexes," and respect for status quo and authority that internalize discipline. For Fanon, the role of the father is crucial in how this behavior is passed down through the generations directly affected by the onset of colonialism, and its uses of capitalist practices as a tool for submission. Fanon writes

> [i]n capitalist societies, education, whether secular or religious, the teaching of moral reflexes handed down from father to son, the exemplary integrity of workers decorated

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[8] In *Cosmopolitan Style: Modernism Beyond the Nation*, Walkowitz claims that Ishiguro "associates major events with those that seem to be minor and asks us to notice that the international politics of immigration and imperialism is shaped by intimate disputes" (111). The small, minute, and intimate cruelties that Stevens lets slip throughout his narrative are crucial in performing the international politics of "immigration and imperialism." Focusing on the cruelty inherent in Ishiguro's narrative can bring us closer to understanding the power dynamics at play rather than dismissing Stevens's flustered narrative as a "taciturn performance," that enables an English imperialist ethos. (Walkowitz 123) Walkowitz has many affective descriptions for Stevens—whether it is his "taciturn" nature; his pride in the "essential reticence—'dignity' of a genuine Englishness" (122); a "purposeful stylization" of this very dignity that "facilitates the Nazi sympathies of his employer" by ignoring Nazism (123); his circumspection that he "mistakes" for patriotism. However, this ends up assuming that he has the same agency as his oppressors. Rather, understanding how cruelty is internalized makes more sense of Stevens's empathy as lying with his oppressors, if it is they that he has been taught to empathize with. While Fanon sees unlearning this colonial pathos as crucial, it is also important to see the other side of the coin—those unable to do the unlearning for various reasons—one of them, perhaps, spatial isolation.

> after fifty years of loyal and faithful service, the fostering of love for harmony and wisdom, those aesthetic forms of respect for status quo, *instill in the exploited a mood of submission and inhibition which considerably eases the task of agents of law and order*. (*Wretched* 3-4 emphasis mine)

In addition, the fact that Stevens "wears" his professionalism "as a decent gentleman will wear his suit," and doesn't let "ruffians or circumstances tear it off him in the public gaze" further exposes the colonial roots behind words like "decency," "dignity," and of course, "suit-wearing" that separate the rulers from the ruled. Behind the odd metaphor of the tearing of suits by ruffians (given that Stevens lives quite isolatedly) is a politics of respectability that defends "decency" in order to submit to it. As Gikandi attests, this "decency," couched within a British "politeness," is an emotions-regulating force in the face of more disruptive goings on.[9]

To elaborate on the mechanisms of "submission" that Stevens has internalized, I want to examine the three stories involving his father that Stevens passes along to the reader as the source of his professional identity. These tales, elevated to the level of

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[9] Rebecca Walkowitz aptly expresses that the "emotions-regulating" stylistic choices by Ishiguro "allows us to imagine that the text is not simply a description of English but an expression of it." (123) To this, I add, it is an expression of England that, through premodern, feudal terms like "dignity" and "loyalty," the passing down of professionalism via his father's lived experience, and due to Stevens's limited education, has not only indoctrinated Stevens, but been weaponized by its benefactors. That Walkowitz points out Stevens takes pride in his profession may seem to be true on a surface level, but beneath Stevens's generally positive associations with this emotion lurks a learned "blind dignity" (see Canby; while his review "Blind Dignity: A Butler's Story" was actually written about the movie adaptation of *The Remains of the Day*, I appreciate its title) a devotion to the ethos of empire that can only be learned. Walkowitz also points out that writers like Ishiguro "'write with an accent to express their alienation within the Anglophone literary and cultural tradition'…[and] reproduce [standard English] aberrantly" in order to "[disorient] systems of meaning and patterns of reference" (123). And yet—rather than a perceived "accent", the prose is *too* perfect, too complicit within British tradition, and too ready to sacrifice the self for the other. More than a representation of national tradition, I feel it is an uncanny valley of imparted colonial ideals.

mythology, show that the only things Stevens seems to know about his father are in a professional capacity, ones that that exemplify the destructive effects of a work ethos that doesn't allow for a life or identity outside profession. Other than these anecdotes, we know nothing about Stevens's father, mother or brother, or what his childhood was like.[10] Together, oddly cutoff from kinship, Stevens and his father may as well have been built alongside the estate—the "professional identity" that Stevens speaks about removing only when alone can, in fact, never be removed, given that it is all there is. In fact, all Stevens has as any kind of inheritable knowledge, nostalgic recollection, or childhood memory, are these tales from a colonial past: formal anecdotes that instruct, discipline, and sterilize the past for the sake of the profession. Given that the importance of these anecdotes isn't their veracity, or personal nostalgia, but "what it reveals concerning my father's ideals"—concerning the profession of the butler—and that it "gives a vital clue to his thinking" suggests that Stevens never spoke to his father directly even about these stories, let alone anything else.

The first of these tales is somewhat apocryphal. His father recounts an English butler, taken with his employer to colonial India, who, along with the "native staff" sees a "tiger languishing beneath the dining table" (36). The butler asks permission to use the "twelve bores"—a gun created primarily for hunting colonial game so big that English

[10] Stevens mentions two brief references to growing up: recalling that his father told these anecdotes to some of the visitors of the manor, and that he "start[ed] out as a footman under [Father's] supervision." (35)

guns did not suffice—kills the tiger, refreshes the teapots, and reports back that dinner is on schedule and that there will be "no discernible traces left of the recent occurrence by that time." It is this line that his father chuckles at, "admiringly" (36). This exhibits how the practice of language to be weaponized not only to attack, but to conceal is tied to an imperial dictate, so that the formal vagueness can erase a violent reality. These are the same ideals that Stevens employs in order to better blur the terrifying reality of his father's death and the (literal) catering to a global elite invested in the spread of fascism, and his part in it. In addition, the fact that Stevens senior "tells and retells" these stories makes it a stylistic mantra that sets the profession of the butler in direct conversation with the colonial "project." This "project" values a kind of complicit "civility" regardless of context, and is reinforced through myth but maintained through a very real violence.

The second anecdote, passed down from a nobleman whom Stevens senior once worked for, performs the idea that the "pact" that the butler must makes with his profession is one that is in his employers' best interests. Stevens shows how his father "continued to behave with immaculate courtesy" when dealing with the childish demands of two entitled guests of his employer (38). At one point, when the guests become bored, and drunkenly "[shout] unflattering remarks" at Stevens senior, he "showed no hint of discomfort or anger, but … an expression balanced perfectly between personal dignity and readiness to oblige" (38). Most importantly, it is not until they begin to insult Mr. Stevens's employer that he "brings the car to an abrupt halt"

and, leaving the driver's seat, stands there "silently, neither demanding disembarkation nor offering any clue as to his desires or intentions" until his "strangely unnerving" presence made the passengers feel "engulfed with guilt" (40) and they apologize for their words. In this example, Stevens's father willingly takes on personal abuse with "equanimity" (38).

The key term here is "equanimity," where one remains composed even when experiencing pain or intense emotions: a stoicism of sorts. Returning Hochschild's definition of emotional labor as the idea of being "hired and monitored for your capacity to manage and produce a feeling" rebrands "equanimity" as a submission demanded by work that at times results in a complicit passivity (Beck). In Sartre's 1964 preface to *The Wretched of the Earth*, he demands that Europeans "excise the bloody colonialist" within them to be aware of the way their silence—forced or unforced—can condone imperial rule. "If exploitation and oppression never existed on earth, perhaps displays of nonviolence might relieve the conflict," he writes. "But if the entire regime, even your nonviolent thoughts, is governed by a thousand-year-old oppression, your passiveness serves no other purpose but to put you on the side of the oppressors" (*Wretched*, lviii). Passivity and equanimity then both become features that are part of the domination and submission dynamics of employment as well as those that enable imperialism in its many forms.

The final anecdote from Stevens's father shows how demands for "civility" and manners unsurprisingly control honest expressions of sorrow and outrage. A "dignified" world view often means sacrificing authentic feelings for a more rehearsed, acceptable "stiff upper lip." When Stevens's older brother Leonard is killed in the Southern African War due to a general's "un-British attack on civilian Boer settlements," Stevens senior then has to face his son's murderer but quickly realizes "that his employers' present business aspirations hung on the smooth running of the house party" that was in the general's honor (41).[11] Stevens senior,

> appreciating his employer's position, volunteered immediately to take [care of] the General, and thus was obliged to suffer intimate proximity for four days with the man he detested…yet so well did [he] hide his feelings, so professionally did he carry out his duties, that on his departure the General…left an unusually large tip in appreciation. (41-42)

Fredric Jameson writes of a vexed literary interiority in novels can represent an "imperial situation," or how colonialism abroad is registered at "home" (Jameson 61), while Rebecca Walkowitz observes that texts that are set in the heart of the empire "do

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[11] Ishiguro generally tends, in this novel at least, to write about actual historical figures visiting Lord Darlington's mansion—Winston Churchill being one of them. In this case, the closest "General" who took part in a "particularly infamous manoevre" was Lord Herbert Kitchener, who proclaimed "we have to aim at the Boers where they are most vulnerable…their farms must be burnt down, their wives and children separated from the men." (Forth 141) Kitchener, who "indiscriminately razed thirty thousand farms and displaced a quarter million civilians," ultimately forced imprisoned Boer civilians into concentration camps. (Forth 139-140) Stevens's father's refusal to "break" his formal appearance towards this man not only shows how complicity can span (and be passed on) through generations, but also foreshadows Stevens's complicity towards Nazism and the German camps that were overlooked in the hopes that international diplomacy would prevail. The fact that a general so severely involved in brutal colonization efforts can simply move on to "business ventures" also shows how systems of global capital can seamlessly repackage the same toxic motives of colonialism. Enter: Mr. Farraday.

not ignore or exclude 'the imperialist situation' but rather distort it because they display…an unseen colonized world… rather than 'colonized daily life'" (Walkowitz 19). These two realities, "the peculiar transformations of the First World," and the accompanying "imperial relationship" of the "colonized point of view" (Jameson 60), then, imagine the concurrence of the imperial and the colonial in a way that mimics the dynamics of domination, both mental and physical, that accompany colonialism.

It is worth noting that for all the claims to England's majesty that Stevens's father defends, Stevens, upon entering his father's quarters on his deathbed, is "newly struck by the smalless and the starkness of it…[like] having stepped into a prison cell" (65). The asceticism that his father abides by in his room—with its bare walls, a single wooden chair, a single window, and a steeply sloped attic ceiling that he cannot stand fully upright in—describes what Deleuze might call, "the art of suggestion" (34). For Deleuze,

> [t]he settings in Sade, the castles inhabited by his heroes are subject to the brutal laws of darkness and light that accelerate the gestures of their cruel occupants. The settings in Masoch, with their heavy tapestries, their cluttered intimacy…create a *chiaroscuro* where the only things that emerge are suspended gestures and suspended suffering. (34)

The light in Stevens's descriptions do what Stevens himself cannot do: highlight the suspended suffering of his father in harsh relief. Stevens describes the "pale early light" of the morning, the high wick of the oil lamp that he uses to climb the "rickety stairs," the "half-light" that "lit up the edges of my father's craggy, lined, still awesome features before his death" (64). We can see how the "brutal laws of darkness and light" have shaped the late life of Stevens's father. Or—is it the brutal laws of imperialism, the

reality ordained by an extensive structural submission to authority? Ishiguro's choice to narrate from the point of view of a servant of the empire is deliberate in that they belong to a servant class that can both carry out the ideologies of the empire while also, not unrelatedly, experiencing aspects of its harmful nature. In literalizing Deleuze's philosophical understandings of power dynamics (taking both from Sade and Sacher-Masoch), and seeing it within the context of empire, we can see our "hero" being subject to these brutal laws which create "cluttered intimacies" in which suffering emerges.

If it isn't already clear that all this suffering is for naught, actions by the estate show that Stevens's father is valuable only at the level of extracted worth. Near his death, Stevens's father traces and retraces his steps, "as though he hoped to find some precious jewel he had dropped" (67). Unfortunately, the jewel, that represents freedom, a life apart from work, all that could have been, never truly existed.[12] This realization, forced upon him by his old age, allows Stevens senior to briefly drop the zealous attitude towards his "profession" and insist, to Stevens, that he hasn't been a good father, even though he "hopes" he has been (97). While his father displays vulnerability, regret, and weakness just before his death, Stevens can only robotically echo iterations of the same phrase: "I hope Father is feeling better now," "I'm very glad Father is feeling

[12] India, known infamously as the "jewel in the crown of the British empire" because of its geographical location near China, its place along the Silk Road, and raw materials (including actual jewels), was also the source for physical *soldiers* for the empire's other colonial wars—including the South African War. In this sense India was also seen as the backbone of England's *military* economy.

better," "I'm glad Father is feeling so much better," and "I'm so glad you're feeling better now" (97). Within the ethos of professionalism, manners, and dignity, there is no allowance for the acknowledgment of pain. This acknowledgment would mean the revelation of truths about the exploited human condition; perhaps even result in radicalization. In this scene the extremes of a stifled inner-self and the cruel demands of a self-policed professionality are exposed. The "suit" of professionalism that every decent man refuses to take off until he is alone is no longer a uniform. It cannot ever be removed.

When his father dies soon after, Stevens refuses to immediately go see to him, saying to his colleague, Ms. Kenton, "please don't think me unduly improper in not ascending to see my father in his deceased condition just at this moment. You see, I know my father would have wished me to carry on just now" (106). Like with the tiger under the table, shot and removed from sight with "no discernable traces left," Stevens refers to the violent ending of his father's life, as he is sequestered out of sight, as a "deceased condition"—the word "dead" too painful an acknowledgement of what occurred, especially given the inconvenience of its timing. And, even after the chaos of the evening, Stevens still concludes the night was a "turning point in my professional development" and though sad, he "recall(s) that evening…with a large sense of triumph" (110). And yet, while the text presents a detached portrayal of a son's attitude toward his father's death lies a moment of crisis that echoes his own recursive

statements to his father. During the conversation he is asked, "I say, Stevens, are you all right?"; "I say, Stevens, are you sure you're all right there?"; and "Stevens are you all right?" (105) Every time, Stevens responds, "quite all right," "perfectly all right," and "perfectly," yet at the crux of the scene, Lord Darlington says, "you look at though you're crying" (105).

This disjuncture between action and description, documented via dialogue, highlights the dichotomy between professional development and personal freedom.[13] It is, as Kathi Weeks writes, important for "political theory [to seek] to pose work as a political problem of freedom" (34), and expose the roots of why freedom is in itself a "problem," in this case, for the imperial state. If Stevens's relationship to both empire and work is seen as a "problem of freedom" then it poses the conditions of his employment, alongside empire, as institutions that cannot take seriously the autonomous, free individual without suffering the consequences of that freedom. While Stevens may be guilty of not saying enough, those are, unfortunately, the conditions of his existence. When a tear slips out of his composed façade, there is an understanding of the person that might still exist beyond the submission of professional expectations. For

[13] Walkowitz's understandings of a disjuncture that leads to an off-kilter narrative experience, for the reader, attends to how unreliable narrators "are an effect of cultural and conventional disjunction," and, in Ishiguro's case especially, they "try to propose that their own stories are always someone else's" … "[t]he anxiety and disappointment they detail, they assure us, do not belong to them" (125). Stevens will be the first to explain how his professional expectations do not affect his personal freedoms, and yet he, and we, are haunted by this tear and what the tear represents: the final, though miniscule, act of a self that refuses its own betrayal at the hands of forces larger than the individual.

Stevens, who outwardly runs his life as a general would an army (*Remains, 77*), the one tear that slips out, that Stevens himself fails to mention in his narrative, are the vestiges of a self that momentarily escaped—that still, for whatever small reason, remain.

4.2 The Luxury of a Life

I want to further elaborate on how *The Remains of the Day* compares the relationship of ruler and ruled to that of employer and employee by straddling historical time periods. The labor conditions and employment that are being critiqued in what seems to be a "historical" novel connect contemporary understandings of the "professionalization" that Stevens is so obsessed with the decrease of rights, agency and protections in the conditions of labor under late capitalism. As David Harvey writes in his commentary on "A Theory of Imperialism," imperialist domination…[or] how imperialist practices worked in the past allows us to see the continuity of those practices, though under changed political and economic conditions and through new mechanisms, into the present" (*Commentary* 155). In this sense, "contemporary globalized capitalism" is still "characterized by [and] dependent upon this continuous undercurrent of imperialism" (155). This continuity is played out in the text, as Darlington Hall is sold to an American after WWII and a new kind of wealth comes to England, one that represents the new flows of capital and global financial hegemony, and with it, different kinds of professional expectations that fall under the same dynamics of submission and domination.

Mr. Farraday does not have the tact of Lord Darlington. Responding to his new employer's off-color jokes, or "bait," as Stevens called them, he rationalizes that "bantering…is a sign of a good, friendly understanding between employer and employee, indulged in as a kind of affectionate sport" (14). Previously unable to be anything but formal, Stevens would now "smile in the correct manner whenever I detected the bantering tone in his voice" yet "could never be sure exactly what was required of me…perhaps I was expected to laugh heartily; or indeed, reciprocate with some remark of my own" (15). As Stevens concludes that "it is all very well, in these changing times, to adapt one's work to take in duties not traditionally within one's realm" (16), we realize, perhaps, how readily his work lends itself to the new regime. These "changing times," which include the downsizing of the manor, "dust-sheeting" whole floors that aren't in use, and the literal ushering in of the neo-imperialist rule of the United States by way of Mr. Farraday, for Stevens, may seem a rapid shift in the expectations for his service, and behavior. Yet, the novel suggests that the submissive practices of colonial thinking continue in a new kind of professionalization—one that prioritizes subjugation in different forms.

In his article "Everything and Less," Mark McGurl writes that *The Remains of the Day* is "a novel about a servant and indeed about the transformation of the role of the servant in an increasingly Americanized world" (455). McGurl observes that Stevens, while "used to standing silently in the presence of his superiors" now "dutifully

practices bantering, the problem being the wholly new and rapid temporality of service required in the offering of witticisms" (464). As I referenced in my introduction, McGurl brilliantly uncovered an interview in which Bezos admits to reading *Remains* while conceiving of the idea of Amazon, connecting the imperial drive to present-day capitalist culture. In addition to being intrigued and inspired by Stevens's obsession with service, Bezos also wanted to invest in something that so many people would rely on that it would become "too big to fail," by McGurl's account. A version of the "socialization of privately assumed risk" (McGurl 467), this sentiment was brought to infamy during the bank bailout of 2008, which required $700 billion of taxpayer money to keep the banks afloat, and was justified as being in "everyone's" interest. The socialization of the private and the privatization of the social, as Weeks argues, are both part of the inability to resist these ever-flowing and newer forms of capitalism that allow for the cruel conditions of work to persist. For capitalists like Bezos, the long game is key, as they seek "resistance to the corrosions of time itself," the idea being that, "for Amazon to fail, the entire world in which it does business would have to fail along with it" (467).

This is the logic of monopoly capitalism, in which the public is held hostage by a megalomaniacal, self-interested institution, and yet is forced to enable its success in what they are led to believe is a "lesser-evil"-type scenario. It is important to point out that this same cruel "monopoly" logic was one engineered by imperialism, in which

after decades of colonialism, the sudden failure of this world-system would mean a certain type of "failure" for the underdeveloped nations of the world preyed upon by empire. Also important to acknowledge: the sheer amount of capital at stake in these "too-big-to-fail" institutions, from imperialism to neoliberal corporations. Recent research done by economist Utsa Patnaik calculated England to have drained almost $45 trillion from India during its nearly 200-year colonization (Hickel). Similarly, in 2017, more than 8 of every 10 dollars of wealth created went to the richest 1% (Kottasová); in 2019, CEOs of American companies earned $14.5 million in 2018, on average, compared to the average $39,888 that rank-and-file workers made, which is 287 times the pay of their workers (Campbell). That is all to say that the atmosphere of impoverishment alongside the cruel politics of intimidation and retribution by institutions with the most power is nothing short of mafia aesthetics.

As the global order reshuffles, Stevens plays a similar role for Mr. Farraday as he did for Lord Darlington, suggesting a clear continuity between titled aristocrats and the more corporate, proto-professionals or what Bruce Robbins refers to as the "liberal managerial class." Building upon Barbara and John Ehrenreich's coining of the term "Professional Managerial Class" (middle-managers that the Ehrenreichs claim appropriate the skills, and the resources, of the working class), Robbins more optimistically regards them as cosmopolitan "professionals" that may be able to bolster international "loyalty and solidarity at a distance, whether corporate or quasi-

governmental" (18). It seems that the difference between the LMC, and the titled elite is that the former can get the world "behind policies that would try to redistribute wealth more equitably," in essence, changing the way power and wealth is held. Unfortunately, this did not become the case; neoliberalism has proven to be a class project that uses law, tax and corporate loopholes, and increased power over the labor force to concentrate wealth at the top, much like the hoarding tendencies of the aristocracy of yore. Reconsidering that number—287 times the pay of the average worker!—attests to the successful installment of corporate interests, not usually accompanied by a benevolent philanthropy.[14]

More importantly, it is Stevens's work habits that are the key to better connecting imperial labor practices to their more contemporary forms, in that his "feudal" conscription to duty and sacrifice are also demanded in a modern work ethos. Echoing Weeks, David Graeber understands that what "professionalism" demands is a masochistic sacrifice to become part of the managerial class. As he writes in *Bullshit Jobs*,

> we have invented a bizarre sadomasochistic dialectic whereby we feel that pain in the workplace is the only possible justification for our furtive consumer pleasures, and, at the same time, the fact that our jobs thus come to eat up more and more of our waking existence means that we do not have the luxury of—as Kathi Weeks has so concisely put it—"a life." (Graeber 246)

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[14] Critics, too, point to the "socially exclusive nature of cosmopolitanism and the way that it reinstates a white, liberal worldview rather than any genuine engagement with 'others'" and "see cosmopolitanism as 'now largely the product of capitalism, (which) flourishes in the top management of multinational corporations and even more in the consulting firms that serve them'" (Savage 179).

For Stevens, this "pain in the workplace" does not require any justification beyond "duty." That he is barely a "consumer" of any pleasures—we don't see him eat, read, spend the money that he is supposedly paid, or do anything other than fully dedicate himself to the job—are extreme examples of the workplace submission that Graeber speaks of. The idea that both his father's quarters, and later, his own, are compared to "prison cells" speaks more to the quality of their life than to the state of their bedrooms.

Not unlike the Sadeian definition of cruelty, as the "negation of the self," "professionalism," as defined by Ishiguro, is aligned with a sacrificial non-life that isolates and disciplines workers in a way that benefits the structures for which they work. Stevens admits that "a butler's duty is not to meddle in the great affairs of the nation ... [something] always beyond [our] understanding… [but to] devote our attention to providing the best possible service to those great gentlemen in whose hands the destiny of civilization truly lies" (199). Who does this refusal to meddle actually serve? Graeber references George Orwell a number of times to make clear his sentiment that "a population busy working…doesn't have time to do very much else" (*Bullshit Jobs* 284) specifically to organize, protest, and be educated about the context and history of their struggles. More to the point is Fanon's idea that "*respect* for status quo… instill[s] in the exploited a mood of submission and inhibition which considerably eases the task of agents of law and order" (*Wretched* 3-4 emphasis mine). Graeber too believes that the rhetoric around "dignity" elevates the idea that "work is a moral value in itself"

("Phenomenon"). What both Fanon and Graeber seem to agree on, in a comparison that traces the systems of control from the colonial to the corporate, is the fact that "anyone not willing to submit themselves to some kind of intense work discipline for most of their waking hours deserves nothing" a fact that "is extraordinarily convenient for [the ruling class]" ("Phenomenon").

As mentioned before, the car trip that Stevens takes seems to be the first time he is able to quietly reflect on his life in general, while motoring around the English countryside. Stevens is "granted time off by his new American employer," just enough for Stevens to pen "diary entries, the reflections on his life of service that we in effect hold in our hands" (McGurl 464). While McGurl posits the important idea that "carving out spaces for autonomous sociality," like Stevens does while driving and writing, is a kind of pushback "against the relentless demands for work," the point seems to be more that Stevens's previous employment had occupied so much of his waking existence that he no longer existed outside of his duty. Let us not forget that his father dies due to "over-working" (63), to which Stevens reacted by working harder and worrying that his father's "deceased condition" would "jeopardize" his "professional development" (106; 62; 110). Perhaps this realization of this twisted logic momentarily dawns on Stevens when he says— "I've given what I had to give … I gave it all to Lord Darlington" (243). Later, he eulogizes Darlington's death by explaining, "at least he had the privilege of being able to say at the end of his life that he made his own mistakes…I can't even say I

made my own mistakes. Really—one had to ask oneself—what dignity is there in that?" (243). Unsurprisingly, it is the time he has away from work in which he is able to entertain his most radical ideas, thoughts that contradict everything he has strained to believe about duty and honor in the previous pages.

In response to the surprising moment of clarity about whether or not there was dignity in Stevens's work, the footman who he is sharing a bench with at the pier responds,

> 'You've got to enjoy yourself. The evening's the best part of the day. You've done your day's work. Now you can put your feet up and enjoy it. That's how I look at it. Ask anybody, they'll all tell you. The evening's the best part of the day.'
> 'I'm sure you're quite correct,' I said. (244)

Stevens doesn't in fact know what the best part of the day is; for Stevens, work is never done. Graeber writes that this "sadomasochistic element in work…rather than being an ugly, if predictable side effect to top-down chains of command in the workplace, has actually become central to what validates work itself" (*Bullshit Jobs* 240). Suffering has become a "badge of economic citizenship" (243), suffering that includes limited leisure time. Yet what kinds of citizens do these practices make?

For Graeber, "managerial feudalism that has come to dominate wealthy economies… cause[s] misery because human happiness is always caught up in a sense of having effects on the world" (*Bullshit Jobs* 243). In other words, happiness comes from wanting to believe that you matter to and can make a difference in the society you belong to. This reveals much of the source of Stevens's unhappy, masochistic reality to

the very fact that he *cannot* "meddle in the great affairs of the nation" (*Remains* 199). Without a sense of playing your part in the world, alongside the "sadomasochistic power dynamics that emerge within top-down situations," is the recipe for a "spiritual violence that has affected the culture," which is a "genuine scar across our collective soul" (*Bullshit Jobs* 143).[15] Graeber's understanding of spiritual violence seems connected to Weeks's "political problem of freedom," in that "the problem with work is not just that it monopolizes so much time and energy, but that it also dominates the social and political imaginaries" (Weeks 37). We have not had the ability to idealize what it would look like to live without this violence.

Examining the "spiritual violence," amongst other types of violence, that Stevens experiences, shows the operational similarities of the same top-down application of the colonial strategies executed by the now global or monied elite. Weeks, who is clear that placing any burden on the individual—the guilty butler, who enables world war, for example—is a limited way in which to understand power dynamics. Stevens may be guilty. He may be an enabler; he may have even been completely comfortable had a fascist regime taken over as his new employer rather than Mr. Farraday. However, the point is not to necessarily exonerate Stevens—who can be both guilty and exploited!—

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[15] Similarly, a blurb from novelist Robert Stone about *Remains* conceives of the novel as a disturbing account of "spiritual imprisonment." Fanon too writes that the British Empire is "now teetering between atomic destruction and spiritual disintegration." (*Wretched*, 235) This repetition of the compromises of the "spiritual" in the face of imperialism, colonialism, as well as labor politics show the deep desire for a kind of humanism even in the face of universal antihumanist structures of the forbears of global capitalism.

but to view the exposed system within which he works. Again, as Weeks writes, "we tend to focus more on the problems with this or that job, or on their absence, than on work as a requirement, work as a system, work as a way of life…we are better at attending to the problems with this or that boss than to the system that grants them such power" (4). While Stevens may have his own issues with enabling, and false consciousness in that he may agree with the unlimited power given to the very few, what does the situation teach us about the way in which his choices are limited when it comes to speaking out? Moralizing his potential rebellion, of course, makes us feel better. But the "system that grants them such power" is also one that limits opportunities for protest.

Therefore, when Stevens talks about not worrying too much about struggle, our cause is to understand what has caused these conditions for this kind of statement in the first place. Stevens writes

> What is the point in worrying oneself too much about what one could or could not have done to control the course one's life took? Surely it is enough that the likes of you and I at least try to make our small contribution count for something true and worthy. And if some of us are prepared to sacrifice much in life in order to pursue such aspirations, surely that is in itself, whatever the outcome, a cause for pride and contentment. (244)

This can be read as an excuse for his inaction, backtracking his realization that he couldn't even "make his own mistakes." Even after the revelation that his anti-democratic, imperialist overlords have given him a prescribed existence, Stevens still takes it upon himself to "learn how to banter." Stevens will adopt the new language, new requirements, submit to new methods of control, to avoid being dust-sheeted.

Stevens believes not being of use is a fate worse than death. But in an effort not to get buried in individual assessments of problems, in an effort to look at Stevens's "work as a requirement, work as a system, work as a way of life" is to understand the mechanisms that aren't in place for him to make any sort of difference. This reading doesn't condone his behavior or make his character more sympathetic, but attempts to situate it within a more complex power dynamic.

What is beyond the assessment of domination and submission is to learn what knowledge can be extracted from these kinds of power dynamics, knowledge that can pull us away from feudal managerialism, and the stunted and oppressed spaces in which thriving is an impossibility. Again, for Weeks, after "mak[ing] a case for the importance of a political theory of work" it is crucial to specify that "this is a political theory that seeks to pose work as a political problem of freedom" (37). More pressing questions, for Weeks, include the following:

> What kinds of conceptual frameworks and political discourses might serve to generate new ways of thinking about the nature, value, and meaning of work relative to other practices and in relation to the rest of life? How might we expose the fundamental structures and dominant values of work—including its temporalities, socialities, hierarchies, and subjectivities—as pressing political phenomena? …What might we name the variety of times and spaces outside waged work, and what might we wish to do with and in them? How might we conceive the content and parameters of our obligations to one another outside the currency of work? (35-36)

In one sense, what Ishiguro describes is a highly specific, almost unrelatable situation: the life of a work-obsessed butler who has his ear to the ground in elite spaces that very few have access to. Yet his anxious, long-suffering affect may not be as anomalous if we

understand what this extreme form of submission can tell us about "obligation," a symbol of the "currency of work." Seeing the problem of the lack of "time and space" outside work as "pressing political phenomena," through a work of literature in which this extreme is imagined and embellished can give us insight into the realities we may not want to recreate for ourselves, and to find a way out. In other words, literature is able to approach already existing power dynamics and take them to their logical extreme. Even though the context itself makes the work of Ishiguro seemingly tailored for a specific allegory (i.e. Stevens as representing how easily fascists can be enabled, or, as we will discuss in *Never Let Me Go,* forced organ donation as a stand-in for the British Welfare State, etc.) it is more about the larger relationships to work and domination that persist and mirror our experiences.

It is worth mentioning, as far as protagonists go, Stevens's isolation, loneliness, and alienation from community is a central characteristic of his person. Whether he acknowledges it or not, Stevens's "enthusiasm" to impress Farraday exemplifies this loneliness and the fact that his only insight into "human warmth" is the reassurance he receives from his "superiors" (245). Weeks has made clear that the "marginalization of work within political theory's configuration of the political could be attributed to the decline of work-based activism in the United States" adding that "it's not surprising that the power of union-based politics has also been curtailed by the sharp decline of union membership in the period since the Second World War" (38). This point—of solidarity

and community, of "our obligations to one another" outside of work, of how we choose to spend our time beyond the workplace—is doubly important because it means both connecting to each other in a way that exposes the dynamics of control at work as unhealthy, as well imagining and organizing a way out. The small exchange between Stevens and the footman shows that it is this minor, human connection that convinces Stevens he's finally "done" with his "day's work"; and to now "put your feet up and enjoy it" (244).

4.3 Coda: "Love," Contractually

Ishiguro's later novel, *Never Let Me Go*, a 2005 "dystopian thriller" set in another very English institution—an elite boarding school known as "Hailsham"—trades along similar extremes of thought. The novel brings some of the very themes of *Remains*—cruelty, choice, justification of abuse, the subjugation of an "unreliable" narrator—into stark relief. Stevens has no first name that we know of, and Kathy H., the narrator, and human clone only created to donate her organs, no last. More to the point, the submission of the clones is also clearer, in that Kathy H. has a mutual understanding with the institution that will eventually harvest her organs, even though it is her friends that she cares for as they die. And, like Stevens, Kathy H. makes the same decisions that she did before she knew her fate as a clone as she does after finding out. Ishiguro continues his exploration into the masochism of professional managerialism, modern

iterations of capitalism, and neoslavery, by following this disturbing contract directly to its cruel end.

For a better understanding of freedom and equality, it is critical to note the lengths to which those with power will historically go to override these two factors completely. We are so inured, however, to the undermining of freedom and equality within labor practices, that what seems natural to the dynamics behind employment are actually designed as structures of abuse. As Weeks writes, a critical analysis of work reveals not only exploitation but…domination" through the form of the employment contract. Yet for Weeks,

> the problem can be reduced neither to forced labor nor to exploitation. Rather, we need to pay more attention to the relationship of dominance and submission that is authorized by the waged labor contract and that shapes labor's exercise. Exploitation is possible, [Carol] Pateman notes, because 'the employment contract creates the capitalist as master; he has the political right to determine how the labour of the worker will be used'. This relation of command and obedience, the right of the employer to direct his or her employees that is granted by the contract, is not so much a byproduct of exploitation as its very precondition. (20-21)

Literature allows us to "pay more attention to the relationship of dominance and submission that is authorized by the waged labor contract" by seeing these very contracts appear in defamiliarizing, jarring contexts that allow us to recognize the authorized abuse of power in ways that we are not used to. Especially when these relationships are recast, not only in different genres—science fiction, travel diaries—but as surprisingly intimate, can we also see the level of manipulation that occurs in supposedly safe spaces.

In the theme of taking contractual domination and submission to its logical extreme, Kathy H. and the other clones are *born into* such an agreement, emphasizing the unspoken and authoritarian nature of such a contract even in more normal circumstances. The terms of this contract are not completely obvious for the children because of the decorum of the English boarding school. Their daily lives are filled with friendship, love, classic literature, music, and arts education. But they have an inkling of what is in store for them, some acting out more violently than others at the prospect of their future. At a memorably shocking moment in the text, before the reader has quite connected the dots as to what the euphemisms of "donor" (forced organ removal), "carer" (aiding a clone through that process), and "completion" (death, due to organ removal) mean, a teacher removes the mask of decorum, and reveals the terms to the students:

> Your lives are set out for you. You'll become adults, then before you're old, before you're even middle aged, you'll start to donate your vital organs. That's what each of you was created to do. …You were brought into this world for a purpose, and your futures, all of them, have been decided… If you're to have decent lives, you have to know who you are and what lies ahead of you, every one of you. (81)

As with Stevens, Kathy H. is often read as complicit, and is often scapegoated over interrogating larger institutions and national forces that systematize these behaviors. Bruce Robbins asks whether Kathy H. could be "so self-effacingly calm and believable if she did not accept the fundamental rightness of the system?" (300-301). The self-effacing calmness is disturbing; Stevens's devotion to service in the light of destruction is disturbing; that only means that the affective politeness as a mask for violence is

working. Those born to serve, born to die, enact an extreme version of the contract that is put into place just by existing, and are paired with the affect that acts as cover. How they feel about the "rightness of the system" matters very little.

I want to return to questions of choice that are front and center in both Ishiguro and Weeks. At first, reading Stevens's sentiment about devotion to "great gentlemen in whose hands the destiny of civilization truly lies" is shocking in its submission. But is he not correct? While we would not admit this with as much enthusiasm as the butler, when power is concentrated in and systematized by a ruling class, "great men" have been and will be, for the time being, the arbiters of our destiny, and clearly have been in recent history. Kathy H., though "self-effacingly calm and believable," knows, in general, that she is left without any avenues for massive structural change, though she tries,[16] and so seeks solace in the small choices she can make. "Okay, maybe I *am* boasting now," she writes, "But it means a lot to me, being able to do my work well, especially that bit about my donors staying 'calm'…I get to pick and choose who I look after" (3). These are extreme situations that can't be perfectly placed onto our society by way of allegory. However, they do provoke an understanding of how far we need to go in order to provide a viable alternative to the capitalist-as-master contract, one which energizes workers with an agency that makes freedom and equality a possibility. While

[16] In meeting with Madame, the woman who runs Hailsham, in an effort to get her to "defer" their inevitable deaths, Kathy H. and romantic partner Tommy see the entire operation for what it is, and the ineffective nature of protest within such a system.

these novels may not necessarily spell out what this kind of alternative may look like, it certainly paints a dreary picture of what happens without it.

This chapter has shown, overtly or not, that cruelty is many things; that it takes different shapes; that it is ossified by the violent global practices traced back to colonial policies of subjugation, capitalism, and the few ruling the many. The method of my analysis is often geared not towards the shocking and the bloody but the everyday hostilities and indignities that have been tolerated or largely ignored because they are relatively less spectacular in the violence they reproduce. Of course, policies, treatment of populations, and laws can be cruel, but in literature, as in life, we come to define the degree of cruelty as to how it manifests in individual circumstances. And yet, as Weeks has so importantly argued, when things are configured as separate from or off-limits for a politics of solidarity, this isolation does not allow for "freedom" to be a "social—and hence necessarily political—endeavor" (23).

Even when literature is viewed as "the product of a series of individual contracts rather than a social structure" (Weeks 4) we lose the ability to imagine the conditions that make up the self, and a way to exist beyond our conditioning. The attention to small moments in this chapter analysis should not be read as a resurrection of individualist studies—rather, a reanimation of understanding structural violence at the point of

materialization.[17] Understanding an abusive contractuality through forced organ donation is both a shock and an invitation to investigate how this came to be. When individual experience is the point of realization for any larger structural inequity, it clarifies both the systemic being reproduced through the everyday, as well as the way in which that theorized violence operates under the radar. For our contemporary moment, examining how cruelty manifests in dynamics of power and labor, especially with a more nuanced understanding of scale, may become the only way to pinpoint the specificity of our outrage and imagine a way out of perverse dynamics that persist due to their invisibility.

[17] See Harvey, "Politics."

5. Matters of Life and Debt: The Cruel Economies of Rachel Cusk's Anxious *Outline* Trilogy

> When debt becomes so huge that there is no prospect for future value production to redeem it, then debt peonage, debt slavery rules. We celebrate the Athens of the past as the cradle of democracy. The Athens of today is the epitome of undemocratic debt peonage. –David Harvey, *Marx, Capital and the Madness of Economic Reason.*

> You could see the whole history of capitalism as a history of combustion, not just the burning of substances that have lain in the earth for millions of years but also of knowledge, ideas, culture and indeed beauty—anything, in other words, that has taken time to develop and accrue…it is the concept of literature itself that is being combusted. —Rachel Cusk, *Kudos*

> Essentially, we all live in the same country…called Capitalism. –Bong Joon-ho

Formally and aesthetically, Rachel Cusk is one of the more pronounced heirs to Sebald's literary legacy, especially in her *Outline* Trilogy. Both authors present a nameless narrator (though we find out Faye's name in passing, about 200 pages into the first novel), who provides informed musings that overturn our assumptions about large-scale ideologies. Without a traditionally individuated character directing plot, both novels feature a voice often disembodied from its monologues, and one that ventriloquizes others. And, in both novels, history is interrogated and called upon to inform the present. Yet, their differences are as important to parse as their similarities. The atrocity that largely informed Sebald's world view is one of colonial cruelty which in turn engineered the physical and moral decrepitude within the nations of colonial powers. In the *Outline* Trilogy, the oppression that captures Cusk's attention is a continuation of this global power by another name: the severe inequality created by the neoliberal financialization of our present-day world. For Sebald, the acknowledgement

of the perverse and cruel conditions of empire causes a paralytic illness brought on by depression; for Cusk, it is anxiety that resonates with the ever-presence of precarity and the threat of economic, moral, and literary bankruptcy.

As I noted in my third chapter, Harvey understands contemporary capitalist globalization to be directly informed by global imperialism. For Harvey, "how imperialist practices worked in the past allows us to see the continuity of those practices, though under changed political and economic conditions and through new mechanisms, into the present" (*Commentary* 155). Like Sebald and Cusk, one is the heir to the other, and the underdevelopment which colonialism put into place plays out once again in the postcolony by way of the global debt economy. While these terms call on different histories and display abjection differently, at the level of the individual, slavery, "wage slavery," and "debt peonage" are all linked by forces financially invested in the cruel constriction of freedom. Sebald in fact ties the plunder of "South African diamond mines" to those that work "the floors of today's stock and commodity exchanges, through which the global tides of information flow without ceasing" (*Rings* 91). For Sebald, like Cusk, the "networks of complexity" of global imperialism or financial domination "goes far beyond the power of any one individual to imagine" (*Rings* 91-92).[1] In a phrase from Mark Fisher that links Sebald's empty landscapes to Cusk's

[1] As I mention in my introduction, Vadde reminds us that "membership in advantaged communities cannot just be shrugged off…keeping visible the wealth disparities across the Global North and Global South insinuates necessary scale-reflection into conversations about critiquing and resisting capitalism as a global

anxious observations, "capitalism is what is left when beliefs have collapsed…and all that is left is the consumer-spectator, trudging through the ruins and the relics" (*Capitalist Realism* 4).

This attention to the individual, alongside forces that can supersede agency, is an inspiring and debilitating paradox for both authors. But both show us that engaging with these "networks of complexity" can change the novel form and hence, the narratives in which these networks are perpetuated. My goal, in this chapter, is to (continue) understanding cruelty as the physical and mental materialization of living in a world where global capitalism has festered, as Sebald once did the imperial past of Europe. Cruelty within global capitalism has spawned to keep the most vulnerable in a debt-ridden promise, or, strangle hold, and links the affective with the material by presenting the airless, anxious atmospheres of cutthroat capitalism. In my second chapter, I argued that even when Sebald uses what I call "literary anachronism" to reconnect colonialism to its crimes to great effect, his narrator is still left in a horror-stricken paralysis. In building off an affective response to realities of the present,[2] this

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phenomenon." (184) While it is important to look at the global debt economy as the universal inheritor of an imperial approach to financialization, it is equally important to "[confront] relative privilege." (184)

[2] In a review of Rachel Greenwald Smith's *Affect and American Literature in the Age of Neoliberalism*, Leigh Claire La Berge shows how Smith offers the "first sustained literary investigations of neoliberalism at the level of form" in her attempts "to track neoliberalism into the formal and modal instances of literary production." ("Reading for Neoliberals" 608) Of Smith's "union of neoliberalism and affect" La Berge shows how this "transpires through a distinction between personal and impersonal feelings… Greenwald Smith is interested in what she calls 'impersonal feelings' that 'often go unrecognized on an intuitive level and become visible only when traced in particular formal gestures.' Personal feelings are those 'that can be more easily felt, described and therefore traded'; impersonal feelings are 'less immediately palpable and

chapter argues that Cusk's literary affect, a curiously alienated, cruel and troubling narrative atmosphere, is a representation of the anxiety around the precarious financialization of life, the infrastructural collapse of nations, and the burdens of debt.[3] Indeed, Cusk's formal changes to the novel, ones that particularly target the bourgeois narratives of progress, are presented as a crisis of representation in a world in which art no longer imitates life.

The global novel, Cusk's included, has come to be shaped by the financialization of language, much like the contemporary moment has been engineered by capitalism's "victors." It's no surprise, though the numbers themselves are shocking, that data from the IMF reports that the world's ten richest billionaires own more wealth than the combined GDP of the bottom eighty-five countries combined.[4] As a Greek millionaire tells Faye on an airplane, "Money is a country all its own… a borderless sphere [consisting of] other people of wealth and importance" (*Outline: Part 1* 178). As I write in my epigraph, filmmaker Bong Joon-ho too writes about the idea of capitalism as an inescapable place that we inhabit just by living, rather than an economic system that we

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codifiable' and thus less able to trade on the market." (609) In terms of Cusk's fiction, it seems like the impersonal is at play here—a purposefully difficult to describe and codify atmospheric materialization of debt and its cultures—and in their difficulty to be "traded" resist financialization.

[3] This also can be formulated to be what Mark Fisher has called "the privatization of stress." (*Capitalist Realism* 19) The spirit behind this phrase is exactly what I aim to address in this chapter—the strange combination of incredibly internalized emotion affected by something that is societal, i.e. well beyond the individual. As he explains, the process of privatizing this emotion "easily converts into depression as well… I deal with the association between post-politics, post-ideology, the rise of neoliberalism, and the conjoined rise of depression, particularly among young people." ("No Honour")

[4] See "World's Top Ten Billionaires."

can opt into. This system is one that, for the wealthy, displaces the nation-state by extracting money from public into private, from the physical into the off-shore and virtual. For David Harvey, the other side of the coin of "borderless spheres" of wealth havens are the nations saturated in debt that they have left behind. This indebtedness, ironically, gives way for a massive availability of credit, and gives contemporary global capitalism its pervasive characteristic. Hence, the production of "antivalue," or global debt, at both the individual and national level, especially for the poorest "eighty-five," is created from a continuing history of financial exploitation.[5] For those who must borrow money, "the future [becomes] foreclosed" because loan payments, credit card bills, and mortgages were never designed to be paid off, but to exist for as long as possible (*Madness* 79-80). We are left with the "nightmare temporality" of ever-present debt with no future imaginable without it.[6]

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[5] For Harvey, though processes of credit and debt have always existed within the capitalist system, "their relative importance has shifted with changing circumstances. The massive deployment of antivalue within the financial system to ensure future value production is relatively new." (*Madness* 81) At one point, antivalue "[defined] an active field of anti-capitalist struggle" (81) via the refusal to work, consumer boycotts, and other minor disruptive forces that forced the ever-accelerating capitalistic accumulate-or-die mentality to a halt. Slowing down, curtailing, resisting, perhaps, exposed both capital accumulation's unsustainability and the fact that it wasn't, in fact, inevitable. Yet, as many scholars have come to point out, late-stage capitalism, or neoliberalism, has attested to both the "durability of capitalism" as well as "its ability to recuperate forms of struggle." (Noys 6) Hence, antivalue becomes yet another symbolic exchange that "capitalism could absorb and parasite on…to the point where any way to distinguish between a radical strategy and a strategy of capital seems to disappear completely." (5)

[6] The "ever-presence" of Cusk's trilogy is further emphasized with her habit of inserting "easter eggs," or small snippets or phrases repeated over and again throughout the novels. This practice shows a recursive logic to the narrative, one that purposefully blurs the time-space continuum of capitalism. In short, Cusk's antinovel, if we can call it that, exposes the cozy codependence of novel structures and capitalism, and exposes its inability to properly critique global capitalism, and in the process experiments with new forms that possibly can.

What we are left with, in this "foreclosed future," is a world in which one works (longer, and harder, for less, as exhibited in my third chapter) to pay off debt; a life lived in the "negative." This system, which unfairly targets vulnerable populations and/within poor nations, allow "the rich [to] grow richer through financial manipulations [while] the poor become poorer through the necessity to redeem their debts" (*Madness* 83). "Debt peonage" invokes both a feudal relationship between creditor and debtor, in which the creditor has full control of the conditions of repayment, as well as the forced labor of repayment.[7] Without getting into the reasons as to why the indebted must borrow—i.e. the reasons behind student loans, sky rocketing prices of medical bills and unaffordable housing, not to mention national bail-outs—the financialization of the debt that Harvey talks about is one that makes money off of indebtedness. The cruel effects of this kind of economic logic saturates contemporary life with stress and anxiety about money; "living in the negative", or indebtedness, is also manufactured and moralized as a personal failing, in turn removing all accountability from the agents of this cruel cycle.[8] Essentially, this foreclosure of the future that renders

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[7] "Man is no longer a man confined but a man in debt;" La Berge and Hanna remind us of Deleuze's understanding of "the historical transition from a Fordist to a financial regime of accumulation." ("Debt Aesthetics") In evoking Deleuze's "now famous" phrase, the authors see debt as not just a "deferred payment or to money loaned at interest, but to a temporal extension of the well-known problem of capitalist enclosure" suggesting that "debt's multidisciplinary and multi-modal presence could benefit from conceptual differentiation and specification and, we believe, both affective and aesthetic specificity as well."

[8] In successful works of art that address debt, La Berge and Hanna write that "'debt' itself becomes unmoored from the familiar Marxist" and "re-articulated as a disciplinary apparatus of temporal and spatial organization and an *omnipresent site of ongoing psychic investment and divestment*" echoing the psychic affects of debt practices I mention in Cusk's work. ("Debt Aesthetics" emphasis mine) As I explain in my

both individuals and states to be living in peonage chafes against the ability to live life with democracy, dignity, or freedom.

What, then, are the affective, material, and literary implications of a foreclosed future, and how can the novel help stage yet another "problem of freedom"? Cusk answers this question in two parts—firstly by registering this financial peonage, and anxiety, through language that centers material issues—like loans, money, and precarious labor—to interrupt the more escapist qualities of fiction. Secondly, with the descriptions of crumbling infrastructures, alongside people dissociated from community or agency, Cusk formally embraces these "negative spaces" of personal and national indebtedness. These may be the more symbolic negative spaces, brought about by writer's block, the material realities of personal debt, or the austerity that exists outside of "borderless spheres…of wealth and importance." Finally, Cusk puts forth a trilogy without a plot or narrative as a direct challenge to the classic novel that celebrates the individual, a veritable stand in for neoliberal culture. In a way, Cusk's novel stages an alternative to the capital combustion that takes place after the smoke clears. The idea of "combustion," as I mention in my epigraph, compares the history of capitalism—the

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introduction, they feel that "it should not be surprising that anthropology no less than economics and political economy has played a particularly important role in elaborating our understanding of debt as a lived social relation and in emphasizing that *quotidian practice should be the ground on which debt's theoretical architecture is built.* ("Debt Aesthetics" emphasis mine) This further expands on my articulation of the "every day" as the locus for conceptualizations of cruelty based on the "theoretical architecture" of larger structures.

"burning of substances that have lain in the earth for millions of years"—to the burning of "the concept of literature itself" shows what kind of novels are created in capitalism's image, and what it might take to write differently.[9]

Here, Cusk's descriptions of the "negative spaces" and all the meanings of the word—from antivalue, to actual physical space—seemingly reflect the austerity and extraction that is caused by global financialization. Like the emptiness of Sebald's countryside registers the decrepitude of countries built on slavery, Cusk's narratives are filled with the half-built, the falling apart, the burned-out structures in places, spaces, and within characters in order to represent the physical manifestation of "profits over people." In describing a famous church in Europe that had been consumed by a fire, Faye notices that

> in certain places where statues had obviously been, new lights had been installed which illuminated the empty spaces. 'These lights,' she said, 'had the strange effect of making you see more in the empty space than you would have seen had it been filled with a statue. And so I knew,' she said, 'that this spectacle was not the result of some monstrous neglect or misunderstanding but was the work of an artist.' (*Kudos* 213)

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[9] In "Neoliberal Aesthetics" Walter Benn Michaels writes

> just as the critique of form is the mark of a neoliberal politics, the assertion of form is the mark of an anti-neoliberal politics—if only because, despite the hopes raised by the recent financial catastrophes, political and economic alternatives to capitalism seem as hard to conceptualize, much less to come by, as they did during the boom times (and, indeed, the upper echelons of the global economy seem to be doing almost as well as they did in the boom times). So the idea instead is the more modest—almost tautological—one that the assertion of form embodies an alternative to neoliberal aesthetics and, in that alternative, the possibility and, for some, the desirability of an alternative to neoliberalism itself. (Benn Michaels)

On the heels of this premise, I wonder if an "assertion of form" can also be a stubborn formlessness, as that of Cusk's, one that resists codification into structures of capitalism. Perhaps they are two sides of the same coin of anti-neoliberal politics: a form that conceptualizes an alternative to capitalism, and a formlessness that evades capitalism's grasp.

In this case, illuminating the negative space is the work of a new kind of artist, one that turns the disastrous into the meaningful.[10] This is a theme that the novels continue to revisit that is crucial to understanding both the structurelessness of their form and the anxious affect of their content.

A brief history of Raymond Williams's older concept of "Structures of Feeling" shows a pointed connection between structures—both novelistic and material—and feelings. In an attempt to describe "structures of feeling," Williams gives the example of early Victorian ideology as it was perpetuated by novels, and how it

> specified the exposure caused by poverty or by debt or by illegitimacy as social failure or deviation; the contemporary structure of feeling meanwhile, in the new semantic figures of Dickens, of Emily Brontë, and others, specified exposure and isolation as a *general* condition, and poverty, debt, or illegitimacy as its connecting instances. (134)

In this example, we can see how an understanding of debt as brought into the mainstream through novels changes from being viewed as personal failing, to eventually being contextualized as a general condition and/or symptom of an age. This change is catalyzed by the way in which the affective economy in the newer novels registers and treats debt.[11] As Harvey has pointed out, the realm of debt *peonage* is

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[10] La Berge and Hanna explain that "Disclosing the elusive formal structures of debt and its distinctive affective, aesthetic, and political potential as a medium seems to *require* recourse to a multiplicity of artistic strategies embedded within more familiar materials and immaterials." ("Debt Aesthetics")

[11] It is important to note that a structure of feeling is often emergent thought, attitudes and ideologies that have not yet been solidified—a "tension is at once lived and articulated in radically new semantic figures." (Williams 134) Within Cusk's fiction, the "emergent thought" of antivalue and its cruel effects on people is captured at both macro and micro scales. This occurs in the shadow of a more traditional novel that, I argue, cannot begin to address global capitalism without a radical shift in the structures of the narrative. Williams writes how these very structures of feeling, as seen in literature, can be ones that capture emergent thought,

relatively recent—as is the fact that its "disciplining effect…[becomes] vital to the reproduction of capital" (*Madness* 204). When "debt means we are no longer 'free to choose'," when "[c]apital does not forgive us our debts…but insists we redeem them through future value production," when "the future is already foretold and foreclosed," the ideology behind debt peonage becomes one of a monetarily imposed servitude.

Cusk's interest in removing an individualistic narrative from her trilogy is an attempt at a collective authorship that begins to critique the structures of the novel (and, as previously mentioned, other structures we take for granted such as capitalism). By showing how, infrastructurally, the novel and society are mirrored, initiating the crumbling of one can lead to an examination of the other. Interrupting traditional narratives can cause suspensions of disbelief to be suspended themselves. Using the contemporary affect theory put into motion by Williams, alongside economics, I will also show how Cusk's language allows us to see the small cruelties of everyday life as connected to the global backdrop of financial crisis and vice versa. Focusing on Greece, her setting for her first novel *Outline*, especially allows us to see how the antihumanist policies of structural adjustment and debt peonage can have a devastatingly negative effect on an entire country. Eventually, I want to show how this examination of the

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ones that are "the hypothesis of a mode of social formation, explicit and recognizable in specific kinds of art, which is distinguishable from other social and semantic formations by its articulation of *presence.*" (Williams 134-5) This is an articulation of an atmosphere in which affective choices in prose capture those cruelties in economic policy, and punishment, made manifest.

negative life, through representation of debt culture, suffering, and austerity can lead to a reappropriation of antivalue. This has the power to unite, even in the threat of a capitalism that keeps on transforming to keep up with the times; embracing "antivalue" can allow for a reckless commitment to freedom that reclaims a foreclosed future by making the most of now.

5.1 Debt Culture, Austere Aesthetics, and the "Spectral Madness" of the Bourgeois Novel

Outline, *Transit* and *Kudos* have been faulted "for being insufficiently concerned with politics and social class."[12] And yet, as Francine Prose points out," we always know how these characters make their money, and more or less how much they make" (532). To which I add, the characters are routinely, and almost banally, described by how money narrates and controls their lives and the way they see the world. The background of the global financial crises, and the setting of *Outline* in a post-debt-crisis Greece, contextualize what has often been dismissed as the "solipsistic" musings of a woman writer, as inescapably linked to material conditions that prevent attempts to divorce emotion from reality. In *Outline*, a politicized affective reading of this novel that does not shy away from economic analysis finds what Ann Cvetkovich calls "forms of testimony that can mediate between the personal and the social, that can explain why

[12] Prose 532.

we live in a culture whose violence takes the form of systematically making us feel bad" (15).

Connecting the physical to the literary, and connecting the material conditions of the world to the stories written about that world, Cusk constantly interrupts what might be a romantic narrative about writing with odd intrusions and seemingly banal reminders of life. While teaching a creative writing class during the summer in Greece, Faye pauses the class in order to deal with her loan officer. Yet before this interruption, a student in her class admits to being unable to keep reading D.H. Lawrence because "for the first time, I felt that Lawrence was going to fail to transport me out of my own life…For some reason I couldn't bear it any longer, the feeling that I was the helpless passenger of his vision" (*Outline, Part 4* 89). Then, from Cusk:

> My phone rang on the table in front of me. I saw the number of Lydia at the mortgage company flashing on the screen…Anyway, she hoped it wasn't going to spoil my holiday, but she had to tell me that the underwriters had rejected my application to increase my loan. They don't need to give a reason, she said, when I asked her why. (91)

In this slight but strange example, any attempt to lean into the escapism of "holiday," of writing and teaching faraway, or of reading, is disrupted by the very ordinary anxiety of financial situations. We, too, fail to be transported out of our own lives, and into Faye's, and the reminder on Cusk's part is purposeful. As with the invocation of Lawrence, the ability of certain literature to be escapist—to be read in order to be transported—is now recast in a way that registers the world's intrusions, anxieties and inconveniences. To suddenly feel like a "helpless passenger" of someone else's vision means that the vision

is no longer sustainable; the disbelief no longer suspended. Cusk, rather than transporting us, leaves us with the uncomfortable reality of economic inconvenience, slicing up the narrative and making it purposefully hard to read.

This example is just a microcosm of a consistent pattern of writing in Cusk's fiction: a theoretical generalization, followed by a direct material issue. In her fiction, she refuses to let empty philosophy, or pointless theorization occur without being latched to a very real, perhaps inconvenient truth. Especially with the background of Greece, as I will explain later in the chapter, it seems nothing—not even writing or teaching fiction—can escape the grasp of material issues that global capitalism has created, and in turn, nothing can be escapist. In thinking back to a conversation about money and life choices that Faye has with a seatmate on an airplane, and after meeting him on land, she realizes that their vague and speculative conversation was, "in a sense, immaterial: above the world, objects didn't count for so much, differences were less apparent." Now, in the daylight, not flying miles above the earth, "[t]he material reality of my neighbor, which up there had seemed so light, was concretized down here, and the result was that he seemed more of a stranger, as though context were also a kind of imprisonment" (186). For Cusk, imprisonment of context is true both in form and in content as cruelty takes up many posts in her novel. One of these contexts is the global space that Faye explores

in her work as a writer, in countries like Greece that have recently suffered great economic cruelty by way of international debt peonage.[13]

In Cusk's *Outline*, set in Greece during this debt crisis, monetary policies have an effect on the very language used to evaluate and describe landscapes, characters, and narrative. The way in which Greece's debt was treated was "never simply about dealing with the Greek debt crisis. [It was] more like a giant experiment in neoliberal social engineering and the first demonstration of the authoritarian, disciplinary potential of the eurozone's financial, monetary, and institutional architecture" (Sotiris). While Greece was portrayed, by financial institutions, as "simply a bad apple,"[14] it was also an attempt to use the punishing effects of the "systemic social violence unleashed upon Greek society" to set an example.[15] And, of course, for some, to profit. As I will eventually show, the anxiety and ennui that accompany the financialization of language seems to suggests that current state of the novel is unsustainable in its bourgeois ethos.[16] Most

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[13] The Greek debt crisis, which "stemmed from the collapse of the United States real-estate market in relation to the global financial crisis of 2007 to 2008" and the terms of its bailout, meant that "each loan payment to Greece was conditional on its government implementing austerity measures and institutional reforms." (See "Greek Government-Debt Crisis") Dictated by international money lenders such as the IMF, these institutions profited monetarily while framing the loan terms as morally-intentioned "tough love" that would discipline Greece out of its unruly, extravagant nature. Contingent aid, while appearing to be in Greece's best interest, ended up causing, some may say purposefully, "far-reaching privatization, which…mutilated the public sector." (Sotiris)

[14] From "Discipline and Punish," an article written by Panagiotis Sotiris, a member of Greek's left wing "Popular Unity" party.

[15] Ibid.

[16] In La Berge and Hanna's "Debt Aesthetics" is the understanding that works of art that specify the violence of financialization allows "a focus on the economic throughout and assume that if value is, as Marx said, a social relation, then debt might be understood to telescope a particular experience of that relationality in our financialized present." ("Debt Aesthetics") This, in turn, "might begin a conversation about the relationship

importantly, "by all measures, the [contingency of the bailout] represents both a failure and a disaster; a failure [for] Greece's mounting inability *to imagine its own future in positive terms.*"[17] As Harvey writes, understanding "economics" simply as numbers and crunched data, "[does] not help solve problem of alienation or of deteriorating social relations" (*Madness* xiii).[18] An inability to imagine a future affects the very real lived atmosphere and daily lives of Greek citizens, and reveals an anxious affect that is the result of the financialization of the every day.

Upon her arrival in Greece to teach a summer course in creative writing, Faye's descriptions of the world in Athens deliberately speak to the politics of austerity, tax avoidance, and infrastructural ruin. While being invited onto the boat of a Greek millionaire, Faye's mind instead wanders to the "unfinished roads and the skeletons of houses that had never been completed, where skinny trees now grew through the glassless window" (187). In recounting the travel journeys of a friend, Faye takes pains to show how austerity has affected even

> scruffy, windswept seaside town[s] where a giant apartment complex had been half-built and then abandoned, so that everywhere there were huge piles of sand and cement and great stacks of breeze blocks, as well as large pieces of machinery that appeared to have been simply left there mid-job, diggers with shovels of earth half raised, forklift trucks with pallets still suspended on their outstretched prongs, all frozen in situ like prehistoric monsters drowned in silt, while the building itself, an aborted embryo in a still-fresh

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between form, medium and our current economy that some have called 'late,' others 'neoliberal' and, most persuasively in our view, others 'financialized.'"

[17] Sotiris, emphasis mine.

[18] Neither do these numbers and crunched data "help solve problems," as Sotiris writes, of "a disaster in social terms."

> swirl of tarmac, stood in all its spectral madness, staring with its glassless windows out to sea." (*Outline, Part 2* 222)

The striking, escalating language— "abandoned," "suspended," "frozen in situ," "prehistoric monster" "aborted embryo," "spectral madness"!—paints a mournful, Sebaldian picture. Echoing this sentiment, Faye recounts a Greek writer's relationship with his own country at a different point in the novel, who understands the atmosphere in Greece to be one of despair, anxiety, sorrow. "The world that happiness existed in has completely disappeared," he recounts, "not just from my own life but from Greece as a whole, for whether it knows it or not Greece is a country that is on its knees and dying a slow and agonizing death" (*Outline, Part 2* 212). It is important, even with the flair of language, to remember the cause of this slow death, its effects on people, morale (or, as Sotiris wrote, lack of positive self-image) and even building projects—the faraway cruelty and material manifestations of structural adjustment and debt foreclosure.

For Cusk, while setting is helpful in piecing together the material realities of life in *Outline*, this reality is not specific to Greece. As I mention in my introduction, in *Postcolonial Theory and the Specter of Capital*, a work that contends with the excision of capitalist analysis in postcolonial theory, Vivek Chibber suggests that all the "universalization" of capital needs, in order to be "successfully reproduced over time" is for the "economic logic of capitalism be implanted in various parts of the world" and this is enough ("Subaltern"). For Chibber, much of the resistance to adopting a class lens and applying it to the postcolony is the idea that reading the "East" through a Western

lens was inappropriate and didn't account for the "generat[ion of] a certain degree of cultural and political change as well." However, as Chibber states, "it doesn't require…even most, of the cultural practices of a region be transformed"; unfortunately, in a universalizing turn, "the global economic crises has brought into relief the basic fact that the world is now part of the same universal history, subject to the ubiquitous, grinding, crushing force of capital" ("Subaltern"; *Postcolonialism* 294). In this specific context, what may, then, be seen as something specific to Greece—the culture of "irresponsible Greeks living beyond their means"[19] as a reason for indebtedness, as an excuse—becomes the model for Cusk's other novels of something that addresses this crisis as truly global.

In *Kudos*, for example, when Faye happens to be at a series of writing conferences, one in an unnamed country that seems to be Spain or Portugal, the depressed economic atmosphere is echoed in her writing. A fellow author excuses his tardiness by explaining how he had "attempted to walk out along the coast and instead become increasingly entangled in a series of industrial complexes and housing developments and shopping precincts, all of which appeared to be in a state of semi-ruin" (*Kudos* 148). Another writer, Luis, "launched into an account of the country's socio-economic decline, which had been precipitated, he said, by the financial crisis

[19] Sotiris.

nearly a decade earlier whose reverberations…were still being felt" (148). Faye's narrative sees spaces in states of "semi-ruin," and "socio-economic decline" and connects them to the financial crisis. While these reverberations are expressed in the narrative through the specific financialization of language, the point becomes that the process of financialization, both in general and as represented by fiction, shows an unsustainable way forward.

I want to further develop the unsustainable financialization of narrative, with the eventual goal of addressing the structural commodification and renovation of the novel form itself. The Greek businessman, who invites Faye onto his boat, shows that the obsession with accumulating money, as seen in his financialization of his own individual narrative, results in misery, solitude and distress. Faye's conversation with him, being one of the first conversations in the trilogy, sets the tone for how we are to read the world. Small details about marriage, life choices, and ambition become bizarrely filtered through economic terms. For example, in discussing his youth, he describes how he and his wife "were both still young enough to believe that this principle of growth was exponential; that life was only expansive and broke the successive vessels in which you tried to contain it in its need to expand more" (*Outline: Part 1* 183). Later on, he recalls how when "he was thirty-six years old and still felt the force of exponential growth in his veins, of life straining to burst the vessel in that it had been contained" (183). The repetition of "exponential growth," "vessel," and some

variation of containment shows how the individual human experience, captured by the single-minded obsession with ever-increasing capital, ironically becomes worthless; his narrative of his own life rings empty and lonely upon her rejection of his advances.

Men like the Greek millionaire represent a bourgeois culture that the novel can no longer sustain or represent without serious consequences to its form. As Sotiris reminds us, "[f]aced with the combined effects of the global capitalist crisis, the Greek bourgeoisie saw the Memoranda as an opportunity… to improve their profit margins thanks to austerity policies." When it is acceptable for millionaires to believe that "money is a country all its own", where the wealthy live in a "borderless sphere among other people of wealth and importance" (178) suggests an uncomfortable disconnect between reality for most and the reality for the very few. Cusk's writing reveals this belief system with Faye's "cruel" portrait of him as he attempts to kiss her:

> The great beak of his nose loomed at the edge of my field of vision, his claw-like hands with their white fur fumbled at my shoulders…the prehistoric creature [was] wrapping me in its dry bat-like wings, felt his scaly mouth miss its mark and move blindly at my cheek. (176-7)

Describing him as a fumbling dinosaur signals the bizarre, monstrous creature that is his obsession with wealth. As seen with his lack of personal boundaries, the passage exhibits his inability to distinguish between the public and private aspects of personal relations. Faye's discomfort with the out-of-touch capitalist, who can only see his life in terms of extractivist vocabulary, is expressed through a repulsive description of the

millionaire, in a move that uses the aesthetic as an extension of the moral argument for democratized economic rights.

Cusk's critics believe her greatest strength to be her use of descriptors, weaponized with a woman's eye, when characterizing chauvinistic men as we see in the example above. In "Cusk's Cruel Eye," Merve Emre, who believes that Cusk is "the cruelest novelist at work today," asks whether "women [are] capable of…cruelty" and concludes that Cusk "invite[s] a distinctly feminized variety of aestheticism, which in the service of ecstasy and power plunders the masculine tradition of cruelty" (Emre). Believing that to "notice" is to "discriminate," Emre sees Cusk's observatory powers as significant "in a literary culture insistent that a woman's truth is too disordered to express with precision," and in which "women writers are held to the lowest standards of aesthetic judgment… [and] all the while they have overlooked how style can serve as a source of power" (Emre). In "Rachel Cusk's Struggle to Break Free," Maggie Doherty explains how "Cusk's female characters, like the author herself, reckon with their imprisonment, rather than deluding themselves into thinking that they were always already free" (Doherty). As one of Cusk's characters notes, "it remains impossible for a woman to live without illusion, because the world will simply snuff her out" (*Kudos* 196).

While many of Faye's stories involve ventriloquizing men's voices, which then purposefully echo empty, silly and pointless in their retelling, Cusk's protagonist, a

middle-class white woman gut-renovating a house from scratch in a gentrifying neighborhood of London, complicates what kind of women are allowed to "be cruel"—and for what reasons. In remodeling her home, the upper story of a two-family house bought from "Africans" who were priced out of the neighborhood, Faye goes to talk with the downstairs owners, an old, working-class couple bitterly resisting gentrification efforts. The tenants' cooking is described as having "a foul meaty smell" and Faye's contractor eyeballs their apartment as being akin to "hell on earth… judging from the ceiling heights from outside, they must be living like rats in a coal-hole" (*Transit* 44). It's clear that Faye's "cruel eye" is not limited to men, as she describes their home as "a heap of filthy sheets and blankets and empty bottles" and her neighbor, Paula, as a "powerfully built, obese woman" whose "large slack body had an unmistakable core of violence, which…suddenly turned to take a vicious swipe at the shrivelled dog…and sent him flying" (45). The imperfections of this narrator show the complexities within any radical change of structure and the limits to a universal empathy, even in the face of, or perhaps because of, a universal capitalist culture.

While mocking the millionaire men may show how "style can be a source of power," (and like de Certeau, a tactic for the "weak") and a critique of bourgeois writing can begin to retool the form of writing, we must also ask the questions about narrational positionality rather than solely ascribing to her style a gendered vendetta. Must we then "depart" from bourgeois literature? One that, as Cvetkovich writes, "tends to presume a

white and middle-class subject for whom feeling bad is frequently a mystery because it doesn't fit a life in which privilege and comfort make things seem fine on the surface"? (122). Calling out Faye's cruelties is essential in making her "discrimination" both more powerful and more complicated. Cusk's contemplation of gender is uncomfortably many-pronged—one that is both empowering and stereotypical, but can act as yet another way through which a cruel aesthetic is actually based in a dysfunctional economic system that creates and rests in an anxious affect.

Returning to the issue with bourgeois narrative, or the novel's inextricability from maintaining the status quo, Faye's dinner partners comment that successful writers "need to hide in bourgeois life like ticks need to hide in an animal's fur: the deeper they're buried, the better" (*Outline: Part 2* 209). Later in the trilogy, a return to this sentiment helps us make sense of this particular image. A writer friend of Faye's remarks, "If I agreed that literature was a form that took its life-blood from social and material constructs, the writer could do no more than stay within those constructs, buried in bourgeois life—as he had recently read it described somewhere—like a tick in an animal's fur" (*Kudos* 183). Cusk enjoys planting these types of "easter eggs" throughout her trilogy, in which ideas are revisited and recursive in a way that divorces them from any particular author. This is one of the ways in which the novel is renovated, structurally. At the very same time that there is a thematic critique of an inability to break from within the constructs of bourgeois life, there is also a structural

curiosity that muddies the bourgeois narrative by removing individual authorship and ownership of particular ideas. For one of Faye's friends, this example of literary collectivity materializes in the fact that "she read so many books, she said, that they tended to blur together in her mind…at other times, she remembered things as if they'd happened to her personally when in fact they were only things she'd read" (*Kudos* 245). Advancing a kind of literary "commons" that blurs characters and destructs the concept of a forward-moving plot by having recurring words, characters, ideas and themes helps create the bourgeois novel's "negative," and embraces both the troubling and generative aspects of "negative space."

For Faye's friend Paniotis, a writer whose publishing house is "taken over by a large corporation…which is interested only in turning out best sellers," the repulsion to the normative narratives—"the story of improvement"—is one that either elicits surrender, or demands a new way of understanding the world and breaking past the story (*Outline Part 2,* 211). "We are all addicted to it," Paniotis says, "it" being "the story of improvement, to the extent that it has commandeered our deepest sense of reality. It has even infected the novel, though perhaps now the novel is infecting us back again, so that we expect of our lives what we've come to expect of our books." (211) I take Paniotis's understanding of "improvement" to mean aspirational living—the sliver of hope, that "cruel optimism," to call back Berlant, of a non-foreclosed future. Paniotis suggests that it is our literature that has led us to be optimistic, making literature itself a

force of cruelty in an economy that cannot enable its fancies. Thus, the word "infected" seems appropriately harsh way to describe the reality of literary culture, especially when referring to the diseased narratives around success and wealth accumulation. Writing successfully, to publish, ultimately means partaking in a collective delusion that furthers the belief in these delusions. However, as displayed by the text, eventually the delusion of "improvement" breaks apart the very norms and structures of the bourgeois novel—an "artifact" of the past—leaving room to create something from the ashes of this combustion.

5.2 Infrastructures and Feeling: The Form of the "Antinovel"

The affect of capitalist culture—one "whose violence takes the form of systematically making us feel bad" (Cvetkovich 15), I think, is key in understanding a potentially anticapitalist narrative. This antinarrative is one that would a) contend with the ways in which the financialization of language mirrors the financialization of life b) self-reflexively frets over the commodification of anticapitalist narratives, and, c) fuels a breakaway from the neoliberal bourgeois subject by generating an alternative novel with an alternative subject. What we are left with, then, is a communal "antinovel" that embraces the negative spaces of "antivalue" that Harvey writes about. In turn, deconstructing narratives of capitalism can do the same to the novel form in a structure that more accurately portrays the realities of global inequality and debt cruelty.

The seamless, blurred recollections and dialogues that take on the voices and stories of other characters that Faye meets and absorbs, *Blob*-like, is actually a self-reflexive method of writing that Cusk has called both "communal storytelling"[20] and "annihilated perspective."[21] While some have viewed Cusk's narrator as more a vessel for stories than an entity on her own, others see Faye less as a "cipher" and more that "the stories she hears are…an environment in which she dwells, her novelist's natural habitat—the very air she breathes or water in which she swims" (Prose 521). More accurately, in an interview with Alexandra Schwartz of the *New Yorker*, Cusk herself compares this kind of osmotic narrative to a deliberate attempt at the dissolution of individual characters, characters routinely tied to the proliferation of understanding society in a consumptive, individualistic way. In explaining her reasoning for this kind of dissolution, she writes, "If the self is less, other things change their proportions and relationship to each other and to you" ("I Don't Think Character Exists"). Cusk departs from a more traditional "Marxist version [of collective authorship] in which an author is the 'representative' of a class or a tendency or a situation" (Williams 196) by refusing not only to be reduced to a representation but imagining a dynamic intervention into how structures of the novel can be reconfigured. Cusk illustrates the novel's shortcomings, as we have seen so far, by thematically performing unsustainable modes of living, and also

[20] "'I Don't Think Character Exists Anymore': A Conversation with Rachel Cusk."
[21] Moore.

formally models a different way by "annihilating" the bread and butter of novel-writing: character and plot; beginning and end.

Critics have deemed Cusk's writing "a 'reinvention' of the novel," or at least "certainly a point of departure for it, one at which fiction merges with oral history" (Thurman). It seems that these facts of communal identity, of the environments of feeling that must be created to accurately depict a new mode of interpreting, living with, and surviving the world suggest both a formal and affective alternative to capitalist realism, or a linear, individual-driven way of understanding a character's place in a world in which an alternative can't exist. In order for it *to* exist, Cusk sees the alternative as, literally, a different "way"—

> All the problems of writing are problems of living...today I drove over the Brooklyn Bridge and remembered all the things I read about the infrastructure of American roads and bridges being in bad repair. I thought, "Am I entirely safe here?" *It's been here a long time, but it doesn't mean it always will be. It's that feeling of realizing that your consciousness, what appears to be your individuality, is actually resting on old, possible decrepit structures.* ("I Don't Think Character Exists" emphasis mine)

Even in her fiction, Cusk is drawn to the connection between "outdated" ways of representation in novels and the more physical crumbling of shoddy infrastructure, abandoned building projects, (like the ones we saw in the Greek seaside) and physically devastated cities, the results of the twisted intentions of imposed austerity measures and divestment in public structures.[22] In Cusk's novels, these "outdated" modes of

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[22] Later, in *Kudos* , she compares success and future opportunities to a road so "less traveled" that the government gave up on its construction. A "friend" of hers explains how, in certain European countries,

representation, when tasked with the burden of representation, cannot hold together under the cruel anxiety of the current era, and begin to deconstruct the structures of the novel that have enabled decrepitude.

In a way that connects "structure" *and* "feeling," this attempt at a reinvention of the form of the novel begins with the infrastructure of the sentence itself. As Cusk has noted, "language structure, sentence structure, the sentence itself, has this underpinning that goes so unexamined. Everyone uses sentences the way they'd drive down Fifth Avenue—because it's there, because someone decided it should be Fifth Avenue, and you should go down it. The sentence, the literary sentence, came to seem a lot like that to me."[23] Much of what we have come to know about writing, about reading novels, is used and recycled "because it's always been there."[24] The same, for Cusk, is true for other institutions, like capitalism, structures that we've been engaging with for so long, we forget that they are structures. Things taken for granted, or perceived as unrelentingly steadfast, once they begin to crumble or even to be questioned, become fair game once more and worthy of reinvestigation. For me, it is this thematic cruelty that actually precipitates the crumbling of the novel form in Cusk's writing, and prompts the reexamination of the existing structures.

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because of the lack of economic support, "girls' ambitions led nowhere, like the roads you often find yourself on in this country, that start off new and wide and smooth and then simply stop in the middle of nowhere, because the government ran out of money to finish building them." (192)

[23] "I Don't Think Character Exists."

[24] Ibid.

To bring back Harvey's understanding of debt peonage in a literary sense, a reexamination of existing structures and a celebration of their crumbling is an embrace of the negative, of antivalue, of, perhaps, the antinovel. The antinovel, or Cusk's attempt at an alternative to a capitalist narrativity, reappropriates the atmosphere of antivalue as something valuable—not in terms of plot or marketability, but as the antithesis to hyperindividualized neoliberalism by way of the novel, one that explores collective alternatives. For a writer that is taking up Faye's post as part-time writing teacher in Greece, Anne, there is an exploration of both of these alternatives—a vague and blurry outline, versus an embrace, of sorts, of antivalue— in her own writing. At first, after she experienced a very traumatic event, Anne was only able to see herself, her stories, and her life, in the "existing structures" that narrative provided:

> Something had happened to her writing… "I call it summing up," she said with a cheerful squawk. Whenever she conceived of a new piece of work, before she had gotten very far she would find herself summing it up. … As soon as something was summed up, it was to all intents and purposes dead, a sitting duck, and she could go no further with it. … And it wasn't only her own work… it was starting to happen with people. (*Outline: Part 4* 103)

For Anne, "drama became something real to me that day…it was no longer an internal structure in which she could hide and look out at the world" (*Outline: Part 4* 113). Anne is exposing the literal "summing up" that occurs in novels—the continuous evaluation and *valuing* of the bourgeois narrative that occurs within structures—Anne's work—that often jars against events that occur in real life—Anne's assault. Anne's summing-up capabilities leave her narrative "dead" and it in fact affects the way she views people.

Cusk's fiction establishes the same tension between observations on a theoretical plane and an actual one, finding, as discussed earlier, an inability to exist purely in the theoretical because of the material realities constantly interrupting the narrative.

And yet, Anne finds power in describing herself in the negative; because she lives in the negative, she can actually see the value, for better or for worse, of a way that reanimates her own narratives as meaningful. On a plane one day, while talking to her seat-mate, a rich, international business man who boasts about his rich, international life, she realizes that

> He was describing, in other words, what she herself was not: in everything he said about himself, she found in her own nature a corresponding negative. This *antidescription*, for want of a better way of putting it, had made something clear to her by a reverse kind of exposition: while he talked she began to see herself as a shape, an outline, with all the detail filled in around it while the shape itself remained blank. Yet this shape, even while its content remained unknown, gave her, for the first time since the incident, a sense of who she now was. (*Outline: Part 4* 108, emphasis mine)

Much like the burned-out church, mentioned in my introduction, that "had the strange effect of making you see more in the empty space than you would have seen had it been filled," Anne embraces what she *isn't*. Reclaiming antivalue as anticapitalist, and not simply "debt peonage," Cusk employs reverse exposition, by explaining what the novel isn't, and becoming that very thing. Cusk's novels, in an attempt to deconstruct the novel as it stands, uses antidescription, lack of character and plot, and Faye remains an "outline" that exists as a "corresponding negative" to the characters and plots of novels before her. As an attempt to find an alternative to a novel form that has often enabled

"decrepit structures," both narrative and capitalist, Cusk finds a way "alt" by renovating the novel in its own negative image as an attempt to further dismantle the novel form.

5.3 The Future of the Novel: Resisting Data Capitalism, Artificial Empathy, and the Post-National

As I mentioned in my second chapter, Ann Cvetkovich shows that an atmospheric registration of emotion, related to conditions of subjection, can make for the text to be

> understood in ways far more collective and 'external' rather than individual and interior…where persistent, repetitious practices of power can simultaneously provide…collectivized bodies…with predicaments and potentials for realizing a world that subsists within and exceeds the horizons and boundaries of the norm. (7)

Hence, "persistent and repetitious practices of power," seen more generally as "crushing capitalism" and more specifically as endless indebtedness, in Cusk's fiction, is a take on the "bad infinity"[25] of a relentless, unsustainable life where "the alienation of whole populations from any real influence of power is complete" (Harvey 205). This alienation,

[25] Harvey quotes Marx as saying "'if surplus value is conceived in the irrational form of interest, the limit is only quantitative' and the consequence of this, Marx adds, 'beggars all fantasy. Bad infinity raises its ugly head. The bonuses the Wall Streeters gave themselves during the years of collapse 'beggared all fantasy.'" (*Madness* 205) In this sense, a "bad infinity" becomes something that is a fantasy of capitalist accumulation and what Keynes called "the love of money as possession—as distinguished from the love of money as a means to the enjoyments and realities of life." (*Madness* 205) Bad infinity represents the ways in which "the sky's the limit" too has been coopted by the "madness of economic reason"—something that even Keynes calls "a disgusting morbidity," "semi-criminal" and "semi-pathological." Interestingly enough, the ways in which to assign blame to this kind of commodity fetishism is through the clear usage of "negative" emotionality—"bad," "ugly head," "madness," (though this can be construed as ableism) "disgusting" and, the verb "to beggar." In this sense, beggar can both end up meaning "to exceed the limits, resources, or capabilities of," which I think was Marx's original intention, as well as "to make a beggar of; impoverish." This impoverishment of the senses, of culture, of enjoyment and of life is the other side of the coin to the exceeded limits of capitalist consumption.

by way of the antinovel, can lead to realizing this very world that both "subsists within and exceeds the horizons and boundaries of the norm."

As long as there is no alternative to capitalism, then the novel form that "resists" the neoliberal obsession with the individual, might perform this resistance with a lack of individuated characters. Literature that attempts to renovate the novel away from the grasp of bourgeois narrative, pictures the future of novel "reform"—alternatives to capitalist modes of thought—as that which contends with capital's foreclosure of the future, and the life in the "negative" as something to find, if not strength, then a kind of unity within the universality of inequality. Returning to the statement of one of her characters, that "stories need cruelty in order for them to work" might perhaps be expanded to mean working to dismantle the toxic cultures of previous structures (Kudos, 164). If we look towards the future of how the novel might continue to resist and critique these cultures, we must simply follow the ways in which capitalism changes (or simply morphs).

How do successive avatars of capitalist forms affect novel futures? Like with antivalue, capital too morphs into forms that may have less of a focus on the individual, and more of a "collective intelligence,"[26] and the question becomes how we can

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[26] As I write in my introduction, Mark Fisher presciently bolsters the ability for capital to mimic collective intelligence, but couches it in a way that inspires, rather than demoralizes: "The odds might be stacked in such a way that we do keep losing, but the point is to increase our collective intelligence. That requires… at least some kind of system of coordination and some system of memory. Capital has this, and we need it too to be able to fight back." ("No Honour")

differentiate between these forms. Both finance capital and employment is being affected by and potentially replaced by trends in automation. This includes the inevitable outsourcing of human intelligence, including character and narrative, to algorithms and to AI. As Mark Jarzombek writes in his book *Digital Stockholm Syndrome in the Post-Ontological Age,* "If the term *capitalism* belonged to the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, the new term is data capitalism. All capitalism is data capitalism. It is all too easy to see data capitalism as an expanded form of imperialism, with nothing better to do than to exploit, consume, and destroy, and to later moralize about freedom and wealth" (28). Jarzombek's argument takes Harvey's a step into the virtual—where the emotional effects of a capitalistic digitization of life comes to be "beset by an inner torment" (28) because every moment of the day is actively mined for profit.

Cusk's first anecdote in her second novel of the trilogy, *Transit*, takes up the strange case of emails created by bots. These electronic "voices," sometimes written, sometimes heard, are meant to replicate human correspondence, an attempt to monetize trading in affectivity and decreasing anxiety by way of machine learning. One of her friends, "depressed in the wake of his divorce" admits to feeling comforted by the voices that announce train stations, the GPS navigation system, and "ads" and that

> he often felt moved to tears by the concern for his health and well-being expressed by the phraseology of adverts…automated voices on trains and buses…[he] actually felt something akin to love. … *There had been a great harvest, he said, of language and information from life*, and it may have become the case that the faux-human was growing more

> substantial and more relational than the original, that there was more tenderness to be had from a machine than from one's fellow man. After all, the mechanized interface was the distillation not of one human but of many. (*Transit* 3, emphasis mine)

Only the sufferer of what Jarzombek coined "digital Stockholm syndrome," or the toxic love for one's captors, can rebrand the imperial logic of an exploitative data capitalism as "a great harvest of language and information from life." And yet, it was "soothing" for Faye's friend to hear about how the human voice, as algorithm, was an "oceanic chorus…affixed in no one person, that it seemed to come from everywhere and nowhere…for him the erosion of individuality was also the erosion of the power to hurt." (3-4)

Seeing data capitalism mimic forms of anticapitalist protest in the form of "the erosion of individuality" puts a complicated spin on whether collectivity can purely stay a form of protest in an age where, for some, "more tenderness was to be had from a machine" than man, a system that essentially views the "human [as] a data derivative, packaged formatted and protected for the global stock market of information" (Jarzombek 28). Cusk's "annihilation of perspective" and restructuring of the novel means an embrace of non-capitalist forms of expression in which the liberal individual, and all the capitalist, narrative, and semantic structures that are attached to that ideal begin to unravel. And yet for Faye's friend at least, the idea that "the erosion of individuality" is "the erosion of the power to hurt" sees an automated future to be one without pain or cruelty in the idealized "perfection" of human emotion. However, even

in its ideal form, artificial benevolence provides an empty alternative to human pain. Removing the human element, then, is not an antidote to cruelty but is an equally disturbing avoidance of addressing its root causes.

Just as I used Cusk's phrase about structures to directly connect semantic infrastructure with physical infrastructure, Jarzombek uses infrastructural logic, too, to describe a simple, technological update to these "same old structures" now understood as data capitalism. He writes that "the space of ontological occupation in an increasingly post-nation-state world… is an infrastructure more robust that any highway. While the highways fall apart, the algorithmic infrastructure is always being rebuilt, updated, refined within days, minutes, microseconds" (53). This quote purposefully introduces the discord between physical highways—and the fact that no nation-state sees any interest, or has any power to fix them—with the highways of algorithmic infrastructure, showing that the investment in one inevitably means the divestment and crumbling of the other. Seeing this kind of austerity and physical decrepitude in novels almost always means that its flipside is an overenthusiastic embrace of new markets to be cornered.

And yet, while demanding her payment by targeting her demographic, the "computer algorithm" writes to Faye that "in this era of science and unbelief we have lost the sense of our own significance. We have become cruel ourselves, to ourselves and others, because we believe that ultimately we have no value" (2). As with Anne, and as with the burned-out church, finding value in ourselves means embracing a character-

less and plot-less antinovel and embracing the fact that we have no "value", as value is understood in a capitalist way, but to find other means, human means, of evaluating life. Whether this is through anecdotes, painful and insistent memories, or an understanding of collectivity that doesn't remove the human element, this valuelessness, or antidescription of ourselves is important. The very fact that one of Cusk's characters believes it to be "human nature… for people to wish cruelty on one another simply because they had been shown cruelty themselves" explores, in the case of the novel, the cruelty perpetuated by encouraging people's belief in a capitalist system.

> This very same character shows how
>
> > the repetition of behavioural forms was the curious panacea with which most people sought to relieve the suffering caused by precisely those same forms. *He had tried to find a way of expressing the contradiction in mathematic terms, but since it was inherently illogical he had not yet succeeded.* As far as he knew a problem couldn't be solved simply by infinitely restating it, unless you relied on infinity itself to break certain factors down. (*Transit* 91, emphasis mine).

The "inherently illogical" notion of perpetuating cycles of cruelty, rather than ending them, as a way to heal the suffering that cruelty had caused, and the fact that "infinitely restating" the novel form, by way of bourgeois narrative, would not solve its contradiction, is similar to the "madness" in Harvey's "madness of economic reason." Both attempt to solve problems by infinitely restating them, whether it is capital, or cruelty, with only the impossibility of infinity ever seeming to act as a barrier to continue.

Returning to Williams might help us see how Cusk's attempt at an alternative form of writing can actually register societal and economic discord in a new way by understanding that "writing is often a new articulation and in effect a new formation, extending beyond its own modes" (211). Williams believes that literary production is "a matter of recognizing the issues as parts of a whole social process which, as it is lived, is not only process but is an active history made up of the realities of formation and of struggle" (210). The alternative is created as the alternative is lived. The process of "confronting a hegemony in the fibres of the self" can lead to "the articulation and formulation of latent, momentary, and newly possible consciousness," not only a new way of writing, but of thinking—no—feeling (212). Registering her allegiances within this negative space, where the lack of character and plot, as well as the embrace of a precarious present by way of a foreclosed future, leads Cusk to "[grasp] the known that the unknown—the next step, the next work—is conceived" (212). As she has said in interviews, "I have used my strength for the purposes of destruction. But now I can use it to build something that will last" (Thurman).

As her attempts at "reinventing" the novel take hold, a self-reflexive anecdote comes to mind, in which a man describes "negative literature" as something that

> got much of its power through the fearless use of honesty: a person with no interest in living and hence no investment in the future can afford to be honest…and the same dubious privilege was extended to the negative writer" (*Kudos* 183).

The words “interest” and “investment” naturally recall Harvey’s understanding of debt peonage and its foreclosure on the possibilities of life in the future. Yet for Cusk, however cruel this foreclosure might be, it allows a certain perverse freedom; with nothing left to lose, and nothing at stake, honesty can finally be afforded. In this way, “confronting a hegemony in the fibres of the self “seems less impossible when there is no pressure to further the hegemonic discourse. While easier said than done, the pressure to conform thus relieved allows for a foreclosed future to also allow for grappling more furiously with the present.

6. Conclusion: Is the Critical Global Anglophone Important, Beyond Academia?

I want to determine how a measured study on cruelty can affect scholarship, not only within the academy, but in public eye as well. The scholarship of cruelty, one that undermines the violence of abstraction, must also resist the abstraction of scholarship. Given its pressing and sensitive material, how has bringing "cruel operations" into journalism and public-facing academia been executed, and how do we assess its success in historicizing and contextualizing cruelty? In an attempt to describe the present, it appears as though cruelty has recently been revisited as a word that can address the strange (though not completely anomalous) current moment, a divisive, troubled time in which the past seems to rule the present. In a viral article from 2018, "The Cruelty is the Point," *Atlantic* columnist Adam Serwer argues that in neoimperial spaces with histories of brutality like lynching, white supremacy, and autocratic rule, cruelty, rather than a means to an end, is the end. Serwer is on the right track in discussing the difference between larger scales of "exploit[ation] of the nation's darkest impulses in the pursuit of profit," and those weaker individuals who "have found in their shared cruelty an answer to the loneliness and atomization of modern life," showing how individual and systemic cruelty interact.

In this sense, cruelty can effectively elucidate the complexities of power and the histories of imperial ideology that morph into contemporary neoliberal thought. Cruelty

may not be "the point," but does serve as an invitation to examine the specific ugliness of an atmosphere at many levels. Yet what about articles in which cruelty is not front and center, but its operational logic still thrives? In which histories go unremembered? As I cited in my introduction, Mark Fisher warns that without "some system of coordination and some system of memory" these lapses of maintaining an up-to-date public scholarship in essence become a "toleration of failure on our side" ("No Honour"). This also echoes something that Sebald fears is inherent in the character of "our species [being] unable to learn from its mistakes" ("On Memory" 158). For example, in a recent article in the New York Times, "The Ganges Brims With Dangerous Bacteria," the words "colonialism" and the like are never once mentioned throughout the text. As Holt writes, the ideologies, those of the "decrepit third world," of infection and disease outside of first-world countries, suddenly makes "market-governed social relations into *natural phenomena*…ignoring the fact that…such relations were nearly always coerced and that the places and peoples…[were] harshly dealt with" (xix).

In this example, the "origins of drug resistant germs" are given a thorough history, but that of colonialism and its brutal aftereffects in the postcolony—the reason for infrastructural weaknesses, and poverty—are omitted. This is important: with the Global Anglophone duly apoliticized, dangerous trends—such as putting blame on religious minorities for larger structural issues—are continued. "The only possible source" for these drug resistant bacteria, the article writes, "is humans, specifically the

throngs of ritual bathers who come to wash away their sins and immerse themselves in the waters" (McNeil emphasis mine). What is not explained is why "an Indian equivalent of the Clean Water Act, which provided billions of federal dollars to build hundreds of sewage treatment plants across the United States" (McNeil) would be both a necessity and an impossibility. Going forward, how can we embolden efforts to make sure the cruelty of colonialism, and its present-day disasters, be appropriately contextualized? Illustrated here is an operational logic of cruelty which targets individual populations: a scapegoating of culture, rather than structure. This is something that indeed justified many brutal practices of colonialism. In this way, the translation of a politicized Global Anglophone field seems to be much needed in places beyond the academy.

As I mentioned in my introduction, seeing global history as a series of "entanglements" between foreign powers erases the continued "asymmetrical relations of subjugation and domination" within them. Without an appropriate lens through which to view history, these postcolonial spaces, and their histories, are often dehumanized. For example, in a book review of a history of the East India Company, the writer believes that while

> the company's men were often wicked and arrogant; they bribed, robbed and killed those who crossed them…*their Indian opponents could commit even more appalling acts of violence.* Worst of all, the company sucked 1 million British pounds (equivalent to $120 million today) out of Bengal in 1769-70 even as one in five Bengalis starved — yet while native rulers certainly did better, when famine struck their own territories in 1784-86 it also killed one Indian in five. *Eighteenth-century India was just a tough place to live.* (Morris)

This language seems to confirm Bakar's fears of the dangers of a flattening "entanglement"; and just how easy it is to make false equivalencies in histories of subjugation. The idea that India was "a tough place to live" erases the cruel realities of life, even as they were just enumerated by the data from the era. In addition, this shows that cruelty is not just in the revelation of raw data, as I posited in my introduction, but the ways in which this data is tabulated and interpreted. As Bakar writes, "our critical language and posture can afford to make the present battles over the rules of global connection more live and contestable and less a foregone conclusion" (Bakar). The cruelty of language thus becomes what Morris and McNeil trade in. That Morris believes that "the only alternative to conquest by European troops was indirect conquest by European bankers" ignores the ways in which colonialism primed vulnerable nations for financial conquest.

In essence, certain types of journalism whose motivations still involve an upholding of the ruler and the ruled, however subconsciously, resides this "haunting" of a cruel ahistoricity, of a carelessness —something which the Global Anglophone may aid in repoliticizing and correcting. "Haunting" oddly enough, is word that ended up connecting all my chapters. In Kincaid, Hartman's ghosts "hainting" the space, alongside Kamugisha's understanding of the "spectre of colonialism's abductions of Caribbean women's bodies" (32). In Sebald, the "haunting" of history's marginalized as a reminder of the dissociation between the achievements of empire and its brutal

colonial culture. The "spectre of communism" in Weeks's analysis of work. Of course, Cvetkovich's postulation that depression is caused by legacies of brutality that "haunt all our lives" (115). The question for me is: why does what haunts, "haunt"? In the context of cruelty within a public discourse, "haunting" presents itself as a placeholder for a historical methodology "to be," one that will continue to make the invisible more visible; one that will acknowledge the continued power of imperialist capitalism and its narratives, and refuse to redeem them. There must be a way to make scholarship on cruelty more accessible in order to distinguish transferable methodologies, ones that help in creating a "system of coordination and some system of memory."[1] It is important.

[1] Mark Fisher, "No Honour."

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