

Authority and Displacement in the English- Speaking World

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*(Volume II: Exploring American
Shores)*

Edited by

Florence Labaune-Demeule

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PREFACE

CATHERINE PESSO-MIQUEL
LUMIERE LYON 2 UNIVERSITY—LYON, FRANCE

In the eponymous essay of his volume of collected non-fiction, *Step Across This Line*, Salman Rushdie commented on the photograph he had chosen for the cover of his book: taken by Sebastião Salgado in the USA, it shows a running man chased by other men in cars, or, as Rushdie makes clear, it shows an illegal immigrant, pursued by border patrollers, running back towards the wall of separation with Mexico. He is trying to “get back, to unmake his bid for freedom.”¹ Salman Rushdie, who in different texts has celebrated the ideas of migration, of flight, discovery, transgression, uprootedness, is also very much aware that travel is a luxury reserved for the rich and the free. He knows that for many desperate people migration is a vital, necessary displacement, a dire choice between certain death if one stays, or unknown dangers and hypothetical death if one leaves, even if those migrants are perfectly aware that they are most unwelcome wherever they go. Rushdie insists that the “free” countries of the West have become “exclusive, increasingly well-guarded enclaves”, and “freedom is now to be defended against those too poor to deserve its benefits,” defended by walls, watchtowers, tight frontiers and armed men, by “the edifices and procedures of totalitarianism.”²

Ironically, if so many human beings are ready to risk their lives in order to save them, it is most often because the rich, free world which is trying so hard to keep them out is responsible for their predicament in the first place, and this for many different reasons, such as supporting dictators in exchange for economic and neo-imperialist favours, or buying up land to replace subsistence crops with cash crops destined to be exported, or because the indulgent way of life of Westerners precipitates climate change. Indeed, the ironic injustice of “global” warming is that it most affects those who are the least responsible for it, those who produce hardly any greenhouse gases, but happen to live in the least temperate

¹ Salman Rushdie. *Step Across This Line*. New York: Random House, 2002, 355.

² *Ibid.*

areas. Similarly, Rushdie constantly celebrates *métissage* and hybridity, the fruitful commingling of cultures, and yet he is well aware that many migrants, daunted by a new culture, a new language, the strange habits of a new community, and faced with “the sheer alienness and defensive hostility” of the people among whom they must henceforth live, choose to retreat “behind the walls of the old culture they have both brought along and left behind” thus leaping “into a confining stockade of [their] own.”³

However, if the far-right political parties of the West vituperate against the “invasion” of migrants, and lobby for the authority of the state to put a stop to it, history has shown that most “displacements” of “natives” occurred when a European power chose to “claim” the land where they were living. In other words, the poor and “insignificant” often find it inevitable, but very difficult, to emigrate, to “displace” themselves, but they can very easily *be* displaced. In a powerful text entitled *Exterminate All the Brutes*,⁴ the Swedish writer Sven Lindqvist reminds us that in the 19th Century, Europeans bent on conquering new colonies tended to consider the “natives” as an annoying hindrance that had to be got out of the way. Not content with depriving them of their land and livelihood, the colonisers killed indigenous peoples massively, or displaced them, herding them into inhospitable zones where they were left to die of thirst and starvation. The title of the book is a quotation from Joseph Conrad’s *Heart of Darkness*. In this original mixture of memoir, history, and literary history, Lindqvist argues that Hitler and Nazi ideologues grew up at a time when racist ideologies and social Darwinism were rife, and when “a major element in the European view of mankind was the conviction that ‘inferior races’ were by nature condemned to extinction” (20). At that time many believed in “the beneficent law of nature, that the weak must be devoured by the strong” (139), and for such people the genocides perpetrated by European colonisers, in Africa, in Australia, in America and elsewhere, were a source of inspiration. Sometimes the displacement and extermination of the “brutes” was carried out under the solemn authority of high-ranking army officials, as when, in 1904, the German General Adolf Lebrecht von Trotha ordered that every single member of the Herero people should be annihilated. The Germans did not even need to use their ammunition: about seventy-five thousand people were herded into the desert and abandoned without food or water in sealed off areas

³ *Ibid.*, 356.

⁴ Sven Lindqvist. *Exterminate All the Brutes*. (1992); translated into English by Joan Tate (1996), in *The Dead Do Not Die*. New York: The New Press, 2014. This volume also includes another book by Lindqvist. *Terra Nullius*, published in 2005, and translated into English by Sarah Death in 2007.

(Lindqvist, 157). Sometimes the “authorities” left adventurers and petty officers to their own devices, as when, in 1898, a French captain called Paul Voulet was asked to head an expedition in Central Africa, in an area destined to be placed under French “protection”, but was given no instructions by the minister for the colonies. As Lindqvist remarks, “Voulet was given a free hand to use the methods for which he had made himself notorious” (170): murder, looting, burning villages. Lindqvist demonstrates how affected Conrad was when the horrors and lies underlying the adulation of British colonial “hero” Henry Morton Stanley became known, and shows how precise historical details were used in Conrad's fiction, like the “twenty-one” cut heads of punished natives that adorned Captain Rom's garden (38), or the heads, impaled on stakes, that Voulet used “to frighten the population into submission” (173). Lindqvist concludes his text by insisting that Conrad did not need to spell out the atrocities hinted at in *Heart of Darkness*, because they were widespread, repeated, certainly not limited to the Belgian Congo, and because everyone “knew quite enough” (178).

Arundhati Roy included in her single novel to date, *The God of Small Things*, many intertextual allusions and references to *Heart of Darkness*; they add depth and brilliant irony to her reflexion on the legacy of colonialism in India and on the ravages of castism. She has also read *Exterminate All the Brutes*, and she obviously agrees with Lindqvist, whom she quoted in a lecture on “genocide, denial and celebration” delivered in 2008 in Istanbul. Like Lindqvist, she is afraid that displacement and genocide are still topical, urgent issues. She describes an India where the very wealthy upper class and the growing middle class have “seceded” “to a country of their own,” a “Kingdom in the Sky,” “hermetically sealed from the rest of India.”⁵ From thence, the “Sky Citizens,” as she calls them, plot to displace the indigenous people, the Adivasis, from their ore-rich mountains, as well as the Dalits and Muslims, who “sit” on prime land in Nandigram, because “when the Sky Citizens cast their eyes over the land, they see superfluous people sitting on precious resources” (153). India has the largest population of internally displaced people in the world, probably the second largest after China. The people are displaced “with court-decrees” or “at gunpoint by government-controlled militias” and they are “herded into tenements, camps and resettlement colonies where, cut off from a means of earning a living, they spiral into poverty” (154-155). Those who resist the theft of their land and

⁵ Arundhati Roy. “Listening to Grasshoppers: Genocide, Denial and Celebration” in *Listening to Grasshoppers*. London: Penguin, 2009, 152.

take to arms are treated like terrorists, and Roy analyses the language used by the then Prime Minister Manmohan Singh when calling for what he obviously deemed to be their necessary eradication: “‘Choke.’ ‘Cripple.’ ‘Virus.’ ‘Infested.’ ‘Eliminate.’ ‘Stamp out.’ Yes. The idea of extermination is in the air.” (160) As always, it is easier to first dehumanize those whom you would displace.

In 1977 Chinua Achebe published a lecture given in 1975 in which he accused Joseph Conrad of xenophobia and racism, dwelling on what he considered to be Conrad's alleged narrowness of mind, which prevented him from telling his readers anything except about himself. The 1987 version of this article was only very slightly amended. Even if A. Roy has reservations about Conrad's attitude towards African “natives,” her references to *Heart of Darkness* in *The God of Small Things* are much more nuanced and subtle than Achebe's. Personally I would argue that many elements in his novella manifest his humourous distance and his capacity to displace or reverse his point of view. One can think, as an illustrative example, of Conrad's treatment of the “Cannibals”, of his ability to look at the greedy, stupid, “unappetizing” Belgian “pilgrims” through the eyes of the “savages.” In other words, Conrad did possess that capacity of empathy which is essential when you want your books to change a reader's complacent worldview. A recent article in *The Independent*⁶ presented the future itinerant Empathy Museum, which will open in London in September 2015, following a concept inspired by Henry David Thoreau's writings (and more particularly by that famous question of his “Could a greater miracle take place than for us to look through each other's eyes for an instant?”). The philosopher Ronan Krznaric will inaugurate the museum, and the first exhibit will invite people to step into somebody else's shoes, somebody else's skin, in order to see the world differently. Krznaric quotes instances when empathy *has* made a difference, as in the discussions fostered by Parents' Circle between bereaved Palestinian and Israeli families, who begin to communicate with those whom they used to think of as their bitter enemies. Sven Lindqvist retains a rather wary and bitter outlook, believing that we all know what imperialism implies, but we lack “the courage to understand what we know and draw conclusions” (Lindqvist, 179). Arundhati Roy, on the other hand, looks “Empire” straight in the face, and by Empire she means the might of globalized corporate business, the collusion of fascist Hindu

⁶ Sophie Morris. “Empathy Museum”, *The Independent*, Thursday 25 June 2015. <http://www.independent.co.uk/life-style/health-and-families/features/empathy-museum-to-understand-others-we-need-to-walk-in-their-shoes--literally-says-philosopher-roman-krznaric-10346326.html>

nationalism with massive privatization, the hypocrisy of the countries of the North that make sure that business transactions are globalized, but not the free movements of people, not human rights, not justice. We *can* confront Empire, she asserts: “Our strategy should be not only to confront Empire but to lay siege to it. To deprive it of its oxygen. To shame it. To mock it. With our art, our music, our literature, our stubbornness, our joy, our brilliance, our sheer relentlessness—and our ability to tell our own stories.”⁷

It is precisely within the context of culture and the arts that this collection of essays questions the concept of “authority” and explores the manifold meanings of the word “displacement,” thus contributing to the necessary questionings and explorations that alone can help us to open up the universe, to push back our horizons, to stop meeting only people who are very similar to us, and to stop believing that “our” lives matter more than “theirs.”

⁷A. Roy. “Confronting Empire”, in Roy, A. *The Ordinary Person's Guide to Empire*, London: Flamingo, 2004, 77.

INTRODUCTION

FLORENCE LABAUNE-DEMEULE

JEAN MONNET UNIVERSITY—SAINT-ETIENNE, FRANCE

Linking the concepts of authority and displacement may seem surprising at first glimpse. Yet whether one thinks of our modern world or of more remote times, both seem to have been affected—if not moulded—by the interaction between the two.

Displacement is often conceived of in terms of space (places and locations), thus referring to key concepts such as migration, diaspora, the transportation of populations, to more limited forms of displacement such as migration from rural to urban areas, or even to more pleasant forms of displacement (travel, exploration, tourism, etc.). In *Questions of Travel, Postmodern Discourses of Displacement*, Caren Kaplan¹ insists on the fact that displacement also echoes the terms *placement* and *dis-placement*, *location* and *dis-location*:²

In this book [*Questions of Travel*] I inquire into categories that are so often taken for granted, asking how and when notions of home and away, placement and displacement, dwelling and travel, location and dislocation, come to play a role in contemporary literary and cultural criticism in Europe and the United States.” (Kaplan, 1)

Yet each metaphor of displacement includes referentially a concept of placement, dwelling, location, or position. Thus exile is always already a mode of dwelling at a distance from a point of origin. Tourism is travel between points of origin and destinations. Diaspora disperses the locations of dwelling into an interstitial habitus. Nomadism is the most attenuated concept in relation to location. Yet even theories of nomadic rhizomes include ‘nodes’—those sites of intersecting movements or ‘lines of flight’.

¹ See Kaplan, Caren. *Questions of Travel, Postmodern Discourses of Displacement*. Durham & London: Duke University Press, 1996.

² Concerning the concepts of dislocation and dis-location, see Connon, Daisy, Gillian Jein & Greg Kerr. *Aesthetics of Dislocation in French and Francophone Literature and Art. Strategies of Representation*. New York, Queenston, Lampeter: The Edwin Mellen Press, 2009.

Thus most notions of displacement contain an oppositional notion of placement and vice versa. (Kaplan, 143)

The reasons behind such types of displacement often have to do with the presence of one form of authority or another—whether political, economic, or cultural—which people obey either willingly or by force, for better or for worse. Such authority can at times be opposed, through diverse manifestations of resistance, or it can be subverted and even transgressed.

This also evokes the need to find some form of anchoring, reminding us of the frequently tackled opposition between “routes” and “roots”.³ These very concepts cannot but recall Deleuze and Guattari’s theories too, with the oft-mentioned opposition between the image of the tree and that of the rhizome, with respectively vertical anchoring or horizontal spreading.⁴

It is also commonly accepted that the term *displacement* should be used in different other fields, such as those of medical diagnosis or psychoanalysis,⁵ since it can prove useful to describe conditions such as mental alienation. The latter can be defined as deviance from a norm or a standard viewed as the expression of authority at any particular moment. The concepts of authority and displacement can thus be linked through a more social and cultural meaning of the terms. But is it not also possible to conceive of displacement in a more metaphorical sense, becoming synonymous with life, and death, as the end of one’s voyage on earth? This allows us to come to terms with yet another context in which displacement and authority can be seen to prevail: the social context, in which individual lives and thought processes can be altered by different forms of authority—through the enforcement of cultural values by political or social institutions, for instance. One illustration of the relationships between authority and displacement in that case could be gender theories, that is to say the male vs. female dichotomy, as with the frequent assumptions to be found in patriarchal societies—that men were superior to women in the Victorian era, the latter being often considered as

³ See Gilroy, Paul. *The Black Atlantic. Modernity and Double Consciousness*. Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1993.

⁴ See Deleuze, Gilles, and Félix Guattari. *A Thousand Plateaus. Capitalism and Schizophrenia*. London & New York, Continuum, 1992. These images are also often used in Edouard Glissant’s approach to poetics.

⁵ This relies on Freud’s theory, as well as on Lacan’s and Derrida’s. For further information, see Krupnick, Mark. *Displacement, Derrida and After*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1983.

children. Subaltern studies or more recently studies in Dalit literature also highlight another form of imbalance in social relationships based on displacement and authority.

This does not, however, overshadow the primary meaning of the terms: spatial displacement as a form of dislocation can also lead to the dislocation of personality or to cultural dislocation, not to mention the social form of dislocation which can be brought about by the collapse of political regimes or the gradual loss of power of former empires.

This leads us back to another spatial metaphor often used when speaking from a more post-colonial vantage point—that of the centre and the margins, and C. Kaplan again draws our attention to the fact that our contemporary world, characterized by flux, constantly requires new definitions and a new positioning.⁶ Which particular meaning, then, should be given to displacement in what is often called our postcolonial, or globalised, world?

In postcolonial theory, the dialectic between authority and displacement seems to occupy a privileged position. When defining the terms *colonialism*, *imperialism* and *post-colonialism*, Ania Loomba, like many other critics, establishes a link between these terms. Colonialism, she says, “can be defined as the conquest and control of other people’s lands and goods. But colonialism in this sense is not merely the expansion of various European powers into Asia, Africa or the Americas from the sixteenth century onwards.”⁷ The creation of ancient Empires, she adds, was different from the setting up of modern ones, notably for economic reasons:⁸

Modern colonialism did more than extract tribute, goods and wealth from the countries that it conquered—it restructured the economies of the latter, drawing them into a complex relationship with their own, so that there was a flow of human and natural resources between colonised and colonial countries. This flow worked in both directions—slaves and indentured labour as well as raw materials were transported to manufacture

⁶ “In the midst of these displacements, new concerns over borders, boundaries, identities, and locations arise. In most theoretical accounts, the influx of immigrants, refugees, and exiles from the ‘peripheries’ to the metropolitan ‘centers’ both enriches and threatens the parameters of the nation as well as older cultural identities. Yet definitions of locations as ‘centers’ and ‘peripheries’ only further mystify the divides between places and people.” (Kaplan, *Op. cit.*, 102)

⁷ Loomba, Ania. *Colonialism/Postcolonialism*. Coll. The New Critical Idiom, Second Edition, London & New York: Routledge-Taylor & Francis Group, 2005, 8.

⁸ Loomba, Ania. *Op. cit.*, 9.

goods in the metropolis, or in other locations for metropolitan consumption, but the colonies also provided captive markets for European goods. Thus slaves were moved from Africa to the Americas, and in the West Indian plantations they produced sugar for consumption in Europe, and raw cotton was moved to India to be manufactured into cloth in England and then sold back to India whose own cloth production suffered as a result.

The relationships between spatial displacement and political as well as economic authority are thus made obvious. When used in this sense, colonialism can be synonymous with imperialism. But the major difference that A. Loomba observes between colonialism and imperialism relies on the fact that the latter may be set up without ever being linked with direct political rule, as in the more modern meaning of the term:

In the modern world, then, we can distinguish between colonisation as the takeover of territory, appropriation of material resources, exploitation of labour and interference with political and cultural structure of another territory or nation, and imperialism as a global system. However, there remains enormous ambiguity between the economic and political connotations of the word. If imperialism is defined as a political system in which an imperial centre governs colonised countries, then the granting of political independence signals the end of empire, the collapse of imperialism. However, if imperialism is primarily an economic system of penetration and control of markets, then political changes do not basically affect it, and may even redefine the term as in the case of ‘American imperialism’ which wields enormous military and economic power across the globe but without direct political control.⁹

Therefore, this suggests that the term *postcolonialism* is more intricate than it may seem. It is not only to be used with a temporal meaning (literally “after colonialism”), but also in a more general sense:

A country may be both postcolonial (in the sense of being formally independent) and neo-colonial (in the sense of remaining economically and/or culturally dependent) at the same time. [...] It has been suggested that it is more helpful to think of postcolonialism not just as coming literally after colonialism and signifying its demise, but more flexibly as the contestation of colonial domination and the legacies of colonialism. Such a position would allow us to include people geographically displaced by colonialism such as African-Americans or people of Asian or Caribbean origin in Britain as ‘post-colonial’ subjects although they live within

⁹ Loomba, Ania. *Op. cit.*, 11.

metropolitan cultures. It also allows us to incorporate the history of anti-colonial resistance with contemporary resistances to imperialism and to dominant Western culture.¹⁰

Whatever meaning can be granted to these terms in the field of postcolonial studies, one can observe that authority and displacement are key concepts, lying at the heart of human activities, be they political, economic, cultural, or even religious, and that this has prevailed throughout history to the present day. Stan Smith, following in Margaret Storm Jameson's steps, indeed views displacement as constitutive of the modern individual:

For Jameson, it was the experience of the Second World War that brought about this dislocation in being, in the fabric of reality itself, after which nothing could be the same. The exilic modern subject, unable to root itself down in a particular community or place, was now constructed from those 'moments in and out of time' of which T.S. Eliot wrote in *Four Quartets* [...].¹¹

Therefore authority and displacement, though frequently used in a postcolonial context as shown by A. Loomba's definitions, are concepts that cannot be restricted to this field. More generally, they can be examined together in a broader sense to refer to any situation where one form of power is linked with spatial, social, religious, or aesthetic displacement.

The concepts of displacement and authority can therefore also be understood to affect various artistic and aesthetic fields, sometimes even linking spatial displacement with aesthetic displacement, as in choreography, stage adaptation or opera staging, for instance. Very often, all these forms of aesthetic displacement also remain linked to authority in one way or another: the authority of generic norms, the authority of the artist, of the writer, or even of the director or stage manager; the authority of the audience through the concept of "audience reception", whether it applies to spectators or readers.

This also underlines the crucial role played by language in the relationships between displacement and authority. Language can be a source of authority, of course, and the medium through which authority can be imposed on peoples. Kenneth Ramchand, in *The West Indian Novel*

¹⁰ Loomba, Ania. *Op. cit.*, 12 and 16 respectively.

¹¹ Smith, Stan. *Poetry and Displacement*. Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2007, 1. See also Kaplan. *Op. cit.*, 101-102.

*and its Background*¹² speaks of the English language as the master's language, for instance. But language itself also produces another form of displacement, by means of translation,¹³ or by using particular stylistic devices to operate a move from everyday language to poetic language. Thus, Wallace Chafe¹⁴ has noted that

When ordinary language is used to represent the experiences of a distal self, it still passes through the consciousness of the proximal self. [...] In written fiction, on the other hand, one effect of the desituatedness of writing can be a total displacement of the represented consciousness to another self. (Chafe, 249)

He even speaks of modes of discourse as *selfed*, or *de-selfed* writing.¹⁵ This also highlights the etymological meaning of authority—*auctoritas*—and of the *auctor*, insisting both on creation and on authority or power.¹⁶ This refers to a form of literary and poetic displacement by discourse and the use of particular stylistic devices aiming at enforcing some form of authority. But how readers travel in a text and through intertextual references should also provide us with new insight in the relationships between these terms: which position does the very persona of the writer occupy in a literary work? How do narrative entities, which contemporary literary criticism has highlighted¹⁷, interact in literary writing? Which

¹² Ramchand, Kenneth. *The West Indian Novel and its Background*. London, Kingston, Port of Spain: Heinemann, 1983.

¹³ In Latin, “translatum” means “carried over” as it etymologically comes from the verb “*transferre*”, which means “to bring over, carry over”, according to the Online Etymology Dictionary (www.etymonline.com, accessed May, 15th, 2015).

¹⁴ Chafe, Wallace. *Discourse, Consciousness and Time. The Flow and Displacement of Conscious Experience in Speaking and Writing*. Chicago & London: The University of Chicago Press, 1994.

¹⁵ “In written fiction, there are two ways to handle this dissociation. One option is for the author [sic] to assume a fictional self, so that the representing consciousness becomes a fictional consciousness that is at home in the fictional world. [...] The other option is for the author to relinquish any self at all, in which case the representing consciousness can be said to be *unacknowledged*. [...] In chapter 19 we will turn to writing with an unacknowledged representing consciousness, a consciousness that has been, so to speak, disembodied or, perhaps more accurately *de-selfed*.” (Chafe, 225)

¹⁶ See the Online Etymology Dictionary: www.etymonline.com, accessed May, 15th, 2015.

¹⁷ See Booth, Wayne C. *The Rhetoric of Fiction*. [University of Chicago Press, 1961], Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1983; Chatman, Seymour, *Story and*

relations can be established between narrator(s), characters or character-narrators, implied reader, narratee, or reader? Such key concepts undoubtedly invite us to analyse the relationships between authority and displacement in the context of literary genres and of the arts. The links between authority and generic norms may then be examined, along with the ways in which they are questioned, and their dissemination, not to mention their interaction through processes of hybridisation in contemporary aesthetic productions. Which effects do they produce on the reader or viewer? Does Umberto Eco not precisely speak of “inferential walks” (“promenades inférentielles”) in *Lector in fabula*?¹⁸

The aim of this collection of essays, like that of the conference, is to lead us to interrogate the concepts of authority and displacement in the English-speaking world, mostly in England and in some former parts of the British Empire. This explains why the approach followed extends in three major directions: the aim pursued in these two volumes is both spatial, temporal and thematic. The readers will first come to terms with displacement and authority in the context of the former metropolis and how their treatment evolved over time to the present day by proposing a chronological and aesthetic approach.

Volume One will be devoted to exploring displacement and authority in a British context and will span several centuries, from the Elizabethan age to contemporary times: the first essay, by Geneviève Lheureux, shows how the concepts can be analysed in Shakespeare’s play *Measure for Measure*, by focusing on what can be called “the empty chair policy”. Then, we will move on to a different period, Eighteenth Century England with Floriane Reviron-Piégay, who introduces us to the field of exploration voyages with John Ross’s *Narrative of a Second Voyage in Search of a North-West Passage*. Our quest will be pursued in Nineteenth-Century England as the article written by Stéphanie Bernard places us at the heart of Thomas Hardy’s Wessex with the study of *Jude the Obscure*. The last essays in Volume One will transport us to the twentieth and twenty-first centuries, and we will first remain in Britain with Emilie Walezak’s analysis of “pretend places” in Rose Tremain’s novels, before moving to Ireland with Vanina Jobert-Martini’s stylistic study of Hugo Hamilton’s novel *Disguise*.

Discourse. Ithaca/London: Cornell University Press, 1983; Leech, Geoffrey N. & Michael H. Short. *Style in Fiction*. London & New York: Longman, 1984.

¹⁸ Eco, Umberto. *Lector in fabula*. Paris: Grasset/Le livre de poche, 1985.

From Irish literature, our attention will then be drawn by Karine Chevalier to a comparative study of Joseph Conrad's novel *Almayer's Folly* and Chantal Akerman's film "La folie Almayer", an essay which will show how displacement and authority can be dealt with in terms of re-writing and intermediality.

Finally, our point of view will move further, with the fictional world of the Anglo-Sudanese writer Jamal Mahjoub thanks to Jacqueline Jondot's essay: thus, we are to be displaced from the English metropolitan centre to the African margins of a territory which has formerly been placed under the protection of the English army—and governed by General Gordon, notably.

Volume Two, on the contrary, will lead us to new shores, by exploring the concepts of authority and displacement in other parts of the world, all of which were former colonies of Britain in America: thus we will be carried across the Atlantic to discover which meanings can be assigned to these terms in some territories of the New World—first, the U.S.A, and then Canada and the Caribbean. Although history will have to be tackled in the articles under scrutiny, the objects of analysis will mostly be linked with contemporary times—the twentieth and twenty-first centuries. Yet the essays will not only be devoted to fiction, and will deal with broader issues, such as social questions or different artistic means.

First, Leland Tracy's essay will take us back to the universe of famous American fugitives at the beginning of the twentieth century, with the iconic figures of Bonnie and Clyde. Then, Véronique Ha Van's article will enable us to understand how the placing and replacing of the Capitol statues in Washington D.C. can be viewed as landmarks to gauge the authority of famous national icons. From this aesthetic approach of art through sculpture, our attention will be drawn to photography, thanks to Danièle Méaux's study of Joel Sternfeld's photographs in *Walking the High Line*.

Travelling through American landscapes and places will be pursued thanks to Elisabeth Bouzonviller's essay on Louise Erdrich's *Books and Islands in Ojibwe Country*, as we will be led to understand more precisely the concepts of authority and displacement from a Native American author's point of view.

From the U.S.A, we will then travel north up to Canada in order to discover Canadian landscapes in transit thanks to Claire Omhovère's enlightening essay.

The last stage in our exploration of American shores will take us to the Caribbean, with emphasis laid on Guianese writers with a comparison of the English-speaking writer Martin Carter with the French-speaking writer

Léon Damas being compared to each other in Kathleen Gyssels's study, while the novel *The Longest Memory* by the British writer of Guyanese origin Fred D'Aguiar, will be analysed in terms of displacement and authority by Florence Labaune-Demeule.

Associating these concepts will then have enabled us to travel through part of the English-speaking world, and to perceive the evolution in the use of these concepts over time and space.

If this critical journey through several English-speaking countries takes the readers to new paths and discoveries, to new knowledge and pleasure, these volumes will have achieved their aim. To conclude, we hope that our readers will finally share what V.S. Naipaul wrote in *The Writer and the World*: "I have no unifying theory of things. To me situations and people are always specific, always of themselves. That is why one travels and writes: to find out."¹⁹

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¹⁹ Naipaul, V.S. *The Writer and the World. Essays*. London, Basingstoke & Oxford: Picador/Pan Macmillan, 2002, 503.

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CHAPTER ONE

FAVORABLE REPRESENTATIONS
OF THE FUGITIVE IN AMERICAN
POPULAR CULTURE:
THE STORY OF BONNIE AND CLYDE

LELAND TRACY
JEAN MONNET UNIVERSITY— SAINT-ETIENNE, FRANCE



Bonnie Parker and Clyde Barrow, 1933. Photo by W. D. Jones

In his 1967 Academy Award winning film *Bonnie and Clyde*, Arthur Penn retells the story of America's best-known outlaw couple, portraying Clyde Barrow and Bonnie Parker as rather likeable and ultimately tragic figures. Their story is a particularly powerful example of how, under the right circumstances, the traditional roles of 'good guy' and 'bad guy' can be reversed. The blurring of the lines between protagonist and antagonist in Penn's film is all the more striking when compared to the less

sympathetic accounts of the young couple's exploits provided by newspapers and other news sources during the violent climax of their criminal career in 1934. Few Americans alive today can remember that contemporary version of the story, and the legend of Bonnie and Clyde is now thoroughly informed by the good looking and charming characters played by Warren Beatty and Faye Dunaway under Arthur Penn's direction.

In the following pages I will describe a persistent phenomenon in popular American culture in which fugitive outlaws, some of whom by any 'objective' historical perspective were dangerous sociopaths, garner a certain amount of sympathy, if not outright admiration. As Oscar Wilde bluntly put it: "Americans are certainly great hero worshipers and always take their heroes from the criminal classes".¹ We will provide some historical and cultural context specific to the United States of America which may help account for this, including but not limited to the ambivalent attitude of American society towards the authority of the federal government, the geographic particularities of this country, and the westward expansion that characterized the first half of its history, during which displacement was one of the most salient characteristics of the culture. Finally, we will take a close look how the telling and retelling of the story of Bonnie and Clyde was affected by a number of cultural, historical and technological influences which, during the countercultural revolution of the late 1960's, facilitated America's fascination with these fugitives.

All Fugitives are Not Created Equal

Before considering the role of the fugitive outlaw in American popular culture, let us first present a few important distinctions to better define our subject and establish some limits on the scope of this study. The first of these distinctions involves two pairs of codependent variables: the (perceived) guilt or innocence of the fugitive, and the historical or fictional nature of the character.

The first operative distinction we should make here is between an innocent fugitive and the true outlaw. It is, after all, not too difficult to understand why an audience might hope that a fugitive escape from the authorities, if, within the context of the narrative, the fugitive in question

¹ From a letter dated April 19th 1882, written by Oscar Wilde after having visited Jesse James' house just two weeks after James was assassinated. Cited in Ron Hansen's historical novel *The Assassination of Jesse James by the Coward Robert Ford*, 213.

is perceived as being innocent. One pertinent historical reference is the figure of the fugitive American slave. Because (at least in retrospect) the arc of American history made the abolition of slavery inevitable, and the evolution of moral convictions in the United States today allows for the representation of these slaves as human beings with the same basic rights and needs as their white masters, it would be considered inappropriate for us to consider them ‘guilty’ today. Just as it would be difficult today to condemn someone like Harriet Tubman for her participation in the Underground Railroad, despite the fact that her actions were in clear violation of federal law.²

There are few historical equivalents to the figure of the fugitive slave in American popular culture. It is entirely possible, indeed likely, that other people have been unjustly pursued, prosecuted and punished, whether as a group or individually,³ but these stories rarely make their way into American popular culture. In the absence of overwhelming and incontrovertible evidence of injustice such as that supplied by the history of slavery, truly innocent historical fugitives may be the only ones who will ever know that they were innocent. Their stories rarely find a place in American popular culture. On the other hand, the extremely powerful narrative device of the innocent fugitive has been used quite effectively in American fiction, both in literature and cinema. In these cases, the advantage of fiction over non-fiction is that the author has the creative power to establish a character’s innocence beyond a shadow of a doubt. It is for this reason that the plight (and flight) of fictional characters like Roger O. Thornhill played by Cary Grant in Alfred Hitchcock’s *North by North West*, or that of Dr. Richard Kimble first played by David Jansen in the late 1960’s Emmy award winning TV series *The Fugitive* and later portrayed by Harrison Ford in the Oscar award winning 1993 film version of that series, solicit such a powerful reaction from the audience, not only one of sympathy, but of a sense of collective responsibility for providing safe harbor for these unfortunate victims of injustice.

To the extent that this sympathy seems, considering the circumstances, like a “normal” reaction, we will not explore the dynamics of the innocent fugitive any further here. The real mystery is why American audiences sometimes wind up, if not identifying with, then at least sympathizing with the fugitive, despite the knowledge that he or she may be guilty.

² The Fugitive Slave Act of 1850 made it a federal crime, punishable by a \$1,000 fine and or 6 months imprisonment, to aid a fugitive slave.

³ The massacre of the American Indians was clearly unjust, but for the most part they didn’t even need to be considered guilty of anything to be persecuted and cannot, in that respect, be considered “fugitives”.

In addressing this question, the next element we need to take into account is whether the ‘guilty’ fugitive is a real life historical figure or a character in a fictional narrative. Popular culture represents, and is informed by, fictional as well as historical characters. The distinction between “fact” and “fiction” therefore, is not always as clear as these terms might suggest. Representations of historical figures are inevitably subjective and often fictionalized (which is admittedly the case in Penn’s film), and literary characters generally inhabit some real and recognizable historical context. The current trend of historical fiction, in which historical and fictional characters co-exist in the same narrative, further complicates this distinction. Nevertheless, and particularly in the context of ethical dilemma which is the subject of our study, fictional characters do not exist in the same legal and moral realm as historical figures do. Storytellers can intentionally create moral ambiguity in their narratives to evoke sympathy from the audience even for characters who are morally compromised. And knowing that the crimes committed by such a character are just as fictional as the victims are, the audience is faced with less of a moral dilemma if they feel sympathy toward characters whose actions they might not actually condone in real life.

Oliver Stone’s “Natural Born Killers” illustrates this phenomenon in a graphically violent way. While the characters of Mickey and Mallory (played by Woody Harrelson and Juliette Lewis) are undoubtedly violent criminals, they are hardly amoral, and do seem to respect a certain code.⁴ And they are presented in a way that is strangely endearing. First of all, they are young and in love (a point they share with Bonnie and Clyde). And then we have Mallory’s disturbingly twisted father, who the film suggests has sexually abused her. How can she be blamed for being violent? The characters in Stone’s film famously generated more than just sympathy from the audience: in some instances the process of identification with the characters led to troubling cases of fans emulating the film’s characters by committing real crimes.⁵ The ability of an author or a filmmaker to construct a scenario in which a law-abiding public winds up sympathizing or even identifying with such fictional characters can be attributed at least in part to their skills as storytellers. It is harder to explain how an audience can come to feel a similar sense of sympathy for a character that has actually committed crimes generally recognized as inexcusable.

⁴ In one scene Mickey ‘accidentally’ shoots their host in a fit of drug induced paranoia, and Mallory repeatedly strikes him, saying “Bad, bad, bad, bad, bad!” as if she were scolding a child.

⁵ Xan Brooks. “Natural Born Copycats”. *The Guardian*, December 20, 2002.

But before we move on to consider some of the historical, geographic and cultural issues that may explain this phenomenon of identification and sympathy with the real life fugitive outlaw, it should be noted that the privileged place that American popular culture sometimes accords to these figures does not generally apply to members of organized or otherwise more territorial forms of criminality.⁶ It may just be that the absence of a good chase makes for a less captivating narrative (most organized crime members would rather not run from the police). Perhaps the considerable sums of money generated by such organized criminal activity, the extravagant lifestyles that often accompany this activity, and the intrinsic level of corruption involved (most notably involving the local police) are incompatible with the folk hero status accorded to other outlaw fugitives.

One well-known contemporary of Bonnie and Clyde provides a case in point. Despite the fact that he was convicted and sentenced to 11 years in federal prison for tax evasion at about the same time that Bonnie and Clyde were at the 'height of their career', the representation of Al Capone in popular American culture is hardly flattering. In feature length films such as Richard Wilson's 1959 *Al Capone* (with the lead role played by Rod Steiger), or Brian de Palma's 1987 *The Untouchables*, in which Capone was played by Robert De Niro, the protagonist of the story is invariably the federal agent responsible for his capture. In fact, the name Eliot Ness has become synonymous with the type of integrity and determination that characterizes law enforcement at its best. On the other hand, Al Capone inspires little sympathy and has come to symbolize the sociopathic criminal with few redeeming character traits.

It would probably take some doing to generate any real sympathy for Al Capone, even if he were to go 'on the lam', and while it may not be the only factor in play, there is clearly something about being on the run which generates a level of sympathy not accorded to more territorial forms of criminality. The ever-changing scenery of flight provides a scenario with an abundance of opportunities for dramatic tension, fear, relief, escape and closure, potent ingredients for a captivating narrative. Displacement is in itself an important ingredient in the folk recipe that elevates some fugitives to the status of folk hero.

Given the universality of the theme, the fact that the fugitive is so often represented in American popular culture is not surprising. What is surprising is that a real life fugitive criminal can be portrayed favorably, as the protagonist who wins the sympathy of an audience who doesn't really want him (or her) to get caught, even if the fugitive in question is responsible for brutal crimes. Historical figures like Jesse James, Billy the

⁶ Mario Puzzo's *Godfather* and David Chase's *Tony Soprano* notwithstanding.

Kid, Ma Barker, and Baby Face Nelson have fascinated Americans for years, becoming an integral part of American folklore. With few exceptions, the names of these fugitives are better known today than those of the authorities who eventually “brought them to justice”.

Authority in America

While American popular culture may not be unique in its fascination and sympathy for the fugitive outlaw, a number of conditions that are specific to the historical context of the United States, including the nature of both authority and displacement in this country, may help to explain such favorable representations of the fugitive and enable us to understand how a reversal of the traditional role of “good guy” and “bad guy” is possible in American popular culture.

Perhaps because the history of the United States is relatively short, and because it lacks a unified cultural foundation of shared traditions, Americans have a particularly strong attachment to the creation myth constructed around the founding fathers and embodied by the *Declaration of Independence* and the *United States Constitution*. These documents have an unusually important place in the collective imagination of many Americans. Even if some Americans know little about that part of the U.S. Constitution providing a template for the institutional framework of the American federal political system, they do tend to be more familiar with the *Bill of Rights*, which offers both important safeguards for individual liberties and constraints on the power of the federal government. The contents of some of these amendments have found their way into popular American culture; ‘the second amendment’ is shorthand for the right to bear arms, simply saying “I take the fifth” evokes that amendment’s protection against self-incrimination, and conservative Americans concerned about the overreach of the federal government regularly invoke the tenth amendment, which stipulates that “The powers not delegated to the United States by the Constitution, nor prohibited by it to the States, are reserved to the States respectively, or to the people” to justify their cause.

The Declaration of Independence of the Thirteen Colonies is, in itself, a clear rejection of the authority of the British Monarchy, which specifically recognizes the right of the people to revolt against any authority the people deems unjust.⁷ In the absence of a common history and tradition, this text has been elevated to a nearly sacred status in the

⁷ The exact wording of the clause in question is: “That whenever any Form of Government becomes destructive of these ends, it is the Right of the People to alter or to abolish it...”