PRO&CONTRA

Central European Studies in Humanities

Volume 7
Issue 2

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Líceum Publisher
Eger, 2023

PRO&CONTRA

Central European Studies in Humanities

ISSN 2630-8916 (online)

Managing publisher: Rector of Eszterházy Károly Catholic University
Published by Líceum Publisher, EKCU, Eger
Head of publisher: Andor Nagy
Managing editor: Judit Kusper
Layout editor: Bence Csombó
Year of publication: 2023

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Deserts, Natives, and Sylvan Cities: Russian Turkestan in American Travel Writing, 1890s – 1910s

Pro&Contra 7

No. 2 (2023) 5–32

https://doi.org/10.33033/pc.2023.2.5

Abstract

The Russian conquest of Turkestan (the territories of modern Turkmenistan, Uzbekistan, Tajikistan, most of Kirghizstan, as well as the southern and southeastern areas of Kazakhstan), completed within three decades from the mid-1860s, brought controversial changes in the region's economy, administration, and native lifestyle. The gradual emergence of railways and the development of agriculture (primarily cotton growing) attracted American entrepreneurs and travelers. This article covers two travel accounts in book form – parts of *Siberia and Central Asia* (1899) by Ohio businessman and philanthropist John Bookwalter (1839–1915) and *Turkestan: "The Heart of Asia"* (1911), written by journalist, travel writer, and diplomat William Curtis (1850–1911). I use the term "imperial view" to argue that the two Americans, despite their different social background and almost a decade passed between their travels, wrote about Russian Turkestan in a similar manner. They hoped to see the transformation of the "empty" nature of Turkestan for economic development, praised new Russian cities compared to native settlements, and created the image of Russia performing a "civilizing" mission in the region while lauding American economic presence there. However, they wrote differently about Central Asia as a geopolitical region due to the different life experiences of the authors and changes in the stance of both Russia and the U.S. in world politics in the 1900s.

Keywords: The United States, travel writing, Russian Turkestan, John Wesley Bookwalter, William Eleroy Curtis, the Central Asian Railway

Introduction

While Russia experienced its first direct contact with the population of Central Asia in the late sixteenth–early seventeenth century during its conquest of Siberia and expansion toward the Pacific, from the early nineteenth century it began increasing its presence and by the late 1850s gradually acquired most of modern Kazakhstan, encountering three independent entities further to the south: the Khiva and the Kokand Khanates and the Bokhara Emirate. Starting from 1864, during the following three decades Russia dissolved the Kokand Khanate, while the other two states, the Bokhara Emirate and the Khiva Khanate, were turned into protectorates. The territories conquered became known as the Turkestan General-Governorship (see figure 5).

The Russians entered a region that differed decisively from European Russia, above all in terms of climate and geography, with semi-desert and desert areas to the south and

southwest, and the mountains to the southeast where the major rivers (the Amu Darya and the Syr Darya) flow from, creating oases and making nearby areas available for cultivation.[1] Most of the sedentary population was concentrated near sources of water or constructed irrigation areas, but others still retained nomadic or semi-sedentary lifestyle. The inhabitants of Turkestan were also ethnically and linguistically diverse, with rich cultural and historical heritage. Most of the population shared Islam as a prevalent religion, different from mostly Orthodox Russians. These differences altogether contributed to the fact that Russians saw Turkestan as a culturally distinct region, and the local population shared little common cultural ground with the new administration.[2]

The ultimate goal of the Russian approach to Turkestan was to gradually integrate it with the rest of the empire economically, administratively, and culturally. But as the Russian administration introduced economic, administrative, and social changes, from the start it debated the degree of integration and weighed the risks of potential instability.[3] The administration of Turkestan was subordinated to the Ministry of War and was called "the military-popular administration." Combining military control of the region with local traditional and Russian self-government structures, the administration focused on developing a market economy and encouraging irrigation, agriculture, cotton growing, and railroad building. It also tried to establish Russian and mixed Russian-native schools parallel to the traditional Muslim education system, and, following Stolypin's reforms, to encourage Russian settlement in the region.

Scholars offer different opinions on the accomplishments and failures of the Russian Empire in Turkestan, and more broadly, Central Asia. Some Russian and English-speaking academics, while not denying the issues of Russian rule or occasional tensions between Russians and natives, focused on state policy and emphasized positive changes in the region brought by Russia, whether demographic, material, social, or cultural.[4] Others offered a

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[1] Yuri Bregel, *An Historical Atlas of Central Asia* (Leiden: Brill, 2003), 2.

[2] Daniel Brower, *Turkestan and the Fate of the Russian Empire* (London: Routledge Curzon, 2003), ix; Richard Pierce, *Russian Central Asia, 1867–1917: A Study in Colonial Rule* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1960), 203–4.

[3] Tat'yana Kotukova, "Turkestan v diskurse frontirnoy modernizatsii Rossiyskoy imperii v kontse XIX – nachale XX v. [Turkestan in the discourse of frontier modernization of the Russian Empire in the late nineteenth – early twentieth centuries]," *Islam in the Modern World* 11, no. 1 (2015): 45–46, https://doi.org/10.20536/2074-1529-2015-11-1-43-54; Sergey Abashin, Dmitriy Arapov, and Nailya Bekmakhanova, eds., *Tsentral'naya Aziya v sostave Rossiyskoy imperii* [Central Asia as part of the Russian Empire], Historia Rossica (Moscow: Novoye literaturnoye obozreniye, 2008), 87; Ulrich Hofmeister, "Civilization and Russification in Tsarist Central Asia, 1860–1917," *Journal of World History* 27, no. 3 (2016): 413–15, https://doi.org/10.1353/jwh.2016.0115; Paul Georg Geiss, *Pre-Tsarist and Tsarist Central Asia: Communal Commitment and Political Order in Change* (London: Routledge Curzon, 2003), 156, 181.

[4] Yuliya Lysenko, ed., *Tsentral'noaziatskiy region Rossiyskoy imperii v usloviyakh frontirnoy modernizatsii (vtoraya polovina XIX – nachalo XX v.)* [Central Asian region of the Russian Empire under conditions of frontier modernization

more critical evaluation of imperial rule, arguing that Russian administrators saw Turkestan as colonizers seeking to bring "civilization" to natives who were perceived as inferior. Critics see the imperial efforts in developing agriculture, education, railways, encouraging colonization, and, no less importantly, transforming the nature of the region, perceived as "lifeless" and alien by Russians, with the help of irrigation, changes in water use, forestation, and modern infrastructure as essentially colonial policy.[5] They argue that the regional policy was often inefficient and inconsistent and reversed the role of the local population who was an active force rather than a passive actor and showed both accommodation and resistance to the actions of the Russian administration.[6]

Nevertheless, scholars agree that Russia gradually began to pay more attention to the economic potential of Turkestan, specifically cotton growing for the domestic textile industry. Since the U.S. was the major cotton producer in the world at the time, Russia looked at it as a reference for establishing cotton cultivation in Turkestan, adopting American cotton seeds and actively purchasing agricultural machinery and cotton gins from the U.S. This eventually led to a cotton "boom" in Turkestan which before the First World War was able to cover almost half of Russian cotton demand. Nevertheless, some scholars emphasized that the growth happened primarily because of the development of market relations and the initiatives of local cotton growers and administrators and questioned earlier accepted claims about the significant role of the state in promoting cotton growing.[7] Besides, despite this progress, Russia still depended on American cotton exports which remained the major article of Russian-American trade. In turn, American entrepreneurs showed increasing interest in local agriculture, irrigation, and mining.[8]

(the second half of the nineteenth – early twentieth centuries)] (Barnaul: Izdatel'stvo Altayskogo gosudarstvennogo universiteta, 2021), 375; Abashin, Arapov, and Bekmakhanova, *Tsentral'naya Aziya*, 27; Pierce, *Russian Central Asia, 1867–1917*, chap. 20.

[5] General contemporary critical works on the period include: Adeeb Khalid, *Central Asia: A New History from the Imperial Conquests to the Present* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2021); Shoshana Keller, *Russia and Central Asia: Coexistence, Conquest, Convergence* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2020). Other scholars look at the region and imperial policy through the lens of environmental history: Julia Obertreis, *Imperial Desert Dreams: Cotton Growing and Irrigation in Central Asia, 1860–1991*, Cultural and Social History of Eastern Europe 8 (Gottingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2017), chap. 1; Maya K. Peterson, *Pipe Dreams: Water and Empire in Central Asia's Aral Sea Basin*, Studies in Environment and History (Cambridge, United Kingdom: Cambridge University Press, 2019); Jennifer Keating, *On Arid Ground: Political Ecologies of Empire in Russian Central Asia* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2022).

[6] Keller, *Russia and Central Asia*, 130–31; Albert Kaganovich, "Nekotoryye problemy tsarskoy kolonizatsii Turkestana [Some problems of the tsarist colonization of Turkestan]," *Tsentral'naya Aziya*, no. 5 (1997): 117–20.

[7] Obertreis, *Imperial Desert Dreams*, 100, 113; Beatrice Penati, "The Cotton Boom and the Land Tax in Russian Turkestan (1880s–1915)," *Kritika: Explorations in Russian and Eurasian History* 14, no. 4 (2013): 773–74, https://doi.org/10.1353/kri.2013.0060.

[8] Norman Saul, *Concord and Conflict: The United States and Russia, 1867–1914* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas,

The development of railroads and tourist infrastructure in Turkestan, economic interest, and awareness about growing cotton cultivation in the region based on American know-how naturally prompted some American travelers to come specifically to Turkestan. Some of them wrote accounts for the home audience based on their travel impressions.

The Authors and Their Travelogues

This article focuses on two American travel accounts. I chose them specifically since they were written by authors from different social groups and with more than a decade difference between their trips. These facts should suggest different takes on the region. Also, they are among the few American travelogues about imperial Turkestan published in book form. The first represents a part of *Siberia and Central Asia* (1899), written by John Bookwalter (1839–1915), a prominent Ohio businessman and philanthropist born in Rob Roy, Indiana. He was involved in banking, the steel industry, and publishing and managed to accumulate considerable wealth, which made it possible for him to engage in philanthropic work in Ohio. Bookwalter was also interested in agriculture, buying up to 65,000 acres of land in Midwestern states and setting agricultural experiments in an attempt to attract people to farm life.[9] He traveled extensively around the world before his trip to Russia, collecting art. He donated a part of his collections to the Cincinnati Art Museum.[10] He undertook a trip along the emerging Trans-Siberian Railway, the Caucasus, and into Turkestan in the summer and autumn of 1898, publishing articles for local newspapers that eventually would be turned into a book.

The other travelogue, *Turkestan: "The Heart of Asia,"* was published in 1911 by journalist, writer, and diplomat William Curtis (1850–1911). Born in Akron, Ohio, he was a reporter, working as an editor and travel correspondent for major Chicago newspapers for most of his life.[11] In the mid-1880s and the early 1890s, he was simultaneously involved in Latin

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1996), 573–75; Viktoriya Zhuravleva, *Ponimaniye Rossii v SShA: obrazy i mify, 1881–1914* [Understanding Russia in the United States: Images and myths, 1881–1914] (Moscow: Rossiyskiy gosudarstvennyy gumanitarnyy universitet, 2012), 927; Aleksandr Savoyskiy, *Rossiya – SShA: 200 let ekonomicheskoy diplomatii (1807–2007)* [Russia – United States: 200 years of economic diplomacy (1807–2007)] (Moscow: RIA-KMV, 2011), 155.

[9] Musetta Gilman, "Bookwalter, Agricultural Commune in Nebraska," *Nebraska History*, no. 54 (1973): 91–105. He wrote a couple of books related to the subject, including *If Not Silver, What?* in 1896, arguing for silver coinage, and *Rural versus Urban* in 1910, where he warned against excessive city building and discussed agriculture in different countries and the principle of "organic" human living.

[10] See John Bookwalter, *Catalogue of Objects Loaned by Mr. John W. Bookwalter, to the Cincinnati Museum Association* (Cincinatti: C. F. Bradley, 1890).

[11] "Curtis, William Elleroy," in *Men and Women of America: A Biographical Dictionary of Contemporaries* (New York: L.R. Hamersly, 1910), 437–38.

American affairs.[12] As a travel correspondent, he traveled regularly around the world and published a dozen book-length travelogues. Among them was a travel account titled *The Land of the Nihilist. Russia: Its People, Its Palaces, Its Politics* (1888). Curtis explored Moscow and St. Petersburg with his wife in 1887 and wrote for the *Chicago Daily News* about the Russian army, religion, education, censorship, police, the exile system, and the private life of the imperial family, concluding that compared to Western Europe the overall condition in Russia "is that of oppression, solemnity, and distrust."[13] From spring to autumn of 1910 he visited Turkestan on assignment for the *Chicago Record-Herald* as part of a bigger trip across the Caucasus and the southern areas of European Russia.[14]

Both Americans traveled by train on the Central Asian Railway (see figure 5). Initially designed for military purposes and called the Transcaspian Railway, the construction began in 1880 and went from the city of Krasnovodsk (present-day Türkmenbashy in Turkmenistan) on the eastern shore of the Caspian Sea. By 1888 the railway reached Samarkand, going through Ashkhabad, the ruins of ancient Merv and the new Russian settlement next to it, Chardjuy (present-day Türkmenabat in Turkmenistan), and Bokhara. Bookwalter crossed the Caspian Sea and traveled all the way to Samarkand. Later the railway was extended to Andijan, with additional lines to the north to Tashkent (the capital of the General-Governorship) and from Merv to Kushka on the Afghan border. In 1899 it was renamed the Central Asian Railway, and that same year its control was transferred from the military to civilian authorities.[15] Curtis traveled across the extended railway from Krasnovodsk to

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[12] Following his public support for the renomination of Chester Arthur at the 1884 Republican convention, Curtis was appointed a member of the Latin American Trade Commission in 1884–1885. This allowed him to visit numerous Latin American countries, and he published his *The Capitals of Spanish America* in 1888, which made him prominent as a specialist in Latin American affairs. He became the executive officer of the first International Conference of American States, the first director of the Bureau of the American Republics, and the manager of the Latin American exhibition at the Chicago World's Fair. As argued by Coates, his activities and writings implied shared Pan-American identity, but at the same time hinted at the U.S. superiority and the possibility to "uplift" Latin America, forming an imperial ideological dimension: Benjamin Coates, "The Pan-American Lobbyist: William Eleroy Curtis and U.S. Empire, 1884–1899," *Diplomatic History* 38, no. 1 (2014): 22–48, https://doi.org/10.1093/dh/dht067.

[13] William Curtis, *The Land of the Nihilist. Russia: Its People, Its Palaces, Its Politics. a Narrative of Travel in the Czar's Dominions* (Chicago: Belford, Clarke, 1888), 323.

[14] As a result of his travels, he published his travel account on Turkestan and the book titled *Around the Black Sea*, which included his impressions during the rest of the trip.

[15] Irina Bochkareva, "Zheleznodorozhnoye stroitel'stvo v strategii Rossiyskoy imperii po osvoyeniyu Turkestana [Railway construction in the Russian Empire's strategy for Turkestan development]," *Izvestiya of Altai State University*, no. 5 (2019): 35–37, https://doi.org/10.14258/izvasu (2019)5-04. Along with the construction of the railroad from Orenburg to Tashkent in 1901–1906, the significance of the railways in the region gradually changed from military to economic.

the east. Since Turkestan was bound by restrictions on foreign travel, both Americans needed permission from the Ministry of War.

Unlike Curtis, Bookwalter was welcomed in all major cities by Russian officials who tried to secure comfortable travel conditions for him, which had a likely influence on his impressions.[16] Neither author knew Russian or any of the native languages, so both hired interpreters or guides (who are barely mentioned in the text) to collect information. This, in turn, limited their understanding of the region. While Curtis had established himself as a popular travel writer, and his account was published by the prominent George H. Doran Company, Bookwalter's book was published privately and intended primarily for his friends, limiting the potential circulation.

Travel Conditions and the Natural Landscape of Turkestan

Bookwalter was assigned a train compartment all for himself and his guide by the officials who expected him to enter Turkestan. In his travel account, he pointed out that the train was painted completely white and consisted of cars of second, third, and fourth class, the latter two for the increasing number of immigrants and native passengers. While its outside appearance was attractive, the interior offered little comfort overall.[17] Curtis took a new first-class car and found it just as comfortable as Pullman sleepers, applauding the railroad's quality and management. However, he complained about the train's slow speed and criticized the restrictions on foreign travel and Russian suspicion toward English-speaking tourists:

> The conductor, porters, and the policeman who accompanied the train were all very attentive, some of them for political and the others for pecuniary reasons. We were under suspicion from the start. The Russians have a delusion that the British government is possessed of an insatiable curiosity to know what is going on in Turkestan, and no Englishman can cross by the Caspian steamers without being subjected to most annoying espionage.[18]

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[16] Curtis got his permit from the Ministry of War with the help and introduction letters by Roman Rosen (Russian ambassador in the U.S.), Nikolay Charykov (Russian Ambassador in the Ottoman Empire) and William Rockhill (American Ambassador in Russia). At first abandoning the idea of traveling to Turkestan, Bookwalter received his permission "in a wonderfully short space of time" allegedly from the Ministry of the Interior with the help of American Ambassador in Russia Ethan Hitchcock after finishing his journey across the Caucasus. He also met with the Governor-General of the Caucasus Grigory Golitsyn to discuss the subject. Unfortunately, so far, I cannot say decisively why Bookwalter was given such a favorable reception.

[17] John Bookwalter, *Siberia and Central Asia* (New York: J. J. Little, 1899), 386.

[18] William Curtis, *Turkestan: "The Heart of Asia"* (New York: George H. Doran, 1911), 29.

In their thoughts on the region's landscape, both Americans focused on deserts and steppe areas traversed by nomads and irrigated areas and oases with water that supported the settled population. For Bookwalter, the oases of Turkestan often reminded him of those of the Nile area that he had visited before, and he believed that in the past there were more water sources and cultivated areas in the region.[19] Curtis shared this reflection by describing the ancient and medieval history of the region, arguing that huge armies like that of Alexander of Macedon would not have been able to go so far to the north without a constant source of water among the many rivers that existed in the past.[20] The entire region reminded Curtis of the southwestern U.S. states as well as certain areas of Latin America, on account of his previous experience.

Both authors often rejoiced about their arrival in an oasis area after a long and exhausting journey through the desert, even though it was done by modern means of transport. Upon seeing an oasis for the first time, Curtis compared it for his readers to the way Americans would feel when they crossed from the "dusty desert" of Southern California into an irrigated "paradise of orange groves."[21] On the way from ancient Merv to Chardjuy, Bookwalter emphasized the desert's emptiness by claiming, "scarcely a vestige of vegetation exists through this long and dreary waste; the flight of a solitary bird or the sight of a lone shrub in the distance only emphasized the horrible desolation."[22] He created a noticeable contrast upon arrival in Chardjuy thanks to the city's location near the Amu Darya:

> The magician's art can scarcely produce an effect more startling than that which followed our sudden transition from the desert, with its torrid heat and blinding sands, to the cool shady groves, the lovely gardens and smiling landscapes in the charming valley of the Amu-Daria. So abrupt was the change that it seemed the work of enchantment.[23]

Both travelers expressed their belief in the potential of the region due to the high fertility of the soil, even in the desert, and claimed that Turkestan would benefit greatly as soon as water was made more accessible and irrigation was expanded. They discussed the possible

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[19] Bookwalter, *Siberia and Central Asia*, 398.

[20] Curtis, *Turkestan*, 53. To strengthen his argument, he cited the results of the Carnegie Institution expedition in Turkestan in 1903–1904 led by geologist Raphael Pumpelly, whose aim was to study the region's archaeology and find traces of ancient civilizations in Turkestan and the reasons behind their decline.

[21] Curtis, 31; For connections between travel writing and the desert, see: Roslynn Haynes, "Travel Writing and the Desert," in *The Cambridge History of Travel Writing*, ed. Nandini Das and Tim Youngs (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2019), 315–29.

[22] Bookwalter, *Siberia and Central Asia*, 452–53.

[23] Bookwalter, 454.

redirection of the Amu Darya and the Syr Darya and the construction of a canal between the Aral and the Caspian Seas. Bookwalter was hopeful of the rapid future agricultural development in the region and was informed that the Russian government had plans to connect the Aral and the Caspian Seas. He imagined the results of such an undertaking:

> The contemplation of cosmic changes so vast, wrought by the erosions of time, suggesting the ultimate removal of the earth's inequalities, teaches anew the lesson that all things seem to be travelling toward a final, and perhaps an eternal, equilibrium.[24]

Curtis also lauded the potential of the soil, calling it "one of those inexplicable mysteries of nature" when the repulsive desert turns into a beautiful area thanks to water.[25] He hinted that Turkestan might experience the same changes as the southwestern states after Americans arrived and worked hard to make those lands ready for cultivation. Early in the journey, he summarized his impressions, elaborating on the region's settlement similarly to that of the closed American frontier:

> Excepting the enormous adobe fortifications which the Turkomans thought would enable them to resist the Russian invasion, the camels, and the fantastic costumes which the people wear, Central Asia looks exactly like Arizona; and the similarity is emphasized now and then when the train passes through an oasis with orchards like the orange groves around Riverside, and fields of grain and alfalfa, and vegetable gardens wherever water has been brought. … There is room for many millions of people upon land within twenty miles on either side of the railway track, and the bright green spots on the landscape show what they might do.[26]

Both authors thus create a dichotomy between empty steppes and deserts as opposed to irrigated and cultivated areas in favor of the potential increase of the latter, emphasizing and justifying the need for the appropriation and cultivation of land, similarly to some of Russian imperial administrators.[27] They also invite American readers to look at Turkestan through the lens of the settlement of the North American continent, especially the American West.

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[24] Bookwalter, 461.
[25] Curtis, *Turkestan*, 42.
[26] Curtis, 39–40.
[27] David Spurr, *The Rhetoric of Empire: Colonial Discourse in Journalism, Travel Writing, and Imperial Administration*, Post-Contemporary Interventions (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1993), 31, 160–61.

The Cities of Turkestan

The Central Asian Railway, with its growing economic significance, eventually connected major cities of the region. Some of them were built from scratch by Russians (such as Krasnovodsk, Ashkhabad, and the new city near the old ruins of Merv), while in ancient cities like Tashkent and Samarkand they created a separate district with European urban planning and design next to the native settlement.

Both authors first arrived in Krasnovodsk on the eastern shore of the Caspian Sea. Bookwalter was enchanted by the local railway station which combined Western and Eastern design. This combination made him think of the ultimate synthesis of the West and the East and a "neutral state of races," where "the softening idealism of the East will give a soul to the inflexible materiality of the West, which in return will impart a substance to Oriental dreams and abstractions."[28] Curtis, in contrast, compared this city with mining towns in the southwestern states and those in Chile. And, in his view, while this city was important as a major transportation hub and had no vulgar places like saloons in the American West, it was deemed to be uninteresting.[29]

In their descriptions of Ashkhabad, both authors made comments that they would repeat for all other Russian cities, whether new or next to native settlements. Bookwalter took note of the high amount of foliage in the urban design and access to water and outlined the positive economic role of the city:

> Like all new Russian towns in these regions, it has wide, well-paved streets, and beautiful avenues of trees, with a stream of running water on either side of the streets. Having an abundance of water, supplied by a stream descending from the adjacent mountains, most of which is used for irrigation, Askabad has become the centre of a large and highly productive agricultural region.[30]

Curtis too described Ashkhabad as "a splotch of green upon the desert" and mentioned all that was perceived as modern in his mind: wide paved streets, schools, museums, theaters, newspapers, retail shops, and other urban features. He similarly emphasized the gardens, groves, and rows of trees, concluding that the population here was prosperous.

Later both authors contrasted the new city of Merv and the nearby abandoned ruins of the ancient city. They again lauded the design and the greenery of the recently established

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[28] Bookwalter, *Siberia and Central Asia*, 383–84.
[29] Curtis, *Turkestan*, 17.
[30] Bookwalter, *Siberia and Central Asia*, 417.

town. While Curtis claimed that the ancient ruins did not contain any notion of Eastern romance immortalized in Thomas Moore poem *Lalla Rookh,* Bookwalter, as if in contrast, visualized the former significance of ancient Merv as follows:

> It baffles the imagination to conceive, or the tongue to describe, the wide prospect of ruin and desolation that spreads before the view. Extending in all directions as far as the eye can reach, there is nothing but great heaps of rubbish, crumbling walls and buildings, broken arches, with here and there the half-preserved ruins of some majestic edifice towering over all, and standing like a solemn, solitary sentinel to guard the sad remains of former splendor and greatness.[31]

Bokhara was the only major city on the railway where, due to the protectorate status of the Bokhara Emirate, there was no distinctive Russian quarter. Bookwalter found little of interest in the town except massive walls that surrounded it and strange local customs like prohibiting the population from entering or exiting the city during the night. However, he admitted that there also were multiple merits in Bokhara, including few crimes in general as well as the temperance of the population, which he linked with the prohibition efforts in his home country.[32] Curtis also praised some of the habits of the population, their tidiness, and colorful clothes, and showed a notable interest in the city's bazaars. However, he was sarcastic about the Bokhara's identification as "the Noble, the Sublime" by the locals in the past in view of the degradation of its mosques, neglected buildings, and the lack of foliage that he saw in person:

> But if anybody should start out to search for the sublime in Bokhara to-day he would become more and more disheartened as he proceeded. It is in all respects the most antiquated, the most depraved, the ugliest, and the least progressive city in Turkestan, although there are fascinations in such places that more enterprising and attractive cities do not possess.[33]

Both Americans described major mosques, squares, bazaars, and dwellings of the population in Samarkand and Tashkent, again contrasting the new and the old. Bookwalter finished his narration with Samarkand, where he saw the Russian part filled with green spaces, claiming that "in fact, a more perfect sylvan city would be hard to imagine."[34] Concerning

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[31] Bookwalter, 439.
[32] Bookwalter, 487–88.
[33] Curtis, *Turkestan*, 119.
[34] Bookwalter, *Siberia and Central Asia*, 494–95, 498.

the ancient city, he witnessed some ruins that evoked only its glorious past. Still, he believed that some of the major mosques, the local madrasa, the buildings of the city's Registan (public square), the famous mausoleum of Tamerlane (Gur-e-Amir), and other architectural masterpieces could "produce an indescribably charming effect" upon a foreign traveler.[35]

Curtis lauded the richness of the Russian part of Samarkand in trees, groves, and all kinds of modern establishments. In his opinion, it was the "finest of all the Russian settlements in Asia," surpassed only by Tashkent. The ancient city, however, reminded him of "a crippled giant fallen helpless by the wayside," where many buildings and almost all places of interest except the Gur-e-Amir were in decay, the bazaars were not so interesting, and the locals were indifferent to their city's development. His general thoughts read as follows:

> There is not a trace of ancient splendour in the old city. I did not see one decent looking building, nor one which seemed to have been erected or repaired by the present generation. … Everything is dilapidated and filthy, but, oh, how picturesque! The riot of colour in costumes, the Oriental types of faces, the camels, the donkeys, the *droskys*, the highwheeled carts, and the peasants loaded with the produce of their farms and gardens, which they bring to market on their backs. … No matter how humble or hungry a man may be, and even if he have but a single garment, that is made of the most brilliantly coloured material he can find.[36]

Later, while visiting Kokand, Curtis again praised the new part of the city and stated that it was more interesting than the old "because it represents life and progress" and since "there is something doing every day in the development of natural resources and in extending the wealth-producing capacity of the country."[37] Only in Tashkent was he attracted to native districts, and the major reason for his positive evaluation was the city's foliage and the accessibility of water.[38]

In conclusion, both authors see the cities of Turkestan with a clear distinction between ancient and modern. The development and "progress" are equated primarily with new Russian cities or districts that had visible economic growth, Western urban facilities, modern infrastructure, and, no less importantly, greenery and water supply. They mostly contrast the favorable image of these new settlements with either stagnation or outright devastation in ancient native cities despite occasional curiosity about the places of interest and the local population.

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[35] Bookwalter, 506.
[36] Curtis, *Turkestan*, 230.
[37] Curtis, 314.
[38] Curtis, 296.

Turkestan's Native Population

Both authors describe the same major ethnic groups, namely the Kirghiz (or more precisely Kirghiz-Kaisak, an earlier name adopted by many Russians for contemporary Kazakhs), Uzbeks, Turkmens, as well as Sarts in their travelogues.[39] The two American authors focused on the status of the native peoples as settled or nomad, their activities, appearance, accommodation, character, religion, and occasionally on the position of women.

Both authors were impressed by the appearance and physical strength of the Turkmens, whom they saw as Muslim nomads and cattle breeders. Bookwalter admired their physical power, their beautiful tents, and their strong character and linked them with the impact of the desert.[40] In his observation, Turkmen women liked colorful rich clothes, but Bookwalter also outlined their acceptance of polygamy and wife purchasing. These two customs signified "the ancient patriarchal traces of the Eastern races."[41] For Curtis, Turkmen men looked fierce, while their faces resembled those of the Chinese and the Koreans. Though they were illiterate, some of them were wealthy; and though loyal to their wives, the Turkmens often saw them as "slaves." He compared them to Bedouins in Arab countries in their lifestyle and praised their bravery, with Russians employing them as a cavalry militia after the conquest of the region. He admired the personal traits of Turkmens but did not go beyond the "noble savage" stereotype:

> In their fights with the Russians the Turkomans have shown marvellous bravery but no military skill, and it is acknowledged that on equal terms, among semi-savages of their own class, they are masters of the art of war, resembling the North American Indian more than the Eastern races to which they are related. And, while they have no codes of morals or standards of honour to advertise, travellers who have passed much time among them and people who have employed their services testify to their loyalty, hospitality, and truth.[42]

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[39] The term "Sarts" was often used since the Russian conquest of Turkestan, but it presented considerable definition difficulties for contemporaries and still causes debates whether they were a separate ethnicity, a synonym to Tajiks or Uzbeks, or a term used to identify the majority of the settled population of the region, see: Sergey Abashin, "Problema sartov v russkoy istoriografii XIX – pervoy chetverti XX v. [The problem of Sarts in Russian historiography of the nineteenth – first quarter of the twentieth centuries]," in *Natsionalizmy v Sredney Azii: v poiskakh identichnosti* [Nationalisms in Central Asia: Searching for identity] (St. Petersburg: Aleteyya, 2007).

[40] Bookwalter, *Siberia and Central Asia*, 404; Bookwalter's perceptions corresponded to many Western notions about the inhabitants of the desert, see: Rune Graulund, "Deserts," in *The Routledge Companion to Travel Writing*, ed. Carl Thompson (London: Routledge, 2016), 435–36.

[41] Bookwalter, *Siberia and Central Asia*, 407.

[42] Curtis, *Turkestan*, 43–44.

Americans wrote similarly of the Kirghiz (Kazakhs) that they were mostly pastoral people who lived in yourtas, and that they were hospitable, courageous, and respectful to women and their families. Bookwalter interacted with them earlier during his trip on the Trans-Siberian Railway, whereas it is questionable that Curtis saw them in person. While Bookwalter considered them to be dignified and called them "a splendid race," Curtis thought of them in a way as children, affectionate and easy-going, but untruthful and unreliable in their words. In his view, they also lived the lifestyle of Arab Bedouins but rarely engaged in religious activity. He also claimed that they had "no history, no literature; scarcely a written language," concluding that they were "a dying race."[43]

Both authors barely mentioned Uzbeks but focused instead on Sarts. Bookwalter believed that Sarts were the population of Samarkand and nearby areas. For him, they seemed to be a mix between the Tartars and the Chinese and excellent sedentary farmers. Nevertheless, he visibly separated himself from their culture and, overall, from the native "Other" after he was invited to a dinner in the company of Sart and Russian officials in Samarkand and experienced local music and dances. He went as far as comparing their arts to those of African Americans:

> I wish I were sufficiently versed in music to make an effort to determine wherein lies the charm of the music of the East, since it certainly has a decided charm for the Oriental ear, as they always listen to it in a dreamy silence. I am inclined to think that it is due to its rhythm, producing a sort of hypnotic spell upon the hearer. To the influence of rhythm is evidently due that strange entrancement displayed by the dancing and howling dervishes of the East, and the somewhat similar mental and emotional state shown by the negro in America on certain occasions of high religious excitement.[44]

Contrary to Bookwalter, Curtis was impressed by Sarts whom he defined differently throughout the text.[45] He applauded their cleanliness, behavior, and desire for education, in which they reminded him of the Japanese. His impressions of the young Sart residents

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[43] Curtis, 98.

[44] Bookwalter, *Siberia and Central Asia*, 538–39.

[45] Curtis, *Turkestan*, 78, 293. At one point, he claimed that they were the inhabitants of Samarkand, whereas later believed that this term described the population of all cities, but was more precisely applied to "inhabitants of the former khanate at Samarkand to distinguish them from the people of Khiva, Bokhara, and other neighbours" (even though the Samarkand Khanate never existed, and Samarkand was part of the Bokhara Emirate before the Russian conquest). Such volatile descriptions and mistakes can be attributed to the fact that his book is a compilation of articles that were evidently poorly edited.

in Tashkent complemented his positive evaluation of the native city, primarily because he saw natives adopting Western values:

> They [children] are clothed like grown people, wearing the same pattern of garments, and imitate them [their parents] in their manners. Their gravity is amusing. You never saw anything more solemn than a Sart baby, unless it is a Japanese infant, and instead of running after strangers and clamouring for "backsheesh," as the children of other Eastern cities do, the boys and girls of Tashkend return your greetings with the grace of a Chesterfield and are as serious as undertakers.[46]

Nevertheless, Curtis attributed the perceived degradation of buildings and mosques in other native cities, passive and ignorant inhabitants, and the lack of modern education among the Muslim population to religion. He came to a derogatory conclusion about Islam:

> You would think there would be sufficient pride, piety, and patriotism in the Mohammedan world to perpetuate monuments and institutions chiefly ecclesiastic in their origin and purpose, but the same conditions appear in every country where Islam prevails, except in Constantinople, Cairo, and one or two other cities. Islam is a dying religion. It has reached a hopeless stage of decay, if the appearance of its mosques and meddresses, its shrines, the mausoleums of its saints, its cemeteries, and other public institutions may be accepted as evidence.[47]

In sum, both authors entertain the stereotypical image of the Orient based on the discourse of race, character, and the "civilization"/savagery dichotomy. Though at times they do write about some of the natives sympathetically, they do not associate themselves with the native "Other." They tend to compare the local population to Arabs, Asians, and African or Native Americans depending on their lifestyle. Unless the natives were trying to look and behave Western-like, both authors implied their exoticism or inferiority. In contrast, as shown in the next section, Russia is presented by both authors as a "civilizing" and creative force.

[46] Curtis, 296.
[47] Curtis, 226.

The Colonial and Economic Policy of Russia

Naturally, both American authors described and evaluated the local economy and the regional policy of the empire. Early in his account, even before he entered Turkestan, Bookwalter argued that he did not see Russia as a passive or "non-progressive" country. In his view, the economic development both in Siberia and Central Asia demonstrated a considerable advance. Writing in the 1890s, Bookwalter believed in the gradual emergence of cotton culture in the region, based on what he saw in the Merv oasis and Bokhara. He noticed that much of the agricultural machinery used by the locals was imported from America. He expressed hope for friendly Russian-American relations and urged further participation of his home country in the economic development of the Asian regions of Russia:

> Considering the immense population of this country, its long and steadfast friendship for America, and the still further fact that in order to develop her own incalculable resources and those of the other Asiatic nations into which she is carrying her influence, there must be created wants far in excess of her own ability to supply, thus necessitating extensive purchases from other nations, it seems evident that, by a proper effort on our part, this, of all countries in the world, could become the most important and profitable field for American enterprise.[48]

Curtis gave a more detailed evaluation of the subject matter two decades later. He dedicated a considerable portion of his account to cotton growing and observed that the government and individuals alike did much to promote it so that soon Turkestan cotton might rival American production. He was similarly content to see American machinery in use in Turkestan, and more broadly American influence in the region, noting the episode when he allegedly saw the portrait of Theodore Roosevelt in one of Tashkent's villas on the Fourth of July. While Curtis applauded the progress of cotton cultivation, he criticized the restrictions set by the Russian government on foreign capital that resulted in slower development of heavy industries. Similarly, because of the state restrictions any foreign prospector of natural resources "is apt to perish before he gets very far."[49] He used the occasion to add a remark on the relations between local Russian entrepreneurs and Jews, claiming that "the persecution of the Jews in Russia has never been due to religious prejudice, but to professional and commercial jealousy."[50]

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[48] Bookwalter, *Siberia and Central Asia*, 385.
[49] Curtis, *Turkestan*, 310.
[50] Curtis, 175–76.

The authors differed in their assumptions on the Russian policy toward natives. Bookwalter applauded the fact that in Turkestan the railway stations and Russian quarters were at a distance from native ones. In his view, this would make the local population adapt to "civilization" more gradually and voluntarily, relying on what he called the "Oriental process of slow absorption, rather than the more modern one of pressure and compulsion."[51] He concluded that the Russian policy was beneficial and assumed that the natives might be fully assimilated:

> It seems to be her policy to allow the older communities and cities the fullest possible freedom to enjoy and exercise their ancient rights, customs, and habits; and to this end she seeks to avoid those violent shocks, changes, and disturbances that must inevitably result from bringing into an unduly near position the influences of a new and too often incongruous civilization. By this precaution the two will ultimately, insensibly, and peacefully merge, the one by gradual decline, and the other through a steady advance.[52]

The views of Curtis on the subject are more ambivalent. He stated that Russia brought peace to the region and acknowledged the natives' traditions and customs. He applauded the Russian goal to settle down nomads, while the railway that Curtis took represented for him a major "civilizing" tool, with apparent parallels to the influence of the railways in the American West. He believed that in material terms Russians also brought benefits to the native population. By improving the welfare of natives and imposing certain restrictions on Russians in their business interactions with them (such as a ban on alcohol sales), the Turkestan administration set a favorable example compared to the British rule in South Africa and India and the attitude of his compatriots to Native Americans.[53]

However, in his view, Russian rule also rested on the display of force, considerable garrisons in major cities, and the memories of brutal military victories against the natives. Further comparing Turkestan to nearby British India, Curtis believed that, unlike the Viceroy in India who was a constant victim of British public opinion and was restricted in his authority, the General-Governor of Turkestan had autocratic powers, even if he used them as an effective imperial administrator. And while the British appealed to "moral suasion" in India, the Russians, after ruthlessly defeating the natives and ensuring their obedience, offered the best of them to integrate into the ranks of the military and state

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[51] Bookwalter, *Siberia and Central Asia*, 425.
[52] Bookwalter, 425.
[53] Curtis, *Turkestan*, 38, 114, 131–32.

elite. Curtis connected this policy to the character of the native population, arguing that the superstitious locals accepted the Russian approach as "the all-powerful will of Allah."[54]

While Curtis recognized and approved Russian administrative reforms, general material development in the region, as well as irrigation and forestation efforts, he criticized the Russian government for the absence of improvements in education and overall "enlightenment" of the population, leaving their (native) lifestyle at their discretion. In concluding remarks, Curtis questioned the benefits of the absence of direct state interference in the lives of the locals:

> I suppose the people of Turkestan in their habits of life and costumes are not much different to-day from what they were at the time of Tamerlane. There has been little change since the Russian conquest, and it seems to be the intention of that government to keep them as they are. This will afford an interesting and unique experiment in civilization. The question is, what will happen to those ten millions of people, who are permitted or required to remain in their ancient condition, while the rest of the world is developing so rapidly?[55]

Thus, both authors see the Russian conduct in the region as a "civilizing mission" that improves the living conditions of natives, with varying degrees of success for Curtis. Yet considering his previous negative conclusions about Russia in his late 1880s travelogue, the fact that Curtis changed his view is noteworthy. Both authors also deny the natives themselves the opportunity to develop their economy and culture on their own and are visibly satisfied with the degree of American economic influence in the region. The topics discussed so far showcase what I designated as the "imperial view." It incorporates the American desire to transform the nature of distant foreign lands for economic development, the acknowledgment of the empire's "civilizing" role and its capability for modernizing its remote regions, and the hopes for increasing American economic presence in Russia.

Russia in Asian Geopolitics

Both travelers offered their take on the role of Turkestan in foreign affairs. The two Americans shared the opinion that the conquest of the region created more tension between Russia and Britain and pointed out Russian plans to build additional railroads in Turkestan

[54] Curtis, 55.
[55] Curtis, 337.

with potential access to British India, Persia, and Afghanistan, which would ensure Russian supremacy in Asia. Bookwalter was glad that America pursued the policy of neutrality *vis-à-vis* European empires. He argued that in case of an all-out conflict, the advantageous geographic position of the U.S. would help it "escape the deplorable consequences that are certain to grow out of the entangling relations and alliances that harass and plague less fortunate nations."[56] He accepted the rising influence of Russia in Asia, while the "appointed destiny" of his country was to dominate in the Western Hemisphere. However, he evaluated Asian geopolitics based on solely Russo-British rivalry, without mentioning other important powers like Japan. Accordingly, he regularly ridiculed British imperial policy:

> The extreme sensitiveness displayed by this great nation – which upon all other questions preserves such an admirable equipoise – whenever Russia makes the least movement eastward, presents a strange spectacle. No matter what that nation may do, she seems to regard every incident and event, however remote, to which Russia is related, as a direct menace to India.[57]

While Curtis compared Turkestan and British India earlier, he indicated the mutual distrust between Russia and Britain despite the formation of the Triple Entente by 1907. In his view, the British Empire was frustrated by Russian railroad building plans in Asia and "almost frightened out of her wits whenever she sees the cap of a Russian soldier approaching boundary lines," whereas Russians were suspicious of any English-speaking traveler in Turkestan.[58] Unlike Bookwalter, he saw Russian foreign policy as aggressive and expansionist and claimed that even the agreement with Britain and the defeat in the Russo-Japanese War "has not caused any change in the Czar's determination to annex Persia, Manchuria and ultimately India, to his empire."[59]

Visual Materials and Factual Errors

While Curtis published a selective range of around thirty photos taken by another American correspondent, John McCutcheon, who visited the region in 1906, Bookwalter's book is filled with around a hundred photos taken personally throughout the trip in Turkestan. In

[56] Bookwalter, *Siberia and Central Asia*, 278.
[57] Bookwalter, 290.
[58] Curtis, *Turkestan*, 17.
[59] Curtis, 336–37.

Russian cities or districts both authors included general views with foliage and Western-like streets, presenting them from a favorable angle (figure 1).

Figure 1. "Street in the Russian City of Ashkhabad," in William Curtis, *Turkestan: "The Heart of Asia"* (New York: George H. Doran, 1911), 49.

In native towns both books show photos of the daily life of its inhabitants like trade or prayer, major places of interest like mosques or bazaars, but also their more neglected parts and ruins, including those of ancient Merv. The authors included pictures of natives in their traditional costumes, and while Bookwalter took many pictures in the street, Curtis published several full-size portraits where the entire dress and facial features can be seen (figures 2 and 3). All of the published images of natives were taken at a distance and not a single one shows the authors themselves together with the locals, allowing the readers to "gaze" at them from a comfortable gap.

Figure 2. "Market Scene in Samarkand," in John Bookwalter, *Siberia and Central Asia* (New York: J. J. Little, 1899), 529.

Figure 3. "Guardian of the Tomb of Tamerlane," in William Curtis, *Turkestan: "The Heart of Asia"* (New York: George H. Doran, 1911), 272.

Bookwalter presented numerous images of landscapes, ranging from empty and uninhabited deserts to irrigated areas with agricultural activity. While Curtis did not showcase the natural landscape of the region, he incorporated several pictures of cotton warehouses and the transportation of cotton instead. With this, both Americans showed a clear interest in the economic development of the region. The authors also included one or two pictures of Muslim women in public. Curtis presented a picture of a woman riding independently with her veil covering everything but eyes, while Bookwalter showed a photo of several women sitting on a cart driven by a man. The author saw this as a custom of wealthy natives taking their wives outside "on an airing" (figure 4). Overall, the photos included by both authors seem to complement the imagined contrast between the exoticism of the Orient and the "civilization" that Russia is bringing.

Figure 4. "A Queer Equipage. A Mohammedan and His Wives Out for a Drive," in John Bookwalter, *Siberia and Central Asia* (New York: J. J. Little, 1899). 527.

Both accounts have factual errors that demonstrate the superficial knowledge of the authors about Turkestan. As an example, Bookwalter wrongly claimed that the Tilya Kori Madrasa in Samarkand was the creation of Tamerlan (in reality it was built in the seventeenth century). Also, while he correctly assumed that the Bibi Khanum Mosque in the same city

was built during Tamerlan's reign and named after his wife Saray Mulk Khanum, he called the latter a "Chinese Princess" which she was not. Curtis made even more mistakes, both related to dates (including the construction of the Central Asian Railway, the Sher-Dor Madrasa, and the Tilya Kori Madrasa in Samarkand), as well as more general historical facts, such as confusing Khiva Khanate with the Kokand Khanate when writing about the Russian conquest of the region. He often gave contradictory information, such as the definition of Sarts mentioned earlier or presenting Genghis Khan as a Mongol early in the account while later noting that he was Chinese. These flaws demonstrate that his account is a compilation of articles that were rather poorly edited.

Conclusion

A businessman and an established travel writer and diplomat, regardless of social background and more than a decade gap between their journeys, wrote about Turkestan in a strikingly similar manner. Their views were influenced by social Darwinism and beliefs in the worldwide progress of "civilization" and the hierarchy of peoples of the world, common among many Americans at the turn of the century. The rapid economic and social development of their home country also gave them confidence as travelers in their perceptions of the outside world. Both take an open "imperial view" of the region akin to some of the Russian administrators and intellectuals of the time and present the Russian Empire as a creative force and part of the Western world. Russia received praise from both authors for its ability to transform the "empty" natural landscape of Turkestan into economic development by encouraging agriculture and irrigation. Their claims invoke in the American readership the creation of major waterways like the Erie Canal and the irrigation of deserts in the southwestern states. The two Americans also recognize Russia's ability and willingness to establish modern Western cities (which are preferred over ancient ones) as well as to "elevate" the natives. The description of the latter explicitly reflects the prevailing belief in the superiority of Anglo-Saxons and the West over the East as well as the importance of Christianity for Curtis as a more "progressive" religion, in light of his Islamophobic comments cited above. Briefly, both travelers projected the settlement of the North American continent and America's own imagined ability and right to "civilize" regions and peoples deemed inferior (including Native Americans and the population of Cuba and the Philippines after the Spanish-American War) on the Russian presence in Turkestan.

Although both travelers take the "imperial view" of Turkestan, their insecurities and criticism of the U.S. are also present. Both authors outlined the sobriety of natives as a positive trait in view of the struggle for temperance (prohibition) at home, while Curtis

conceded that the treatment of natives by Russians was at times more preferable to the way the British governed in India and to the treatment of Native Americans. Thus, the authors use Turkestan as a "mirror" to reflect Anglo-Saxon colonialism and Progressive reforms.

Yet there is a major difference between the two accounts. As a businessman, Bookwalter offers rather simplified conclusions about the geopolitics of the region while displaying anti-British sentiments (popular among some Americans on account of the Alaska boundary and fishery disputes at the turn of the century) rather than a serious take on the affairs in Asia. In a travel account that he published in 1899, he did not even mention Japan. Curtis possessed considerable diplomatic experience and viewed the U.S. as a potential imperial force in East Asia and Latin America. He was keenly aware of Anglo-Japanese and Anglo-American rapprochement in the 1900s, and the cooling of Russian-American relations after the Russian defeat in the Russo-Japanese War. Unlike Bookwalter, he takes a pro-British stance in foreign affairs and is more critical of Russian policy in Turkestan, especially when comparing it to British India.

Their praise for Russia's "civilizing role" in Turkestan is similar to the conclusions of those Americans who took a train along the Trans-Siberian Railway and wrote about Siberia. However, the presentation of Russia as a creative force in the Asian regions of the country is in striking contrast with other American travel accounts of the time, including the ones penned during and after the 1891–1892 famine, when Russians, especially the peasants, were themselves presented as backward. Yet, whether in European Russia or elsewhere, Curtis, Bookwalter followed other American travelers at the turn of the century in acting as self-appointed heralds and supporters of increasing the economic influence of the U.S. in the empire.

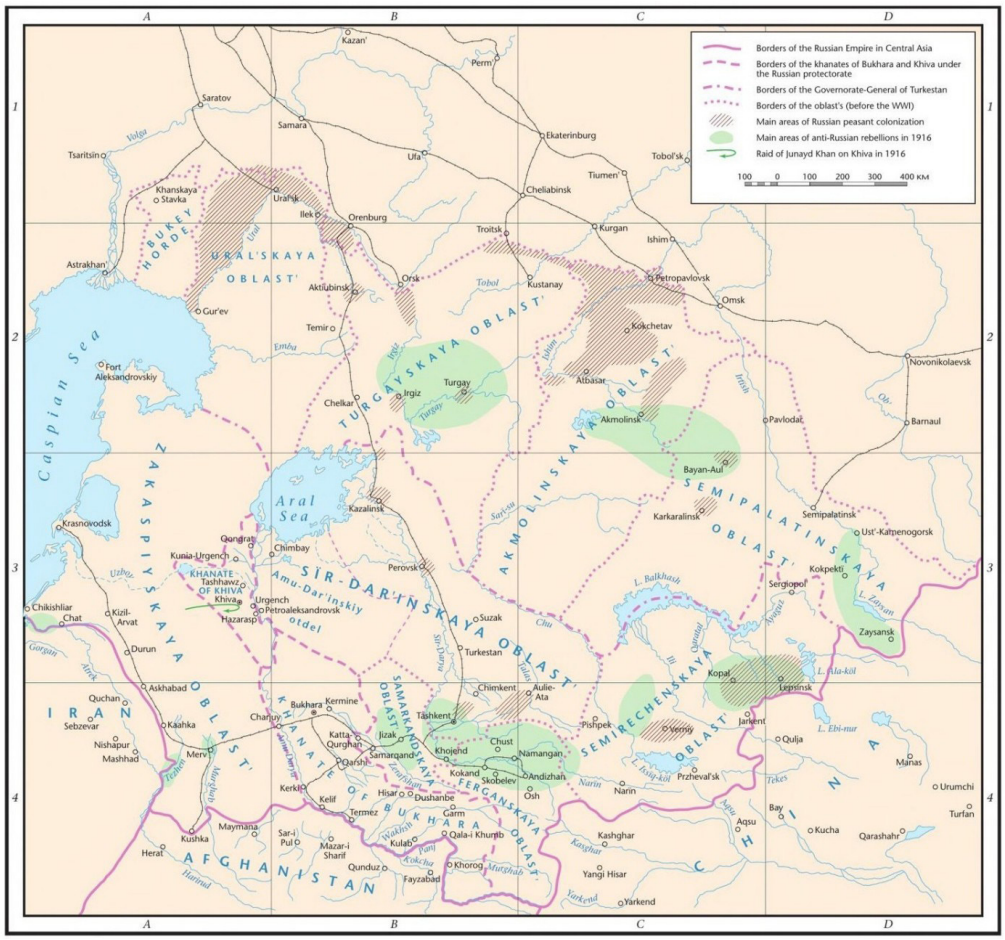

Figure 5. Bregel, Yuri. *The End of the 19th and the Early 20th Centuries: Western Turkestan Under Russian Rule* [map]. In: Yuri Bregel, *An Historical Atlas of Central Asia* (Leiden: Brill, 2003), 91.

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Comments Attached to the Briand-Kellogg Pact

Pro&Contra 7

No. 2 (2023) 33–50

https://doi.org/10.33033/pc.2023.2.33

Abstract

The Briand-Kellogg Pact was signed in Paris on 27 August 1928, which was an important step for international law, especially for the process of the prohibition of the use of force. The contracting states of the Pact renounced the use of war as a national political instrument and pledged to settle their disputes henceforth by peaceful means. The signing and entry into force of the Pact were preceded by considerable preparatory work, during which the contracting parties made different notes, which were then attached to the treaty. The classification of these comments is not uniform throughout scholarly literature. Some authors consider that the statements can be regarded as reservations, while other sources refer to them as interpretative declarations. For legal and historical reasons it is highly important to find the correct classification for the comments. Therefore, the aim of this study is to analyze which of the two categories the notes would qualify based on the intention of the contracting parties and the nature and the content of the comments.

Keywords: Briand-Kellogg Pact, international treaty, interpretative declaration, reservation, renunciation of war

Introduction

On 27 August 1928, an international treaty on the renunciation of war, also known as the Briand-Kellogg Pact or the Pact of Paris (hereinafter: Pact), was signed in Paris, in which the contracting parties renounced the use of war as a national political instrument and pledged to settle their disputes peacefully.[1] The signing and entry into force of the agreement were preceded by considerable preparatory work, during which the contracting parties expressed their views on the treaty in the form of various notes. These comments are extremely important from the aspect of the effect and application of the Pact. Despite their importance, the classification of the comments is not uniform throughout the literature. Some authors consider that the statements can be regarded as reservations,[2] while other

[1] Kellogg-Briand Pact, France-United States [1928]," in *Encyclopaedia Britannica*. https://www.britannica.com/event/Kellogg-Briand-Pact. (hereinafter: Encyclopaedia Britannica)

[2] These authors include among others: Ian Brownlie, *International Law and the Use of Force by States* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1963), 82. and Yoram Dinstein, *War, Aggression and Self-Defence* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011) 85-86.

sources refer to them as interpretative declarations.[3] In addition, there are authors who do not want to classify the comments and rather use a neutral term for them, such as statements or explanations.[4]

The aim of this study is to explore which of the above positions can be considered correct. For this purpose, the study analyzes whether the statements in question can be classified as reservations or whether it is more appropriate to describe the comments as interpretative declarations. In order to answer this, the study first describes the circumstances in which the Pact was concluded, then presents the content of the agreement. Lastly, it analyzes the content and the nature of the comments of the parties. The opinion of the author about the correct classification of the comments will be presented at the end of the study, until then the expressions of notes and comments are used.

The conclusion and the content of the Pact

The process of conclusion

The treaty renouncing war was the result of a French initiative. After the First World War France wanted to strengthen its security system on all sides. Cooperation with European states was guaranteed by the League of Nations and the Treaty of Locarno, but these did not provide full protection. The dispute settlement mechanism of the League of Nations had major shortcomings and the Locarno Pact provided only limited cooperation.[5] These reasons and the fact that the United States was not a party to either of these conventions, led France to consolidate its relationship with the United States. For this purpose the French Foreign Minister Aristide Briand wrote an open letter to the United States on 6 April 1927 about renouncing the use of war in their relations by a bilateral agreement.[6]

The US Secretary of State Frank B. Kellogg answered for the proposal on 28 December 1927 and declared that all the principal powers of the world should renounce

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[3] Among these, the following sources can be mentioned as an example: Lassa Oppenheim, *International Law. A Treatise. Vol. II. Disputes, War and Neutrality (*London: Longmans Green and Co., 1944), 149. and André N. Mandelstam, *L'interprétation du Pacte Briand-Kellogg par les gouvernements et les parlements des États signataires* (Paris: Éditions A. Pedone, 1934).

[4] For example, William W. Bishop refers to the notes simply as statements. William W. Bishop, "Reservations to treaties," *Recueil des cours de l'Académie de droit international de La Haye*, no. 103 (1962): 307–309.

[5] The treaty was signed by Belgium, France, Great Britain, Germany and Italy on 16 October 1925 at the Locarno Conference.

[6] Cécile Balbareu, *Le Pacte de Paris. Pacte Briand-Kellogg sur la mise de la guerre hors la loi* (Paris: Librairie Universitaire, 1929), 25.

war as an instrument of national policy by mutual declaration.[7] The United States thus wanted to create a multilateral treaty open to many states. In response to the idea of the US, France proposed on 5 January 1928 that the governments of the two states should conclude a bilateral treaty, in which they renounce all wars of aggression and declare that they will resort only to peaceful means for the settlement of any disputes of whatever nature, which may arise between them. They shall then invite all the powers of the world to accede to this treaty. Kellogg's reply to the French Government on 11 January indicated his disagreement with the narrowing of the treaty to the exclusion of war of aggression and with the idea of presenting the other great powers with a finished agreement. The Secretary of State declared that the treaty should provide for a general renunciation of war and give the included states an opportunity to express their views on the agreement.[8]

The two states finally agreed to conclude a multilateral treaty, which would include a general renunciation of the means of war, not limiting the agreement only to wars of aggression. Accordingly, on 13 April 1928, a draft of the agreement was sent to four major powers – Germany, Italy, Japan and the United Kingdom – inviting them to participate in the treaty.[9] Soon afterwards, nine more states – Australia, Belgium, Canada, Czechoslovakia, India, New Zealand, Poland, South Africa and the Irish Free State – were invited to sign the Pact. On 27 August 1928, the Pact was signed by fifteen states and it entered into force on 24 July 1929, after the necessary ratifications had been made.[10]

The number of signatories to the treaty continued to grow, and by 1928-1934 almost 50 states had become parties to the treaty, in addition to the first 15 states.[11] Hungary was one of them, signing the treaty in Budapest on 14 February 1929 and depositing its instrument of ratification with the government of the United States on 23 July 1929.[12] The Pact thus gained widespread support, as 63 of the then existing 67 states ratified it, including all the great powers.[13]

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[7] A. Lysen, *Le Pacte Kellogg. Documents concernant le Traité Multilatéral Contre La Guerre* (Leyde: Société D'Éditions A. W. Sijthoff, 1928), 5, 19-20.

[8] Mandelstam, *L'interprétation du Pacte Briand-Kellogg par les gouvernements et les parlements des États signataires*, 4.

[9] Lysen, *Le Pacte Kellogg. Documents concernant le Traité Multilatéral Contre La Guerre*, 32-34.

[10] Randall Lesaffer, "Kellogg-Briand Pact (1928)," in *Max Planck Encyclopedie of Public International Law*, ed. Rüdiger Wolfrum (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), 2.

[11] Status list: Treaty Providing for the Renunciation of War as an Instrument of National Policy, done at Paris August 27, 1928. https://www.state.gov/wp-content/uploads/2020/02/249-Kellogg-Briand-Treaty.pdf. (hereinafter: Status list)

[12] General Treaty for Renunciation of War as an Instrument of National Policy. Signed at Paris, August 27, 1928. UNTS vol. 94. p. 57. (hereinafter: Briand-Kellogg Pact)

[13] Status list.

The content of the Pact

The main text of the Pact is rather short, with only three articles on the substance. Before these articles, the preamble can be found, which states that the contracting parties renounce war as an instrument of national policy and henceforth use only peaceful means in their relations in order to maintain peaceful and friendly relations. In this introductory part the parties further expressed their hope that encouraged by their example, all other nations of the world will contribute to these humane endeavors.[14]

After setting out these objectives, the first and second articles of the Pact state the following:

> "Article I.
> The High Contracting Parties solemnly declare in the names of their respective peoples that they condemn recourse to war for the solution of international controversies, and renounce it as an instrument of national policy in their relations with one another.
> Article II.
> The High Contracting Parties agree that the settlement or solution of all disputes or conflicts of whatever nature or of whatever origin they may be, which may arise among them, shall never be sought except by pacific means."[15]

The third article of the Pact is a final provision, since it contains the requirement to ratify the treaty and the necessary requirements of the entry into force. According to this, entry into force happens "as soon as all their several instruments of ratification […] have been deposited at Washington."[16] The treaty then declares its open character, namely that the agreement shall "remain open as long as may be necessary for adherence by all the other powers of the world."[17] For the acceding states, entry into force will also occur when they deposit their instruments of ratification in Washington.[18]

It is clear from the text of the Pact that the contracting parties did not attach any sanction to the breach of the treaty. In this respect, the preamble merely states that the breaching party must be deprived of the benefits of the treaty.[19] In a related context,

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[14] Briand-Kellogg Pact, Preamble.
[15] Briand-Kellogg Pact, Article I. and II.
[16] Briand-Kellogg Pact, Article III.
[17] Briand-Kellogg Pact, Article III.
[18] Briand-Kellogg Pact, Article III.
[19] Briand-Kellogg Pact, Preamble.

Kellogg explained during the negotiation of the Pact that the breach of a treaty by one party relieves the other contracting parties of their obligation under the treaty.[20]

Therefore, the compliance with the Pact, in the absence of an enforcement mechanism and a body to monitor compliance, was based on the hope that the tools of diplomacy and the weight of public opinion would provide a sufficient deterrent to treaty violations.[21] Thus, the observance of the treaty was left to the solemn promise and honor of nations. In his speech to the US Senate, Kellogg explained the exact reason of this: in his view, no state would sign the treaty if it were sanctioned for violating it, or if the question were to be decided by a separate body.[22]

The issue of sanctions was not the only one that the treaty did not address. During the preparatory negotiations, a number of questions arose regarding what wars were prohibited by the agreement, how far the question of self-defense, the provisions of the Locarno Treaty and the Covenant of the League of Nations were affected.[23] Since the agreement itself did not say anything about these matters, the states expressed their own thoughts in various comments, which they attached to the draft treaty.

Comments attached to the Pact

France was the first negotiating state to comment on the draft treaty. On 30 March 1928, it sent a letter expressing its views on a number of issues, including the breach of the treaty, the right of self-defense and the relationship of the agreement to the Locarno Treaty and the Covenant of the League of Nations. On the first question, France stated that if a contracting party did not keep its word and resorted to war, the other contracting parties would be released from the agreement. Regarding the right of self-defense, France was of the view that the agreement did not deprive the contracting parties of the right of self-

[20] Ferenc Faluhelyi, "A Kellogg-egyezmény nemzetközi jogi jelentősége [The international legal significance of the Briand-Kellogg Pact]," in Magyar Jogászegyleti Értekezések [Discussions of Hungarian Lawyers], ed. László Kollár (XXI/105-106, 1929), 54.

[21] In addition to this, the League of Nations was of course also present in the background, also trying to facilitate the implementation of the Pact.

[22] The Avalon Project: The Kellogg-Briand Pact. Hearings before the Committee on Foreign Relations, United States Senate, Seventieth Congress, Second Session on The General Pact for the Renunciation of War, December 7 and 11, 1928, Part 1. (hereinafter: Hearings)

[23] It was necessary to clarify the relationship between the conventions because, in fact, each of these documents made some provisions for recourse to the means of war. Brownlie, *International Law and the Use of Force by States*, 66.

defense.[24] Thus, war was not prohibited in such a case according to the state. Regarding the third question, France stated that the Pact did not affect the Covenant or the Locarno Treaty, nor did it diminish their provisions or affect the neutrality treaties concluded by France.[25]

On 23 June 1928, the United States also submitted a note on the issues raised, in which it stated that the agreement did not abrogate or limit the right of self-defense. According to the US position, the right of self-defense includes any right of the state to defend itself against an attack or invasion of the territory of the state. Furthermore, this self-defense is not limited to the territory of a particular state, but means that a state has the right to take action in any case it feels necessary to protect its interests or rights. The right of self-defense may be justified by the prevention of a specific attack on the territory of the state, or even of any event, which might jeopardize a right or interest of the state. In the view of the US, the determination of the necessary response in such a case is always a matter for the state to decide. The United States has also stated that neither party is under any obligation to take action against a violator of the treaty, that there is no conflict between the Covenant and the Locarno Treaty, and that the Pact does not conflict with the rights and obligations of the Covenant of the League of Nations.[26]

Germany, the first of the states to be included in the treaty, expressed its opinion on the Pact in a note made on 27 April 1928. In this comment, Germany stated that the treaty to be concluded was without prejudice to international obligations arising from previous international treaties, including the Covenant of the League of Nations and the Locarno Treaty, and to the inherent right of self-defense of states. Moreover, the German Government considers it self-evident that the right of any power to seek satisfaction by the means of war is revived against a party which is in breach of the treaty. Germany also expressed the hope that the treaty would make general disarmament possible and that the treaty will also provide a tool and an incentive for the development of peaceful means, which are indispensable for the settlement of disputes between states.[27]

On 19 May, the United Kingdom also expressed its opinion, stating that the British Empire has frontier territories in which it has a special interest and which it reserves the right to defend.[28] The note stated, quite precisely, that there are certain areas of the world,

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[24] Edwin M. Borchard, "The Multilateral Treaty for the Renunciation of War," *American Journal of International Law*, no. 1 (1929): 116-119.

[25] Henry Cabot Lodge, *The Kellogg-Briand Peace Pact: A Contemporary Criticism, 1928-29*. https://teachingamericanhistory.org/library/document/the-kellogg-briand-peace-pact-a-contemporary-criticism-1928-29/.

[26] Lesaffer, "Kellogg-Briand Pact (1928)," 5.

[27] Ferenc Faluhelyi, *A párisi Kellog-paktum és annak jelentősége [The Briand-Kellogg Pact and its importance]* (Kaposvár: Somogy-megyei Keresztény Irodalmi Nyomda, 1929), 13-14.

[28] Faluhelyi, *A párisi Kellog-paktum és annak jelentősége [The Briand-Kellogg Pact and its importance]*, 15.

whose integrity and well-being are of special and vital interest to the peace and security of the United Kingdom. Interference in the affairs of these territories cannot be permitted by the British Government, therefore, the defense of these territories from attack is regarded by the United Kingdom as self-defense.[29] In a speech in the House of Commons on 30 July, Chamberlain called this declaration the British Monroe Doctrine, and stated that it was far from being aggressive. Its object is merely to keep out of these territories the invasion of foreign states, just as the original Monroe Doctrine sought to keep out of South and Central America the invasion of European states.[30]

The other states, including Australia, Belgium, Canada, Czechoslovakia, India, Italy, Japan, New Zealand, Poland, South Africa and the Irish Free State also expressed their opinions regarding the Pact. All these states stated that the Pact does not affect the provisions of the Covenant and the Locarno Treaty, nor does it in any way limit or impair the right of self-defense. All the contracting parties agreed that each state shall enjoy complete freedom to defend itself against aggression and foreign invasion according to its needs and will.[31]

The above comments show that the participating states paid particular attention to the issue of self-defense. In this respect, it is important to note that the customary law of the time included preemptive strikes within the scope of self-defense.[32] Preemptive self-defense or self-defense without a specific attack, was adopted in international law since the Caroline affair in 1837.[33] Such a broad interpretation of self-defense had important consequences for the treaty: it left a significant gap in the Pact as it made it possible for the parties to invoke preemptive self-defense, even without an actual attack. It means that merely the threat of an attack was enough, provided that the requirements of immediacy, necessity and proportionality laid down in the Webster formula were met.[34]

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[29] Charles G. Fenwick, "War as an Instrument of National Policy," *American Journal of International Law*, no. 4 (1928): 826-828.

[30] Faluhelyi, "A Kellogg-egyezmény nemzetközi jogi jelentősége [The international legal significance of the Briand-Kellogg Pact]," 44.

[31] Stanimir A. Alexandrov, *Self-Defense Against the Use of Force in International Law* (The Hague: Kluwer Law International, 1996), 52-54.

[32] Brownlie, *International Law and the Use of Force by States*, 231-232.

[33] In 1837, an independence movement was launched in Canada against British rule. The United States steamship Caroline was used to transport supplies from the United States to the rebels, sailing on the Niagara River. To prevent further resupply and to break the rebels, a British commando burned and sank the Caroline on the night of 29 December 1837. In the case, the British argued that the sinking of the ship was justified by self-defence and self-preservation due to the threat of attack. After the incident, in 1841, Daniel Webster formulated the so-called Webster's Formula, which defined self-defence as an immediate, overwhelming necessity, which leaves no opportunity for recourse to other means, and no time for consideration. R. Y. Jennings, "The Caroline and McLeod Cases," *American Journal of International Law*, no. 1 (1938): 82-92. Anthony Clark Arend, "International Law and the Preemptive Use of Military Force," *The Washington Quarterly*, no. 2 (2003): 90-91.

[34] Christine Gray, *International Law and the Use of Force* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2008), 148-149.

Classification of comments

As explained in the introduction to this study, the comments made by the contracting parties are classified differently by researchers in the field of international law. The positions existing in the literature can be divided into two main groups: one of them classifies the comments as reservations, the other views them as interpretative declarations.[35] In the following, it will be explained which of these two categories seems to be more correct.

The concept of reservation can be used as a starting point for assessing opinions that consider comments as reservations. The definition was first codified in the Harvard University draft treaty, which states that a reservation is a written declaration by which a state, at the time of signature, ratification or accession to a treaty, specializes certain provisions as a condition of becoming a party to the treaty, thus limiting the scope of the treaty as applied to that state.[36]

On the basis of the above definition, the comments in question must be examined from three points of view in order to determine whether or not they can be classified reservations. Firstly, the manner and time of making the comments, secondly, the content of the statements and thirdly, the intention of the states, namely the purpose for which the statements were made. Regarding the first point, it should be noted that the states expressed their views in the form of a diplomatic note before the signature of the treaty, in reaction to the draft received. This does not correspond to any of the possibilities laid down in the concept of reservation. Furthermore, the draft treaty also states that a reservation made at the time of signature must be confirmed at the time of ratification,[37] which did happen in the case of the comments. Moreover, at the time of ratification by the United States, on 15 January 1929, the United States expressly stated that ratification was without reservations or conditions, and it communicated this to the other contracting parties as well.[38]

Therefore, based on the first point of view, it seems that the comments cannot be regarded as reservations. However, it is important to address the two additional criteria mentioned above, namely the content of the comments and the intention of the contracting parties. Regarding the content, it is important to note that all of the comments expressed,

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[35] The neutral expressions also can be mentioned as a third category, however, I am not paying attention to these statements.

[36] Draft Convention on the Law of Treaties, *American Journal of International Law*, 1935. Supplement: Research in International Law, 659. (hereinafter: Draft Convention)

[37] Draft Convention, 848-849.

[38] Philip Marshall Brown, "The Interpretation of the General Pact for the Renunciation of War," *American Journal of International Law,* no. 2 (1929): 374.

in different wording, that in a situation of self-defense the state concerned did not consider the use of war to be prohibited. Thus, the purpose of making these comments was clearly to limit the scope of the treaty and preserve the right to use force in case of self-defense. However, an important point arises in connection with this: in his speech to the Senate, Kellogg explained that irrespective of the notes of the states, the convention does not remove or limit the right of self-defense, since this right is an inherent right of all sovereigns and is implicit in all treaties.[39] According to the Secretary of State, every state enjoys the freedom to defend itself against any attack or invasion, even by war if necessary, regardless of time and regardless of the provisions of the treaty.[40] Based on this, any nation may defend its territory against attack or invasion at any time, regardless of the treaty, and the states have the exclusive right to decide whether, and under which circumstances the means of war are necessary for self-defense.[41]

In my view it means that the initiators did not intend to extend the scope of the treaty to self-defense. The states wanted to include the renunciation of war in the agreement in such a way that it would not affect the exercise of the right of self-defense. Consequently, the right of self-defense can also be seen as an implicit exception to the Pact.[42] However, if this is the case, one question arises: if the right of self-defense as an exception to the treaty is so significant, then why is it not explicitly mentioned in the text of the Pact? In my view, there are two possible answers for this. The first is that Kellogg did not find the concept of self-defense definable. In his Senate speech, the Secretary of State repeatedly stated that, in his opinion, the concepts of aggression, aggressor and self-defense could not be defined precisely. However, in addition to the conceptual difficulties, the lack of explicit mention of self-defense could also be explained by the fact that this right was considered to be an inherent right of all states. Therefore, this right should be included in all treaties without any specific mention.[43]

Whatever the real reason for the agreement's failure to mention self-defense as an exception to the prohibition of war, Kellogg's speech makes it clear that the right of self-defense can be exercised independently of the provisions of the Pact, therefore it is not covered by the treaty. This is also reinforced by Kellogg's statement before the Senate, that the treaty has the same effect without the notes of the parties: it preserves the right of self-defense without the states having to make a comment to that effect. This fact also

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[39] Hearings.
[40] Alexandrov, *Self-Defense Against the Use of Force in International Law*, 52-54.
[41] Charles G. Fenwick, *International Law* (New York and London: Appleton Century Crofts, 1949), 234.
[42] In addition to the right of self-defence, Ian Brownlie also mentions Article 16 of the Covenant of the League of Nations as an implicit exception to the Pact. Brownlie, *International Law and the Use of Force by States*, 89-90.
[43] Hearings.

strengthens that the notes cannot be regarded as reservations. A limitation of the scope of the treaty by reservation is conceivable only in respect of matters, which are otherwise covered by the treaty.[44]

In addition to this, there is a further circumstance, which makes it incorrect to classify the comments as reservations. Namely, the principle of absolute integrity, which was a dominant principle of the law of treaties in 1928.[45] This meant that the treaty had to apply to all contracting parties with the same content. Therefore, the reservation of one party had to be accepted by all the other parties,[46] otherwise the reserving party would not become a party to the treaty. If the comments had been classified as reservations, they would have required acceptance by all parties. If it had been the case, the United Kingdom clearly could not have become a party, as its comment was objected to by a number of states.[47] However, the state was not excluded from the circle of the contracting parties, which further strengthens the claim that the comments under consideration are not reservations.

Based on the above, the second question needs to be analyzed, namely whether the notes can be considered as interpretative declarations. According to this view, the purpose of the comments is merely to express how the states interpret the renunciation of war. This was the view expressed by Kellogg in the US Senate negotiations following the signing of the Pact.[48] During these negotiations, the Secretary of State was asked about his position on the effect of the comments. More precisely, he had to answer whether the comments were reservations and whether they represented any change to the treaty. Mr. Kellogg replied that there was nothing in the notes that would change or alter the treaty.[49] In his view, the notes remain within the framework of the interpretation of the treaty and merely reflect the parties' views on the matter. Kellogg therefore considered that no state had made a reservation,[50] on the contrary, the states had made unilateral declarations reflecting their own position. Thus, the comments had no force of reservations, since the text of the Pact was left intact and unchanged. At the same time, the Secretary of State

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[44] Hearings.

[45] In 1951, this concept was challenged by the advisory opinion of the International Court of Justice in the Genocide case, which favoured a flexible approach to absolute integrity, leaving it to the discretion of the contracting parties to decide how to look at reservations. This line of thought was gradually adopted by the United Nations from the 1960s onwards. Ian Brownlie, *Principles of Public International Law* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1998), 612-614.

[46] Draft Convention, 659-660.

[47] Protesting states include the Soviet Union, Persia, Egypt and Afghanistan. Faluhelyi, "A Kellogg-egyezmény nemzetközi jogi jelentősége [The international legal significance of the Briand-Kellogg Pact]," 30-32.

[48] Richard K. Gardiner, *Treaty Interpretation* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), 98.

[49] Hearings.

[50] Quincy Wright, "The Meaning of the Pact of Paris," *American Journal of International Law*, no. 1 (1933): 42-43.

also stated that the statements made in the notes were an essential and integral part of the Pact, since they constituted the official interpretation of the agreement and were therefore binding for the parties.[51]

I agree with the above and believe that the comments are indeed closer to interpretative declarations than to reservations. The expression of interpretative declaration did not exist in 1928, these declarations were explicitly mentioned and analyzed in the Guide to Practice of the International Law Commission adopted only in 2011 (hereinafter: Guide).[52] As the Guide was created much later, it cannot be applied for the notes, however, the concept of interpretative declarations contained therein may assist in understanding the nature of the comments attached to the Pact as well. According to the Guide, an interpretative declaration is "a unilateral statement, however phrased or named, made by a state or an international organization, whereby that state or that organization purports to specify or clarify the meaning or scope of a treaty or of certain of its provisions."[53]

Although the term interpretative declaration was not used in the literature at the time of the Pact, however, other similar terms had already appeared, such as interpretations by governments, unilateral interpretations, interpretative note and unilateral declaration.[54] Unilateral interpretations were therefore already known and used in the 1920s and 1930s, therefore I believe that the classification of the comments in this category is correct.

In this respect, there is one more question to consider: as interpretative declarations, are the comments binding for all contracting parties? According to the Appendix to the Harvard University Draft Convention, an interpretation to which all the parties agree is deemed to be an agreement as to the interpretation of the treaty and as such is applicable and binding to all contracting parties. This is particularly relevant where the wording of the treaty is not entirely clear.[55] In connection with this Philip Marshall Brown also explains that the most important point of alignment for the interpretation of agreements is the intention of the contracting parties, which may take the form of notes, comments, interpretations, even in the negotiations prior to ratification.[56]

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[51] Oona A. Hathaway – Scott J. Shapiro, "International Law and its Transformation through the Outlawry of War," *Internatonal Affairs*, no. 1 (2019): 45-46.

[52] The official title of the document is: Guide to Practice on Reservations to Treaties, Report of the ILC, 63 UN GAOR, Supp. No. 10. (A/66/10/Add.1) (hereinafter: Guide to Practice).

[53] Guide to Practice, 3.

[54] Mandelstam, *L'interprétation du Pacte Briand-Kellogg par les gouvernements et les parlements des États signataires*, 155. Robert H. Ferrell, *Peace in Their Time. The Origins of the Kellogg-Briand Pact* (Archon Books, 1968), 192-200.

[55] Draft Convention, 1225.

[56] Brown, "The Interpretation of the General Pact for the Renunciation of War," 378.

In my opinion, this is entirely true for the comments attached to the Briand-Kellogg Pact. In the light of the above, I am of the opinion that the comments made by the contracting parties during the preparation of the Pact can be considered as interpretative declarations and form a binding, additional part of the treaty for all parties.

Conclusion

Despite the widespread support of the Briand-Kellogg Pact the events of the 1930s, including the Japanese invasion of Manchuria in 1931, the Italian invasion of Abyssinia in 1935, the German invasion of Poland in 1939, the Russian invasion of Finland[57] and the horrors of the Second World War, made it clear that the Pact had failed to achieve its purpose regarding the prohibition of war.[58] According to certain views, the attached comments of the parties had a key role in the failure, as they deprived the Pact of its essence and rendered the agreement totally ineffective.[59]

In my opinion the statements describing the Pact as a complete failure are incorrect. While it is true that the Pact could not prevent the events of the 1930s and 40s, it can be seen as a significant milestone in other aspects. Firstly, the Pact successfully brought the United States into an agreement with European states that neither the Covenant of the League of Nations, nor the Locarno Treaty could achieve. On the other hand, the principles set out in the treaty provided the basis for the prosecution of war criminals after the Second World War. Building on the prohibition of war to define the concept of crimes against peace allowed the Nuremberg and Tokyo International Military Tribunals to prosecute the leaders of Second World War.[60] In Nuremberg and Tokyo it was established that although the crime against peace was only defined in the London Agreement of 1945, it was a category that had existed since the Briand-Kellogg Pact and that its violation constituted an international crime.[61]

Furthermore, the Pact was a landmark in the history of war and international law in general.[62] It was an extremely important step towards the prohibition of the use of force,

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[57] Thomas M. Franck, *Recourse to Force. State Action Against Threats and Armed Attacks* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 11.

[58] Encyclopaedia Britannica.

[59] Lodge, *The Kellogg-Briand Peace Pact: A Contemporary Criticism, 1928-29*.

[60] Lea Felmájer, "A Nürnbergi Nemzetközi Katonai Törvényszék [The Nuremberg International Military Tribunal]," *Collega*, no. 1 (2000): 42.

[61] "International Military Tribunal (Nuremberg) Judgment and Sentences," *American Journal of International Law,* no. 41 (1947): 218.

[62] Cynthia D. Wallace, "Kellogg-Briand Pact (1928)," in *Encyclopedia of Public International Law 3. Use of Force. War and Neutrality Peace Treaties (A-M).* ed. Rudolf Bernhardt (Amsterdam: North-Holland Publishing Company,

which was finally enshrined in Article 2, Paragraph 4, of the Charter of the United Nations. This provision, however, did not repeal the Pact in my view. A similar view is expressed by Ian Brownlie, who argues that the Briand-Kellogg Pact is still in force today, supporting and reinforcing the Charter, and as a separate legal document, it sets limits on the use of force.[63]

All in all, the Pact has been a success,[64] even if not in the way its creators had originally envisaged. The comments attached to the Pact had a very important role in the prominence of the treaty, as without them, the Pact would probably not have been signed. As Kellogg has argued, it was essential to leave the interpretation of the prohibition of war to the individual sovereign states.[65] Thus, the comments of the participants, which in my view serve an interpretative function, helped to ensure broad participation in the Pact and contributed to the success of the agreement.

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1982), 238.

[63] Brownlie, *International Law and the Use of Force by States*, 75, 84.

[64] The importance of the Pact is illustrated by the fact that Kellogg was awarded the Nobel Peace Prize in 1929 for its creation. Nobel Peace Prize. https://www.nobelprize.org/prizes/lists/all-nobel-peace-prizes/.

[65] Hearings.

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Black Joy and Afrofuturist Visions: Exploring Race, Space, and Womanhood in Zora Neale Hurston's Selected Short Stories

Pro&Contra 7

No. 2 (2023) 51–75

https://doi.org/10.33033/pc.2023.2.51

Abstract

This study explores the intersection of race, space, and womanhood in Zora Neale Hurston's short stories through Black joy and Afrofuturism frameworks. Drawing on Lindsey Stewart's concept of Black joy, the analysis highlights how Hurston interweaves these themes to emphasize joy as a transformative and resistant force that preserves Black people's psychic and psychological wholeness. Focusing on selected stories from the posthumously published *Hitting a Straight Lick with a Crooked Stick* (2020), this paper investigates how Hurston uses narratives of joy not as escapism, but as a deliberate strategy for overcoming systemic double oppression. Through a close reading of the chosen short stories, the study demonstrates how Hurston envisions joy as a form of resistance, deeply intertwined with race, space, and gender. By pairing Black joy with an Afrofuturist perspective, Hurston articulates a vision for African Americans' collective freedom and cultural wholeness. This analysis positions Hurston's work as a blueprint for navigating constraints while envisioning a future grounded in empowerment, resilience, and joy.

Keywords: Black Joy, South, Afrofuturism, Womanhood, Space, Race

Introduction

That black women experience a distinct form of identity-based oppression that is intersectional and not sufficiently framed or addressed by the feminist or Black rights movements has long been articulated from various perspectives. This is the notion of intersectionality, which, as postulated by Kimberle Crenshaw, is premised on an insistence that "systems of race, gender, and class domination converge… in the experiences of battered women of color."[1] Denise Lynn (2014) describes "a long tradition of black American women that regarded their oppression as unique from other women and from black men, [which in]… its various manifestations… identified black women's oppression as "double jeopardy," Jane Crow, triple exploitation, or triple oppression."[2] Hurston, on various occasions, thematizes this double jeopardy in her writings, as has been established by various scholars (Spencer,

[1] Crenshaw, "Mapping the Margins," 1246.
[2] Lynn, "Socialist Feminism and Triple Oppression," 2.

2004;[3] Marcucci, 2017;[4] Brooks, 2010[5]) who, above all, have concerned themselves with dispelling the dominant perception of Hurston as politically naïve and apathetic, while highlighting her incisive depiction of intersectional oppression. For instance, in *Their Eyes Were Watching God*, black women are referred to as the mule of the world, highlighting the weight of sexist and racist oppression.[6]

However, the concatenation of Black joy and Afrofuturistic envisioning in Hurston's short stories, in view of race, space, and womanhood, has not received enough critical attention. Although relatively less studied than her novels, Hurston's short stories are very influential. This is reinforced by Henry Gates noting, in the introduction of *The Complete Storie*s, that "as early as 1931, Zora Neale Hurston's capacities as a master of the short story were widely acknowledged."[7] These short stories, many of which are located in the Black-only town, Eatonville, showcase how Hurston, a brilliant and complicated trickster, situates the self-respect and self-preservation of Black people within the context of race-based spatial and gender dynamics.

Six short stories, namely "John Redding Goes to Sea," "Black Death," "Drenched in Light," "Magnolia Flower," "The Eatonville Anthology," and "Spunk," were selected from *Hitting a Straight Lick with a Crooked Stick*, edited by Genevieve West, and with a foreword by Tayari Jones, two highly respected authorities on Hurston. *Hitting*, a recent and widely circulated anthology, is a collection of short stories written by Hurston between 1921 and 1937. The selection aligns with current academic trends and perspectives on Hurston, reflecting contemporary academic interests in intersectionality. According to West, each story in *Hitting* is newly transcribed based on the first documented publications, with great care taken to not disturb the original style, including stylistic conventions that depict the evolution of Hurston's style.[8] The stories were selected because they center Black joy, with Tayari Jones explaining in the foreword that "although racism and "white folks" present real challenges to the characters that people [the] collection, oppression is not the center of their lives"[9] Furthermore, the setting of the stories and the portrayal of gendered conflict are conducive to the exploration of the intersection of race, place, and womanhood through the frameworks of Black joy and futuristic envisioning.

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[3] Stephen, "Racial Politics," 111–126.
[4] Marcucci, "Zora Neale Hurston and the Brown Debate,"13–24.
[5] Brooks, "Sister, Can You Line It Out?," 617–627.
[6] Hurston, *Their Eyes*, 47.
[7] Gates, *The Complete Storie*s, x.
[8] West, *Hitting a Straight Lick*, 6.
[9] Jones, *Hitting a Straight Lick*, vi.

"John Redding Goes to Sea" and "Drenched in Light" depict racialized spatial confinement and longing for self-actualization. In both stories, the persistent longing for self-actualization and a penchant for dreaming illustrate Black joy and a refusal to placidly live a constrained life. As Redding defiantly declares, "Oh, yes, I'm a dreamer. I have such wonderfully complete dreams, Papa. They never come true. But even as my dreams fade, I have others."[10] Thus, John Redding in defiantly making up new and complete dreams actualizes himself, "sharpening his oyster knife,"[11] like Hurston, in readiness to take on the world despite his circumstances. John's unyielding desire to travel polarizes his parents, Matty and Alfred. Following a life spent struggling with the drudgery of traditional life and spatial limitations, John drowns in a flood and his father instructs that his body be left to float on the sea, John's chance to finally travel the world. "Drenched in Light" offers a female foil to the themes of identity and self-actualization through dreaming explored in "John Redding Goes to Sea." Isis' character offers a gendered perspective that underscores Hurston's vision of womanhood about Black joy. The protagonist, Isis Watts, brimming with joy and dreams, is at constant odds with her grandmother, her guardian. Isis, described by the narrator as Isis the Joyful, constantly pushes the boundaries of acceptable behavior as she seeks avenues for pleasure in her daily life, while always fondly gazing on the road and waving gaily at travelers. One day, she is saved from trouble with her grandmother by a lost white couple whom she helps by showing them the way. The story ends with the triumph of Isis, as the white woman requests for her to come and dance for her in the hotel, a request Isis' grandmother proudly grants.

"Black Death" and "Spunk" explore Black spirituality, emphasizing root work as an inscription of Black joy and self-determination. Both stories have elements of speculative storytelling that center Black people as custodians of alternative and important spiritual knowledge. They are about deception, revenge, and supernatural justice. In "Black Death," the young handsome Beau impregnates a widow's only daughter, Docia, and scorns her. Annoyed and heartbroken by Beau's careless disregard for her daughter's feelings and honor, Mrs. Boger seeks supernatural justice, which she attains by killing Beau via a mirror. In "Spunk," Spunk, a strong and intimidating black man, parades his affair with Joe Kanty's wife all over town. Joe, a timid man, becomes the subject of mockery, which drives him to confront Spunk. Spunk kills him and is exonerated by the court. In what is considered perfect justice, Spunk dies, in what appears to be at the hands of Joe's ghost.

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[10] West, *Hitting a Straight Lick*, 178.
[11] Hurston, "How It Feels," 324.

"The Eatonville Anthology" was selected because of its portrayal of Eatonville, a black-only community where black people determine their path unconstrained by racial oppression. Thus, it offers an opportunity to study spatially foregrounded self-determination as Black joy. "The Eatonville Anthology" is made up of vignettes of various black characters. Hurston chronicles the joys of everyday life in the community. Rather than a linear plot, Hurston fondly presents a collage of different Black people and their interesting quirks and foibles.

"Magnolia Flower," similarly to "Drenched in Light" and "Black Death," was selected for its portrayal of Magnolia, a Black woman in resistive and refusal modes grappling with intersectional oppression and exhibiting admirable self-actualizing agency. It is a folkloric story narrated by a river to a young brook. Black joy is inscribed in the story through the folkloric elements. Bentley, the larger-than-life protagonist is a strong Black man who, by his strength and willpower, flees captivity and becomes very successful. He rules his community with an iron fist and surrounds himself with the blackest people he can find. His agenda is to perpetuate blackness around him to the maximum extent, including by having the blackest grandchildren possible, a wish that is thwarted when his daughter falls in love with a light-skinned man. Bentley dies broken and his estate crumbles when his daughter and her lover, John, escape their prison.

Hurston's stories, which, according to Gates, are pervaded by a "concern for justice beyond race, class, or gender,"[12] have been celebrated for the depiction of the complexities of black life which provides an opportunity for the study of race, space, and womanhood through the prism of Black joy and Afrofuturism. Jones' postulation in her foreword to *Hitting* also provides crucial justification for the inclusion of these stories, concerning which she notes that "although racism and "white folks" present real challenges to the characters that people [the story], oppression is not the center of their lives."[13] Alongside Lindsey Stewart's *The Politics of Black Joy*, references are also made to Hurston's essays, "How it Feels to be Colored Me," "Court Order Can't Make Races Mix," and "High John de Conquer," a folkloric essay that may be considered as Hurston's manifesto of Black joy owing to the detailed explication of the spiritual, political, and psychological of Black joy, even as Hurston acknowledges racial oppression.

[12] Gates, *The Complete Stories*, xxi.
[13] Jones, *Hitting*, viii.

Hurston's Black Joy as Afrofuturism

Hurston's Black joy, according to Lindsey Stewart, is a refusal of the abolitionist mandate to prioritize Black sorrow in their representation of Black people, conflate blackness with dejection, and uphold Black suffering as "the truth."[14] It is a response to the political tradition that diminishes Southern Black life due to the traumatic past of slavery. Gates' explanation is crucial in this aspect, as he posits that Hurston considered the "idea that racism had reduced black people to mere ciphers, to beings who only react to an omnipresent racial oppression, whose culture is 'deprived'… and whose psyches are 'pathological'" degrading and constricting.[15] Hence, Hurston rejected the portrayal of black people as objects of sorrow with existence limited to reactive entanglement with oppression and racism. In this diminished representation, Blacks are portrayed as existentially stranded in oppression, with the hope of the restoration of their humanity being restricted to railing against subjugation and amplifying their objection. Hurston's writings refused this abolitionist mandate, as she insistently refused to center oppression in her depiction of the lives of Black people. Although her writings predate the concept of Afrofuturism, Hurston's politics of Black joy and core aspects of Afrofuturism are mutually reifying as her joy politics are inscribed within a framework that prioritizes an agenda for a black future: "winning in a permanent way… with the soul of the black man whole and free."[16] Hurston's politics of Black joy is not merely an emotion but an intentional affirmation of Black agency within a futurist framework. Her politics of Black joy, rather than being mere escapism, is a refusal of pain, although an overwhelming presence in Black life, as the sole definition of blackness. It is a rejection of black abjection sharpened by a refusal to centralize the white gaze.[17] It is premised on an insistent contemplation of the future of black people even in the struggle for complete freedom while honoring the African heritage in the form of root work, a spiritual practice based on African American folk magic, also known as hoodoo. According to Stewart, root work refers to "practices of conjure" and "is a touchstone of West African religious practices that persisted even as slavery sought to erase… cultural ties to the continent."[18] Hurston puts forward as equal to science and technology, wherein lies the interplay of her politics of Black joy and Afrofuturism.

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[14] Stewart, *The Politics of Black Joy*, 16.
[15] Gates, *The Complete Stories*, 288.
[16] Gates, *The Complete Stories*, 141.
[17] Stewart, *The Politics of Black Joy*, 32.
[18] Ibid., 9.

The term "Afrofuturism" was coined by Mark Dery in 1993 to describe speculative fiction that explores "African American themes and concerns in twentieth-century technoculture—and…African American signification that appropriates the images of technology" within an imagined future.[19] Afrofuturism presents a space for Blacks to envision a future devoid of structural racism "to contest white supremacist narratives of exclusion and technological illiteracy" and to wield diverse aesthetics to speculate and loop the past with the present and claim a Black future that is free from white supremacy.[20] This aspect of Afrofuturism is integral to Hurston's politics of Black joy which affirms the potency of joy for transforming the future of black people by interweaving the black past with the present. Hurston herself emphasizes the futuristic aspect of Black joy especially in "High John de Conquer" where Hurston discusses how Blacks had knowledge of emancipation long in advance through High John and "knew something better was coming."[21] This knowledge reflects an/the Afrofuturist vision, as it entrenches a mythical, alternative system of knowing that counters Western epistemology, specifically rationalism and empiricism, while insistently representing Black people as agents from their future through their past.

Ensconced in Black joy is a celebratory honoring of blackness and an anticipation of Blacks' desired reality which Hurston foregrounds in different ways. Hurston's Eatonville, as a black Utopia, is one of the ways Hurston foregrounds her envisioning of the desired future for Blacks. In this black-only space, there is a complete justice system, as demonstrated by the supernatural justice in "Spunk" and "Black Death." Honor, integrity, and community accountability are sacred values that matter more than materialism. Here, Hurston refuses the absolutes of black enchantment and abjection, grounding black joy in a balanced appraisal. For example, Spunk and Lena's love affair counters the spectacularization of black abjection denounced by Stewart[22] and Hartman,[23] celebrating black beauty and joy instead. The sight Spunk and Lena provide is beautifully described thus: "A giant of a brown-skinned man sauntered up one street of the Village and out in the palmetto thickets with a small pretty woman clinging lovingly to his arm… All the loungers in the store tried to walk to the door with an air of nonchalance but with small success."[24] On the other hand, their beautiful sight notwithstanding, they are in disfavor with the townspeople owing to the perversion they flaunt.

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[19] Dery, "Black to the Future," 180.
[20] Taylor, "Introduction to Co-Futurisms," 2.
[21] Stewart, *The Politics of Black Joy*, 138.
[22] Stewart, *The Politics of Black Joy*, 16.
[23] Hartman, *Scenes of Abjection,* 32.
[24] Hurston, ed. West, *Hitting a Straight Lick*, 159.

Hurston's Afrofuturistic Black joy goes beyond technoculturality, inviting a deviation from the Western definition of technology as hard and verifiable facts solely based on Western-accepted logic. Hurston's Afrofuturism is a push against the limits of belief, as exemplified by the story of Morgan and his mysticism that enables him to be a pillar of retribution and judgment within the community. The exclusive knowledge of root work grants Blacks access to a space of Black joy from which whites are excluded. According to the narrator in "Black Death:" "…if a white person were halted on the streets of Orlando and told that Old Man Morgan, the excessively black hoodoo man, can kill any person indicated and paid for, without ever leaving his house or even seeing his victim, he'd laugh in your face and walk away, wondering how long the Negro will continue to wallow in ignorance and superstition."[25] The mysticism of Uncle Morgan constantly invites the juxtaposition of belief and skepticism, especially as the details of his exploits grow more fantastic. All of these are things black people ought to know, according to the narrator. As Womack explains:

> …Afrofuturism is a home for the divine feminine principle, a Mother Earth idea that values nature, creativity, receptivity, mysticism, intuition, and healing as partners to technology, science, and achievement… [and] in Afrofuturism, technological advancement is not enough to create a free-thinking future. A well-crafted relationship with nature is intrinsic to a balanced future too.[26]

Thus, Hurston's telling of the spiritual might of Uncle Morgan in a matter-of-fact manner inscribes root work as a vital knowledge of potent power that is as real as science and technology, serving as a space of Black self-determination and, by extension, Black joy. This follows Stewart's assertion that "for Hurston, root work is an important site for working out the politics of joy."[27] This is because root work exists as a phenomenon that decentralizes whiteness.

In affirming root work, Hurston elevates the humanity of black people whose testimonies are considered the final words on the legitimacy of root work. According to the narrator in "Black Death,": "All of these things can easily be proved by the testimony of the villagers. They ought to know."[28] By validating this belief system, Hurston inverts the order of power, especially in the account of the death of Old Lady Grooms who "was

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[25] Hurston, ed. West, *Hitting a Straight Lick*, 267.
[26] Womack, *Afrofuturism: The World of Black,* 103–104.
[27] Stewart, *The Politics of Black Joy*, 10.
[28] Hurston, ed. West, *Hitting a Straight Lick*, 269.

sent to her death in the Lake"[29] by Morgan, upon which "the white coroner from Orlando said she met her death by falling into the water during an epileptic fit."[30] According to the narrator, "the villagers *knew*. White folks are very stupid about some things. They can think mightily but cannot *feel*."[31] In this framework where root work is elevated, validating black people as custodians of knowledge beyond the realm of conventional understanding is the realm of the concatenation of Afrofuturism and Black joy. This concatenation is spatially inscribed, for standing right there in Orlando, as depicted in "Black Death," the white man is excluded from belonging to the space the way the black people do. What has occurred here is similar to what the servants, tutored by High John, did, hiding in plain sight.

Hurston's work, like those of the Afrofuturist women writers described by Womack, "links science, nature, and magic as one," [32] as is very apparent in the description of the killing of Beau in "Black Death": "…the mirror grew misty, darker, near the center, then Mrs. Boger saw Beau walk to the center of the mirror and stand looking at her, glaring and sneering."[33] Thus, Afrofuturism connects the black diaspora experience with their African ancestry to reimagine and recreate the future on the foundations of the past and present.

Based on the foregoing, I contend that the intersections of race, space, and womanhood in Hurston's short stories are grounded in Afrofuturistic joy because they "contest white supremacist narratives of exclusion and technological illiteracy"[34] while representing an example of black women creators with powerful imaginations shaping the future.[35] According to Womack:

> Afrofuturism is a free space for women, a door ajar, arms wide open, a literal and figurative space for black women to be themselves. They can dig behind the societal reminders of blackness and womanhood to express a deeper identity and then use this identity to define blackness, womanhood, or any other identifier in whatever form their imagination allows.[36]

This unrestrained imagination of the black woman creator engenders the development of "theories, characters, art, and beauty free of the pressures of meeting male approval, societal standards, color-based taxonomies, or run-of-the-mill female expectations. The

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[29] Hurston, ed. West, *Hitting a Straight Lick*, 269.
[30] Ibid., 271.
[31] Hurston, ed. West, *Hitting a Straight Lick*, 271.
[32] Womack, *Afrofuturism: The World of Black,* 102.
[33] Hurston, ed. West, *Hitting a Straight Lick*, 281.
[34] Tylor, "Introduction to Co-Futurisms," 2.
[35] Womack, *Afrofuturism: The World of Black,* 101.
[36] Ibid., 101.

results are works that some critics call uncategorizable."[37] Hurston's contestation of white supremacist narratives of exclusion and technological illiteracy is most palpable in her exploration of root work. First, she inverts the basis of Western empirical and rationalist traditions to uphold belief and intuition. Thus, Hurston juxtaposes belief and skepticism in stories such as "Black Death," and "Spunk." Noteworthily, an Afrofuturistic veneration of nature inheres in the folkloric dimension of "Magnolia Flower."

Hurston, as Sheree Thomas explains, "was well versed in the spirit of her people… reach[ing]back and preserv[ing] vital folk knowledge that may have been lost through the ages in the rush to assimilate whatever current ideal of blackness persisted,"[38] thus creating "works that evoke the past, critique the present, and challenge us to imagine a greater, more possible future."[39] Hurston's Afrofuturism connects the past to the present and future through the politics of joy inscribed through her black characters' defiant refusal of spatial constraint, insistent connection with their spiritual roots in Africa, and insistence on finding that spaces of self-determination and self-actualization.

The Afrofuturist link with the past is particularly pronounced in "Black Death," specifically when the enraged Mrs. Boger approaches the house of Morgan, "three hundred years of America passed like the mist of morning. Africa reached out its dark hand and claimed its own."[40] Thus, Hurston uses root work to inscribe a connection between the present and the African past, as Mrs. Boger aspires to orchestrate her desired future and achieve justice. This knowledge, embodied in High John de Conquer, empowers black people to be agents not just in their future but in America's future. The link to the future is further established by the metaphor of the characters' eyes on the horizon, like Isis in "Drenched in Light" and John Redding in "John Redding Goes to Sea." This agency is evident in their ability to envision themselves on the horizon and aboard ships, like John Redding, or within the timeless grandeur of myths, as seen with Isis. Hurston's views on Black joy, in a futurist framework, are well articulated in her 1928 essay "How It Feels to Be Colored Me" where she denounces black abjection and the "sobbing school of Negrohood" while declaring her preoccupation with "sharpening [her] oyster knife."[41] In the essay, Hurston frames Black joy as psychological resilience, a source of fortitude, while refusing to consider blackness as an inherent disadvantage rooted in nature. She chooses to confront the rigors of life directly, holding that life is fundamentally hard. She assumes

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[37] Womack, *Afrofuturism: The World of Black,* 112.
[38] Thomas, "Dangerous Muses," 42.
[39] Ibid., 37.
[40] Hurston, ed. West, *Hitting a Straight Lick*, 279.
[41] Hurston, "How It Feels," 324.

agency, metaphorized in the act of sharpening her oyster life, which hints at her futuristic perspective and her view of the necessity of preparedness on the part of Black people to be able to take on the future. This infers that her rejection of a state of sorrowfulness as a response to blackness is a rejection of passiveness and her definition of Black joy is agency over escapism. The sharpening of her oyster knife underscores her insistence on playing the long game with the fortitude and black consciousness forged by joyful and thriving blackness.

Race and Space: Black Joy and Black Utopia in Zora Neale Hurston's Short Stories

The subject of displacement is central in African American history, especially as it is at the core of the pathos of the transatlantic slave trade, Middle Passage, enslavement, and Civil Rights Movement. African American history begins with displacement, a tragedy whose marker continues to permeate the continued agitation for belonging and identity construction. Hurston's writings, especially in their emphasis on Black joy and refusal, across the lines of race and gender, centralize the subject of space both thematically and aesthetically. Her unique engagement with Black spaces has its basis in her formative years which were spent in the Black-only Eatonville. According to Gates: "Hurston is concerned to register a distinct sense of space- an African American cultural space."[42]

Hurston's stories, like her stance on segregation, tie space to the integrity and self-determination of Black people. Spaces, where black people are free to carry out their joy, are crucial because they fortify them and ensure their wholeness. As she explains in her 1955 open letter to the *Orlando Sentinel*, as a reflection on the question of court-mandated desegregation following the Brown v. Board of Education (1952-1954) Supreme Court Case, space dynamics is intricately bound with the self-respect of Black people: "It is well known that I have no sympathy nor respect for the "tragedy of color" school of thought among us, whose fountainhead is the pressure group concerned in the court ruling. I can see no tragedy in being too dark to be invited to a white school affair."[43] This declaration captures the correlation Hurston draws between space and Black joy, as well as the self-respect she considers as integral to wholesome blackness. Hurston proceeds to opine: "…I regard the ruling of the U.S. Supreme Court as insulting rather than honoring my race. Since the days of the never-to-be-sufficiently-deplored Reconstruction, there has been the

[42] Gates, *The Complete Stories*, xi.
[43] Hurston, "Court Order Can't Make Races Mix," 958.

current belief that there is no greater delight to Negroes than physical association with whites."[44] The triumph Hurston envisioned was not legalistic desegregation. It was for the preservation of Black joy, which she considered a vital asset that should be carried intact to the envisioned future of Black people. This was essential to ensure the completeness of their victory. As she puts it in "High John de Conquer," the laughter and joy High John embodies are essential to "really winning in a permanent way, for he was winning with the soul of the black man whole and free."[45] This is the centrality of space in her worldview. Black-only spaces that are not defined solely by interaction against relentless racism are strongholds in preserving Black joy, which is not only important to the survival of Blacks but to that of America itself, as she further expresses in the essay: "Maybe, now, we used-to-be black African folks can be of some help to our brothers and sisters who have always been white… We have given the nation song and laughter. Maybe now, in this terrible struggle, we can give something else—the source and soul of our laughter and song. We offer you our hope-bringer, High John de Conquer."[46] Thus, Hurston upends the power dynamics between whites and blacks. Rather than conflating blackness with a desperate need to be accepted into white spaces, Black people are depicted as being custodians of heritage and a secret (joy) that can benefit whites and Americans as a whole.

Eatonville, as the setting of Hurston's short stories, is therefore very significant in terms of the futures of Blacks and America. Hurston, in "How It Feels to Be Colored Me," describes Eatonville as a little Negro town, exclusively colored in Florida, a town in which, growing up, "the only white people I knew passed through the town going to or coming from Orlando."[47] As an all-black town and the setting of the majority of her stories, it allows Hurston to, as Barbara Christian says concerning the focus of African American women's writings in the 1970s, "escape one of the plagues of Black literature—the handicap of having its most passionate feelings directed at 'The Man.'"[48] The effect of this fixation is a failure to, in the words of Christian, show that "Black people are more than simply reactors, that, among ourselves, we have laughter, tears, and loving that are far removed from the white horror out there."[49] The result is a reduction of Blackness to a reactiveness to suffering, humiliation, and degradation.

Thus, situating her stories in Eatonville enables her to assert a blackness not defined by or against whiteness and craft a complete and unrestrained depiction of Black joy. Eatonville,

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[44] Hurston, "Court Order Can't Make Races Mix," 958.
[45] Hurston, ed. Gates, *The Complete Stories*, 141.
[46] Hurston, ed. Gates, *The Complete Stories*, 139.
[47] Hurston, "How it Feels," 322.
[48] Stewart, *The Politics of Black Joy*, 138.
[49] Stewart, *The Politics of Black Joy*, 138.

as a representation of black Utopia, is a futuristic place intimating a future where blackness can be expansive and self-defining without being inhibited by antiblackness, a framework that positions blackness as social death.[50] It is an inscription of Black Utopia founded on a value for justice. To illustrate, in "Spunk," justice is based on the supernatural. It exists beyond the law of the white man, under which Spunk faces no punishment despite killing Joe. His death, at the hands of the ghost of Joe, as the village and the dying Spunk believe, is perceived as true justice. This Eatonville is near-mythical in the clockwork way justice is always obtained.

Eatonville, as depicted in "The Eatonville Anthology," disrupts what Stewart refers to as "schemas of devastation or nostalgia, or tragedy or enchantment." [51] It proves that Black people, like all other human beings who are not defined by oppression, are capable of joy and self-determination that is not captured by the inherent paradoxical stereotype of the South as "the site of Black tragedy, bearing the brunt of the nation's sin of racism… [and] a land of Black enchantment."[52] Recollecting scenes of Black joy from her childhood in the south, Stewart describes "sinful spread of crawfish, corn, and potatoes under the oaks my grandfather's yard as my extended family ate and ate until the cicadas chimed in with our music late in the evening… the seriousness with which my *maman* delivered a bit of wisdom when I was frightened by her beloved horror films."[53] What Stewart depicts here is the simple enjoyment of community and Blackness with no self-consciousness or restraint induced by the burdens of racial tensions. These scenes of joy come alive in the diverse characters in Hurston's short stories, especially in the character-based "The Eatonville Anthology," which spotlights blackness and black life with a vibrant portrayal: "Sweating bodies, laughing mouths, grotesque faces, feet drumming fiercely. Deacons clapping as hard as the rest."[54] In addition to such scenes of overt joy in the short fiction, she celebrates the joy found in their regular lives.

In the worlds depicted in her short stories, white people exist vaguely in the periphery. For instance, in "Black Death," the Blacks of Eatonville, as Hurston describes them,

> …know a number of things that the hustling, bustling white man never dreams of… For instance, if a white person were halted on the streets of Orlando and told that the Old Man Morgan, the excessively black Negro hoodoo man, can kill any person indicated and paid for,

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[50] Wilderson, *Afropessimism*.
[51] Stewart, *The Politics of Black Joy*, 2.
[52] Stewart, *The Politics of Black Joy*, 2.
[53] Ibid., 3.
[54] Hurston, ed. West, *Hitting a Straight Lick*, 453.

> without ever leaving his house, or even seeing his victim, he'd laugh in your face and walk away, wondering how long the Negro will continue to wallow in ignorance and superstition. But no black person in a radius of twenty miles will smile, not much. They *know*.[55]

This knowledge of root work is one of the things that protect their space from white intrusion and one of the pillars sustaining their community. It is integral to their justice system, which does not center on the sheriff or the American legal system. This is one of the ways they keep their spaces of Black joy pristine.

Furthermore, Hurston emphasizes the link between joy, manifesting as black wholeness, and space. In "Magnolia Flower," Hurston depicts Bentley, one of the "slaves who did not weep,"[56] as "large and black and strong" with a strong heart that "thudded with an iron sound in his breast."[57] His strength, based on his refusal to be sorrowful, is manifested in the dominance of his spatial context: "The forest made way for him, the beasts were afraid of him, and he built a house."[58] Spatial metaphors are abundant here. By building a house, Bentley establishes his agency. His strong determination compels the forest, nature, an intimation of Afrofuturistic veneration of nature, to make way for him. Bentley's blackness, like Old Man Morgan's "excessive blackness" is emphasized in a celebratory manner as a vision of strength.

Similarly, in "Drenched in Light," Isis channels High John, "making a way out of no way."[59] Isis does this through her joyful dominance over space, sitting atop the gate post where she has a commanding view of the road. Isis' spatial dominance is further apparent when she is approached by the lost white couple for directions. Even though they own the car, they are dependent on Isis for direction. It echoes Hurston's position that America needs to look to Blacks for a well-calibrated compass to a wholesome future.

Various other spatial metaphors abound in the selected short stories. The white man in "John Redding Goes to Sea," Mr. Hill, approaches the black people to save his bridge. Having spent so much money building the bridge, he is anxious about the impending storm destroying his time- and capital-intensive project. Therefore, he reaches out to John Redding and other young black men in a last-minute effort to preserve his project. Mr. Hill, like the couple in "Drenched in Light" recognizes the importance of the contributions of Blacks, as ensconced in the spatial metaphor, the bridge. Thus, he declares, when John agrees to

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[55] Hurston, ed. West, *Hitting a Straight Lick*, 267.
[56] Hurston, ed. West, *Hitting a Straight Lick,* 249.
[57] Ibid.
[58] Ibid., 249.
[59] Ibid., 139.

come along to work on the bridge, "Now, if I had a few more men of your brawn and brain, I could build an entirely new bridge in forty-eight hours. Come on, jump into the car." [60] Mr. Hill, inviting John into his car, recognizing the important contributions he has to make, mirrors the experience of Isis, who, like John, has always had her eyes on the road. Their High John de Conquer-like ability to gain some mastery over their space and make a way out of no way makes them useful, affording them a space in the car, riding alongside white Americans and sharing the same goal, and most importantly, being the source of hope and not an emblem of social death. However, Mr. Hill seeks the Black community's help too late, and nothing can be done to salvage the bridge.

Not only are these characters portrayed as occupying their spaces, but they are also portrayed as dominating them. This confidence in their space and of their right to belong there exemplifies the resilience inherent in Black joy. This is the idea Hurston espouses as well in "High John de Conquer," as she declares: "But nationally and culturally, we are as white as the next one. We have put our labor and our blood into the common causes for a long time."[61] The whiteness Hurston refers to here is a metaphor for confident belonging. This confident belonging is also metaphorically inscribed in "Magnolia Flower." The connection to nature imbues the short story with a folkloric essence and spatial authority, grounding it in African worldview, while affirming the centrality of Blacks to the present and the future, with nature in the form of the river bearing testimony to the triumphant love of Magnolia Flower and her lover, John. The recognition ascribed to the enslaved Blacks by nature in "Magnolia Flower," in the form of the river and the Wind carrying their tears counters the displacement black people experience after nature bestows timelessness on their realities.

The Blacks in these narratives do not jostle to belong to white spaces, nor do they vie for whiteness. Rather, they treasure their black communities, one of the inscriptions of Black joy. Bentley goes out of his way to ensure he secures a place away from the white gaze or presence. Old Man Anderson in "The Eatonville Anthology" has never boarded a train and does not wish to; as written about him, "He doesn't know yet what a train looks like and he does not care."[62] These various scenes of Black joy represent a self-contained sanctuary. The Blacks leave the oppressor in the dark about this joy. They do not offer it up as spectacle; it is not a performance aimed to prove their humanity to the oppressor, neither is it offered up to disbelieving Blacks carelessly, as exemplified in the encounter recounted by Hurston in "High John de Conquer," in which Aunt Shady

[60] Hurston, ed. West, *Hitting a Straight Lick*, 128.
[61] Hurston, ed. Gates, *The Complete Stories*, 139.
[62] Hurston, ed. West, *Hitting a Straight Lick*, 451.

asks, "I hope you ain't one of these here smart colored folks that done got so they don't believe nothing."[63] The custodians of root work protect their special knowledge and keep it from undeserving eyes.

However, for all her preoccupation with Black joy and the literal and figurative spaces of Black joy, Hurston was not entirely silent on the oppression in the South. Hurston did not ignore or downplay the realities of quotidian oppression. The argument that the stories focus on black lives and joys constituting an act of refusal draws its validity from the evidence that Hurston was not blithely ignorant of place and its constraints for Blacks. The refusal argument is based on the presumption that Hurston is aware of racial tensions and antiblackness but refuses to center it. Therefore, as is done subsequently, instances of Hurston's thematization of constraints based on race and space are worth examining in the selected short stories to emphasize that Hurston's short stories are predicated on a politics of joy grounded in refusal, as against racial naiveté.

Hurston's short stories recognize how space and its dynamics are interwoven with racial dynamics, which bolsters her politics of refusal. Hurston's perception of spatial oppression and its insidiousness is clearly shown in most of her short stories. The river in "Magnolia Flower", like Isis' grandmother, rebukes the young brook for its joyfulness expressed through its lively interaction with space: "Why, O Young Water, do you hurry and hurl yourself so riotously about with your chatter and song? You disturb my sleep."[64] John Redding's tragic life is punctuated by a relentless bristling against spatial limitations. His refusal to center tradition and spatial constraints in his life, defying them by dreaming and pining to get away is a form of Black joy that is stifled by superstition and the women in his life, his mother and his wife. As described in the narrative, "The little brown boy loved to wander down to the water's edge, and casting in dry twigs, watch them sail away downstream to Jacksonville, the sea, the wide world and John Redding wanted to follow them."[65] John Redding's thwarted pining for the horizon underscores the place-related tragedy experienced by Black people who for various sociological issues are constrained to places. In the words of John Redding: "This indolent atmosphere will stifle every bit of ambition that's in me." [66] In this regard, his mother, like Isis' grandmother, embodies intra-racial obstacles to the quest for Black joy, metaphorized through spatial ambitions, like the opposition Hurston experienced from the school of the "sobbing Negroes."

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[63] Hurston, ed. Gates, *The Complete Stories*, 142.
[64] Hurston, ed. West, *Hitting a Straight Lick*, 246.
[65] Ibid., 101.
[66] Ibid., 112.

The foregoing shows that far from being complacent or displaying naiveté, Black joy is hard-won. The brook, in "Magnolia Flower" "when it encountered hard places in its bed… hurled its water in sparkling dance figures up into the moonlight… sang louder, louder; danced faster, faster with a coquettish splash! At the vegetation on its banks, upsetting the hyacinths who shivered and blushed."[67] All these examples highlight the resilience necessitated by Black joy in the face of oppressive intra- and inter-racial obstacles. Black joy, especially in its form in Hurston's fictive worlds, like High John, begins as a "whisper, a will to hope, a wish to find something worthy of laughter and song."[68] Black joy, as Priya Chhaya puts it,[69] is perseverance, which is exemplified in the resilience demonstrated by Bentley as he flees his place of oppression, by Isis, as she continues to defy the boundaries of acceptable behavior, by John Redding's continued dreaming and unrepressed wanderlust, and by Hurston, in her persistent amplification of Black joy and refusal. Ultimately, Hurston's short stories present space and the intentional resistance against displacement as central to Black joy.

Womanhood and the Concatenation of Black Joy and Liberatory Futures in the Selected Short Stories

Like her portrayal of Black people generally, Hurston brings on nuanced complexity in the depiction of her women characters, rejecting single stories of oppression. Hurston's gender vision is often inscribed through a juxtaposition of her male and female characters as foil to one another, as will be explored in this analysis. According to Doris Davis, "the respective strengths and talents of women as compared to those of men… is a subject Zora Neale Hurston considered throughout her distinguished career."[70] Davis further describes Hurton's works as "a recording… of the promoting of the beauty of the black voice and particularly that of the female voice."[71] Some of the women in the selected short stories are vibrant, resilient, and determined such as Laura Crooms and Isis. However, some of them are small-minded, petty, and vindictive such as Daisy in "The Eatonville Anthology" who is described as "the town vamp."[72] Yet, others are active antagonists, such as the grandmother

[67] Hurston, ed. West, *Hitting a Straight Lick*, 245.
[68] Hurston, ed. Gates, *The Complete Stories*, 139.
[69] Chhaya, "Finding Black Joy."
[70] Davis, "The Creation of Psychic Space," 269.
[71] Davis, "The Creation of Psychic Space," 270.
[72] Hurston, ed. West, *Hitting a Straight Lick*, 453.

in "Drenched in Light" and Matty in "John Redding Goes to Sea" who actively stand in the way of the dreams of Isis and John Redding, respectively.

However, generally, the women in Hurston's short stories are assertive, with their "vitality of spirit" contrasting strongly with the depiction of women as victims in the writings of her contemporaries, Jean Toomer and Richard Wright.[73] In the short stories under consideration, women are custodians of spaces of Black joy and demonstrate a greater knowledge of root work and intuitive knowledge, which Hurston references in "Black Death" as one of the strengths of Black people: "White folks are very stupid about some things. They can think mightily but they cannot *feel*."[74] Matty takes the lead in this native knowledge in "John Redding Goes to Sea." This thinking-male vs feeling-female binary is presented in the conflict between Alfred and Matty and their disposition towards John Redding's intense wanderlust. Although Matty believes John Redding has been cursed with restlessness, Alfred pragmatically opines that John Redding's tendency to wander is the natural male disposition. The gendered perspective difference is metaphorically foregrounded when "Matty and Stella sat on the deep front porch, but Alfred joined John under the tree. The family was divided into two armed camps."[75] The men and women are divided by the women's desire to own the men who resist this bondage. Thus, Alfred vituperates about "women wanting to settle men down to own them", to which Matty retorts, "dat's all we po' wimmen kin do. We wants our husbands an' our sons."[76] Matty and Stella's positioning on the porch is significant as a metaphorical indicator of protectors of the house, the space of conducting Black joy. Their roles as protectors of the house mirror. When the owl cries ominously the night of John Redding's death, Stella, in keeping with her role as the protector, is the one who rises to pour salt on the fire to scare the owl off, exhibiting an ingrained understanding of root work. Similarly, Mrs. Boger, in "Black Death" looks to root work for justice instead of formal legality. Mrs. Boger is dared by the scoundrel, Beau, who dishonors her daughter and drags her into disrepute, to "do whatever you feel big enough to try—my shoulders are broad."[77] Overwhelmed by ferocious anger, Mrs. Boger draws on root work, one of the ways of channeling Black joy. As Gates emphasizes in the introduction to *The Complete Stories*, it is necessary to note that the story is about "justice outside of the white man's law."[78] In both instances, the women embody the all-knowing divine feminine energy that inheres in Afrofuturism and root work as Black joy, thus decentralizing whiteness. The

[73] Davis, "The Creation of Psychic Space," 271.
[74] Hurston, ed. West, *Hitting a Straight Lick*, 203.
[75] Hurston, ed. West, *Hitting a Straight Lick*, 118.
[76] Hurston, ed. West, *Hitting a Straight Lick*, 122.
[77] Hurston, ed. West, *Hitting a Straight Lick*, 276.
[78] Gates, *The Complete Stories*, xvii.

moment of Mrs. Boger's moving triumphant scene metaphorizes the concatenation of Black joy and root work. In the moment, "three hundred years of America pass[ing] like the mist of morning… Africa reached out its hands and claimed its own." [79] Power over powerlessness Mrs. Boger exerts psychic dominance over the place in a moment that is a profound celebration of the joy of black spirituality. Empowered by this joyful blackness, she triumphantly executes her vengeance upon Beau. This tallies with Stewart's assertion that "For Hurston, root work is an important site for working out the politics of joy."[80] The politics of black joy manifested by Mrs. Boger is a decisive spiritual subversion of her place of oppression, which she transforms through the joy of root work.

These female characters, through the joy they exhibit, achieve various victories over their oppressors, often the men in their lives. The sexist oppression they experience ultimately serves as a metaphor for subjugation and triumph over it. Even Mrs. Clarke whose husband "used to beat her in the store when he was a young man" before he became patient enough to "wait until he goes home" [81] makes a point to extend a handshake of fellowship to everyone but her husband in church, excluding him, even when her eyes are shut. This action can be construed as an act of refusal and exclusion wielded as a deliberate act of power, much like Laura Crooms' silent wielding of the Stetson in "The Eatonville Anthology."

As an embodiment of a joyful refusal to centralize oppression, these women, owing to their intuitiveness, feeling, and spirituality, attain victory over oppression. Matty in "John Redding" represents a triumph of *feeling*, which Hurston considers the preserve of Black joy. This manner of knowing how things are and being able to narrate it without embellishment, as juxtaposed against book learning, is one of the forms of Black joy, as celebrated by Hurston in "High John de Conquer," in Aunt Shady Anne's account:

> High John de Conquer… had done teached the black folks so they knowed a hundred years ahead of time that freedom was coming. Long before the white folks knowed anything about it at all. These young Negroes reads they books and talk about the war freeing the Negroes, but Aye, Lord! A heap sees, but a few knows. Course the war was a lot of help, but how come the war took place? They think they knows, but they don't.[82]

In this foregoing excerpt, there is an interweaving of mythic knowledge, foresight, and the Afrofuturist emphasis on historical and futuristic representations of Black people with a

[79] Hurston, ed. West, *Hitting a Straight Lick*, 279.
[80] Stewart, *The Politics of Black Joy*, 10.
[81] Hurston, ed. West, *Hitting a Straight Lick*, 164.
[82] Hurston, ed. Gates, *The Complete Stories*, 142–143.

black woman centralized as the custodian of this knowledge. Black people are depicted as having a knowledge of their freedom beyond the agitation of the abolitionists. Aunty Shady Anne inserts Black people as agents in the emancipation, averring that the civil war helped, but the impulse to fight the war was placed in the emancipationists by High John, thus inscribing Black joy, in the form of root work, as crucial to the emancipation.

Another character that emphasizes the intertwining of womanhood and Black joy is Isis in "Drenched in Light." Instructively, Isis and John Redding are very similar in their wanderlust and their intense desire to transcend spatial restrictions. They even exhibit joy in similar ways, having dreams of freedom that counter the limitations they experience in real life. Their envisioning of a more fortuitous future is similar, as shown by their descriptions of their fantasies. John Redding: "sometimes in his dreams… was a prince, riding away in a gorgeous carriage. Often, he was a knight best-ride a fiery charger prancing down the white shell road that led to distant lands. At other times, he was a steamboat captain piloting his craft down the St. John River to where the sky seemed to touch the water."[83] However, John Redding's envisioning is described as a dream. He invokes it to underscore the dreariness of his reality. In contrast, Isis' trips are not dreams. Although they have no basis in her material reality, they are still valid. She narrates them as real experiences. By doing so, she defies restrictions and creates her own reality. These journeys are not somewhere in the future for her. They are her lived reality, even if other people cannot see it. As the story is told, "she told them about her trips to the horizon, about the trailing gowns, the gold shoes with blue bottoms. She insisted on the blue bottoms—the white charger, the time when she was Hercules and had slain numerous dragons and sundry giants."[84]

Therefore, whereas John, merely longs to depart, and, having been thwarted becomes immersed in deep sadness, Isis is joyful, as she frequently departs without actually leaving like John de Conquer teaches the servants to do in "High John de Conquer": "Oh, Old Massa don't need to know you gone from here. How? Just leave your old work-tired bodies around for him to look at, and he'll never realize youse way off somewhere, going about your business."[85] Thus, Isis can experience the joy of psychologically fortifying inner journeys that infuse her with joy and resilience. This equips her with the joy that the white woman hungers for and the ability to direct the white couple, thus finally earning herself a place in the vehicle—a metaphor for triumph. Thus, whereas John Redding weeps at all the things tying him down, Isis is so buoyed up by joy that even when wades into the water on her own to die, joy fills her up so much that she "saw no longer any reason to die… and she

[83] Hurston, ed. West, *Hitting a Straight Lick*, 110.
[84] Hurston, ed. West, *Hitting a Straight Lick*, 220.
[85] Hurston, ed. Gates, *The Complete Stories*, 145.

splashed and sang, enjoying herself immensely,"[86] until she is approached by the white couple. John Redding, on the other hand, dies in the water, a juxtaposition spotlighting the power and understanding of Black joy by black women. Isis' success, where John fails, is even more remarkable because she bears the double burden of race and place, experiencing gendered suppression. Isis lives under greater constraints than John does, having to conform to rules such as no whistling, "settin brazen, whistling, playing with boys, crossing her legs."[87] Isis' triumph is a celebration of the potency of Black joy in thwarting racist and gendered oppression. Most importantly, Isis' success represents success at establishing a "psychic space to exult spiritually." [88] Her achievement is as spiritual as it is physical, with significant implications for her well-being beyond physical survival. Similarly, Magnolia Flower's love affair with John underscores the ridiculousness of Bentley's close-mindedness and obsession with having very black grandchildren so much that he wants to marry his daughter off to Crazy Joe. Magnolia Flower's success is a psychic and spiritual triumph earning her complete freedom. Similarly, Laura Crooms, in "The Eatonville Anthology," having run out of patience with her husband's affair with Daisy, wields the ax-handle. Likewise, Cal'line Potts, tired of being disrespected by her philandering husband, Mitch Potts, dons a Stetsons, grabs an axe and determinedly pursues redress. These women's boldness in the face of disrespect and infidelity offer a stark contrast to the timid Joe Kanty in "Spunk," who approaches Spunk with an insignificant razor and dies from his Stetson.

Therefore, black women are important in Hurston's oeuvre, exhibiting a natural leadership ability and affinity for root work and Black joy. In this regard, we observe the playing out of Davis' observation that Hurston juxtaposes men and women in her stories to highlight and compare gender-specific strengths and weaknesses. Her character's confrontation of conflict spotlights Hurston's gendered vision. An intertextual foil characterization can be observed in her stories, with Magnolia Flower and Isis and Laura Crooms/ Cal'line Potts serving as foil characters to Bentley, John Redding, and Joe Kanty, respectively. These women achieve triumph over adversity, circumstances, and intersectional oppression, a message resounds throughout the collection of stories, in Magnolia Flower's defeat of Bentley, in Isis's ascension. Beyond the stories, the portrayal of Black womanhood as Black joy in the form of determined agency is driven home in the vindication of Hurston and her restoration to her rightful place of honor in the history of African American literature.

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[86] Hurston, ed. West, *Hitting a Straight Lick*, 218.
[87] Hurston, ed. West, *Hitting a Straight Lick*, 206.
[88] Davis, "The Creation of Psychic Space," 276.

Conclusion

Hurston's short stories centralize the intersectional oppression Black women experience based on race, space, and womanhood. Rather than focus on the pathos of Black suffering, Hurston deviates from the dominant perception of Blackness as unmitigated suffering. However, this was not naïve escapism. Instead, as this analysis of Hurston's selected short stories through the lens of Afrofuturism and the politics of Black joy reveals, Hurston's profound engagement with triumph over intersectional oppression through Black joy and Afrofuturist envisioning aimed at securing the complete psychic and cultural wholeness of Blacks, in addition to their freedom. Both frameworks show that race, space, and gender can occasion constraints that can be overcome through the strategic imbibing of transformative joy. In weaponizing joy to secure freedom, Hurston makes a way out of no way, advocating the necessity of preserving the wholeness of black people while wielding a veritable weapon fashioned solely from laughter and joy against the suppression of black people. This feat ultimately facilitates the pairing of Afrofuturism and Black joy in a mutually enriching dialogue that decodes Hurston's racial vision and presents a roadmap toward the optimal future Blacks should envision.

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Theatre in Suspension: Staging the Epoché in Beckett, Churchill, and Kane

Pro&Contra 7

No. 2 (2023) 77–100

https://doi.org/10.33033/pc.2023.2.77

Abstract

This paper examines the intersection of postdramatic theatre and phenomenology. It utilizes the Husserlian concept of the *epoché* and connects it with postdramatic theatre as theorized by Hans-Thies Lehmann, following the analysis of Zsolt Benedek: theatre as a suspension of quotidian intentionality. The study incorporates a practical application of its analysis within the selected works of Samuel Beckett, Caryl Churchill, and Sarah Kane. It explores how these playwrights employ the *epoché* to suspend familiar patterns of perception and rethink meaning by disrupting traditional performative structures on two levels, performance and text. The discussion will then examine how Lehmann's 'joint text' and Goethe's 'productive imagination,' within these works in focus, impact spectators' engagement in meaning-making. This phenomenological mode of perception is further grounded in Maurice Merleau-Ponty's theory of perception and his concept of the 'gaze'. In this regard, this framework enables the analysis to position the theatrical experience as a co-constituted, embodied event, where meaning unfolds through the spectator's corporeal presence and perceptual engagement. For the most part, this study argues that postdramatic forms compel a radical shift in spectatorship, urging a phenomenological attitude that transcends passive viewing and fosters active and reflective participation.

Keywords: Husserlian *epoché*, phenomenology, postdramatic theatre, perception, the gaze

Introduction

Drawing on Edmund Husserl's (1859–1938) concept of *epoché*,[1] this paper considers how the suspension of habitual perception is mirrored in the theatrical experience, particularly

[1] The word *epoché* (ἐποχή) originates from Ancient Greek Skepticism, it referred to the suspension of judgment regarding the truth of non-evident matters. For Greek skeptics, this practice aimed to achieve *ataraxia*—a state of mental tranquility. "It is traditionally translated as 'suspension of judgement." See Daniel Vazquez, *Suspension of Belief* (n.p.: Cambridge University Press, n.d.). Then, Husserl adapted the concept of suspension not for the sake of skepticism or tranquility, but to focus on conscious experience. For Husserl, *epoché* involved bracketing or setting aside judgments about the external world in order to examine the structures of consciousness and how phenomena present themselves to us. This approach aimed to overcome assumptions rooted in scientific realism or naturalism, allowing experience to be analyzed from within, on its own terms. Husserl's *epoché* became a cornerstone of phenomenological methodology, profoundly influencing philosophers such as Heidegger, Merleau-Ponty, Sartre, and later Levinas. It is now fundamental to continental philosophy and existentialism, and has extended into fields such as performance studies, where it is employed to examine how phenomena are experienced in real time—particularly in contexts like art and theatre that foreground

in relation to spectators' engagement. It begins by establishing a theoretical framework that links postdramatic theatre[2] as outlined by Hans-Thies Lehmann (1944–2022) and phenomenology[3], positioning the stage as a unique site for embodied experience. This analysis will be contextualized through Zsolt Benedek's perspective of postdramatic theatre as a medium for reflection and philosophical inquiry, as articulated in *The Phenomenology of the Theatrical Performance* (2020) where he writes that "theatre suspends the quotidian intentionality of being-in-the-world."[4] To illustrate this framework in action, close readings of selected works[5] by Samuel Beckett (1906–1989), Caryl Churchill (b. 1938), and Sarah Kane (1971–1999), will be conducted to examine how these playwrights engage with the phenomenological suspension of everyday perception through their innovative strategies.

The discussion then shifts to Lehmann's concept of the 'joint text' and Johann Wolfgang von Goethe's idea of 'productive imagination,' both explored in relation to the same works. By prioritizing imaginative engagement, these performances position

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lived experience and perception. For the purposes of this paper, I will utilize Husserl's concept of *epoché*.

[2] The concept of postdramatic theatre was introduced by German theatre scholar Hans-Thies Lehmann in his work *Postdramatic Theatre* (2002). "Lehmann's theory of postdramatic theatre is testament to a new emphasis on performance in European and North American theatre and art from the 1960s onwards, which consequently led to a paradigm shift in the study of theatre and to the emergence of Performance Studies as a discipline." Hans-Thies Lehmann, *Postdramatic Theatre* (London/New York: Routledge, 2006), 4. "The adjective 'postdramatic' denotes a theatre that feels bound to operate beyond drama, at a time 'after' the authority of the dramatic paradigm in theatre." See Lehmann, *Postdramatic Theatre,* 27.

[3] Phenomenology is a philosophical movement and research methodology that focuses on the study of conscious experiences from the first-person perspective. It seeks to explore how individuals perceive, interpret, and understand their experiences. Originating in the early 20th century with thinkers like Husserl, he writes, the task of phenomenology is "to go from words and opinions back to the things themselves, to consult them in their self-givenness and to set aside all prejudices alien to them," 35. Taylor Carman analyzes Husserl's definition of phenomenology in his foreword to *Phenomenology of Perception*, "Husserl meant not real (concrete) objects, but the ideal (abstract) forms and contents of experience as we live them, not as we have learned to conceive and describe them according to the categories of science and received opinion. Phenomenology is thus a descriptive, not an explanatory or deductive enterprise, for it aims to reveal experience as such, rather than frame hypotheses or speculate beyond its bounds" see Taylor Carman, *Foreword* to Maurice Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology of Perception*, translated by Donald A. Landes (New York: Routledge, 2012), xxxxv. Phenomenology has influenced various fields, including psychology, sociology, and the arts. Moreover, the methods and definitions within phenomenology have been the subject of extensive debate among philosophers, with discussions about its core principles continuing to this day. This ongoing debate is reflected in the diverse approaches of subsequent philosophers, such as Martin Heidegger (1889–1976), Jean-Paul Sartre (1905–1980) Simone de Beauvoir (1929–1980) Maurice Merleau-Ponty (1908–1961) Alfred Schütz (1899–1959) and Don Ihde (1934–2024).

[4] Zsolt Benedek. "The Phenomenology of the Theatrical Performance." *Acta Universitatis Carolinae. Interpretations. Studia Philosophica Europeanea* vol, 10, no. 2 (2020): 187–206, 191.

[5] In this paper, the focus will be on the following texts: Samuel Beckett's *Collected Shorter Plays* (1984) and *Waiting for Godot* (2006), as well as Caryl Churchill's notable pieces such as *Cloud 9* (1989), *Far Away* (2000), *The Skriker* (1994), and *Top Girls* (2008). Additionally, I will examine Sarah Kane's impactful plays, including *Blasted* (2011), *Crave* (1998), *Cleansed* (2000), and *4.48 Psychosis* (2000). I will be referring to several examples from these works to support the discussion.

spectators[6] to become co-authors, actively shaping their interpretations within the rich layers of meaning that challenge conventional narrative structures.

Finally, the analysis is grounded in Maurice Merleau-Ponty's (1908–1961) phenomenology of perception and his concept of the 'gaze' as the initiating point of perceptual experience. He posits that perception is not a passive reception but an active engagement of the body, influenced by the gaze and shaped by the body's situatedness in the world[7]. This interconnectedness of gaze, perception, and body is crucial to understanding how meaning is created in Beckett's, Churchill's, and Kane's performances.

Postdramatic theatre as phenomenological experience

Within the framework of postdramatic theatre, instead of engaging in a self-referential game of signs, theatre invites the spectator to immerse themselves in their own perception, imagination, and experiences. This immersion allows for the possibility of rediscovering their connection to intersubjective reality—the shared social and emotional landscape of human experience. The foregoing statement implies that the performance space has the capacity to disrupt everyday perceptions that ordinarily structure the spectator's worldview. Benedek articulates that theatre offers more than mere entertainment; it becomes a site for deep personal reflection and existential inquiry. He states that:

> Theatre performance can be perceived as a unique occasion for a special phenomenological practice, rather than a self-referential hermeneutic game with self-referential signs. It performatively suspends the quotidian intentionality of being-in-the-world of the spectator. By putting the spectator's imagination, perception, and recollection into play, theatrical performance grants the possibility for the spectator to re-discover and to reflect on their embedding in their intersubjective reality. [8]

This idea, however, hinges on the quality of the performance and its ability to resonate authentically with the spectator. If a performance becomes too self-referential or detached from lived experience, it risks alienating the spectator rather than inviting them into a

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[6] In theatre theory, 'audience' refers to the collective group attending a performance, while 'spectator' emphasizes the individual's active, perceptual engagement; I will be using the latter, as it aligns more closely with the phenomenological focus of this study.

[7] See Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology of Perception*.

[8] Benedek, "The Phenomenology of the Theatrical Performance," 191.

transformative engagement. Benedek underscores theatre's potential to function as a unique phenomenological practice, urging the spectator to move beyond conventional modes of perception and engage with their intersubjective reality. In a similar vein, the editors of *Performance and Phenomenology: Traditions and Transformations* (2015)[9] note that:

If the Husserlian phenomenological approach invites us to take a distance from direct involvement with the world, this same distance will replicate the purported distance between what happens on stage and audience members. [They contend that] theatre provides a staged representation of the *epoché*, as both phenomena [theatre and the concept of *epoché*] allow for a form of perception that exists apart from the quotidian [everyday experiences].[10]

This connection underscores the way theatre can function as a space for profound reflection and interpretation, mirroring the distancing effect intrinsic to Husserlian phenomenology. Husserl articulates the concept of *epoché* in the second volume of his work, *Ideas Pertaining to a Pure Phenomenology and to a Phenomenological Philosophy* (1912). He describes the *epoché* as a process that allows the "suspension of judgment, from taking any position predicatively toward being and being-thus and all the modalities of being which pertain to the spatiotemporal factual being of anything 'real.'"[11] This methodology encourages individuals to set aside the 'natural attitude'—the usual way of perceiving the world and its objects—in favor of a focus on pure consciousness.

Building on Husserl's concept of *epoché*, Derrida highlights that Husserl's concept of phenomenological reduction can be associated with a theatrical setting: "[p]henomenological reduction is a scene, a theatre stage."[12] Derrida's analogy draws attention to the inherent performative nature of the phenomenological approach—where both performers and spectators navigate a space that encourages a step back from direct reality. Based on this, theatre might be seen as a dramatized portrayal of the *epoché* that involves modes of perception exceeding everyday encounters.

Husserl's phenomenology, when linked to theatrical contexts, provides a valuable framework for examining the intricate relationship between perception, reality, and performance. This intersection between theatre and phenomenology highlights a profound shift in the spectators' engagement, particularly within the tradition of postdramatic theatre. Such performances reconfigure the spectator's role as an active participant in meaning-making. In

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[9] The editors of this book are Maaike Bleeker, Jon Foley Sherman, and Eirini Nedelkopoulou.

[10] Maaike Bleeker, Jon Foley Sherman, and Eirini Nedelkopoulou, eds., *Performance and Phenomenology: Traditions and Transformations* (New York: Routledge, 2015), 2.

[11] Husserl, *Ideas Pertaining to a Pure Phenomenology*, 61.

[12] Jacques Derrida and Newton Garver, *Speech and Phenomena: And Other Essays on Husserl's Theory of Signs*, trans. David B. Allison (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1973), 86.

contrast, traditional dramatic forms aim to construct an illusion of reality that encourages emotional identification with characters, positioning the spectator as a passive observer.

This paradigm is grounded in the phenomenological practice articulated by Benedek, who suggests that theatre serves as a platform for suspending everyday judgments and embracing an intersubjective reality. Thus, it aligns closely with the principles of Husserl's *epoché*, thereby deferring immediate interpretations and fostering critical reflection. As Lehmann notes, "[h]ere everything depends on not understanding immediately. Rather one's perception has to remain open for connections, correspondences and clues at completely unexpected moments, perhaps casting what was said earlier in a completely new light. Thus, meaning remains in principle postponed."[13] This departure from conventional hermeneutics encourages spectators to assume multiple roles—those of readers, theorists, and participants—ultimately transforming their experiences into an interactive exploration of complex themes rather than a passive consumption of content.

In this framework, the dynamics of performance become a site for in-depth engagement with the intricate interplay between perception, reality, and the immersive potential of theatre itself. Spectators assume an active role in the theatrical experience, where their individual perspectives shape both their interpretation and engagement with the narrative, performers, and thematic content presented on stage. This participatory dynamic facilitates a critical form of engagement, encouraging them to reflect not only on the performance itself but also on its broader implications within societal, cultural, and theoretical contexts. As they navigate between roles as readers, theorists, and critics, they contribute to co-authoring the text. This interplay creates a disruption of the traditional hermeneutic experience, manifested in the conversation between performance and spectators, where "the emission and reception of signs and signals take place simultaneously."[14] This dynamic engagement ultimately transforms the spectator's experience, inviting a deeper reflection and exploration of the complexities inherent in the performance.

The space between: *epoché* in Beckett's abstraction, Churchill's dislocation, and Kane's fracture

In this section, I will explore how Beckett, Churchill, and Kane employ the *epoché* to create 'a space between' the performance and spectators by challenging conventional theatrical

[13] Lehmann, *Postdramatic Theatre*, 87.
[14] Robert Leach, *Theatre Studies: The Basics*, 2nd ed. (London: Routledge, 2013), 17.

norms, inviting spectators to introspect the intricate relationship between performance and reality. Beckett's use of abstract and minimalist settings serves to strip away familiar structures and to bring the spectator to confront the essence of existence amidst a backdrop of ambiguity. Similarly, Churchill uses dislocation in her theatre as a key dramaturgical strategy that disrupts fixed notions of identity, temporality, and spatial coherence; through cross-casting, non-linear structures, and surreal aesthetics, Furthermore, Kane takes this a step further with her deconstruction of reality and transforming her settings into surrealistic landscapes. In this context, familiar environments crumble into chaos, reflecting deep existential anxieties, prompting spectators to question their own understanding of human experience. Together, these playwrights create a dynamic interplay between the stage and the spectators, cultivating a reflective space that challenges them to rethink their (spectators) interpretations and the very nature of reality itself.

Within the framework of Beckett's non-naturalistic technique, the minimalist and abstract settings in his works serve as crucial tools for destabilizing the spectator's aesthetic experience. Beckett's departure from the detailed realism typical of naturalistic theatre invites a multitude of interpretations. In *Waiting for Godot* (2006) the setting is minimal, it is described simply as "[a] country road. A tree."[15]. Nathaniel Davis argues in his paper "Not a Soul in Sight: Beckett's Fourth Wall" (2015) that "with *Godot*, we are presented with a stage, a plot, and characters that are all so extremely reduced as to barely register as theatrical, let alone real or natural. With *Godot*, we are neither here nor there, and thus the fourth wall separating the audience from the stage takes on a strongly ambiguous character."[16] In this sense, *Waiting for Godot* challenges traditional notions of theatre, transforming the experience from a naturalistic play into an abstract exploration of existence. This minimalist setting, stripped of clear context or grounding, serves as a crucial mechanism in subverting traditional representations of reality, positioning *Waiting for Godot* as a seminal work that questions and destabilizes the very notion of reality and representation.

The same tendency is also present in *Play* (1964), where the characters—two women and a man—are encased in large, urn-like structures: "front centre, touching one another, three identical grey urns about one yard high. From each a head protrudes."[17] In *Not I* (1973), the setting is similarly minimalistic and abstract: "stage in darkness but for mouth."[18] In *That Time* (1976), the character is only visible through a spotlight on their face: "stage

[15] There are other objects used by the characters, including a rope or belt used by Estragon, a bag or basket carried by Pozzo, and a pocket watch. See Samuel Beckett, *Waiting for Godot* (London: Faber & Faber, 2006), 1.
[16] Nathaniel Davis, "'Not a Soul in Sight!': Beckett's Fourth Wall," *Journal of Modern Literature* 38, no. 2 (2015): 86–102, 97. https://doi.org/10.2979/jmodelite.38.2.86.
[17] Samuel Beckett, *Collected Shorter Plays* (London: Faber and Faber, 1984), 147.
[18] Beckett, *Collected Shorter Plays*, 216.

in darkness. Fade up to listener's face about 10 feet above stage level mid stage off centre. Old white face, long flaring white hair as if seen from above."[19] The backdrop is devoid of any other elements, reinforcing introspection and temporal displacement. In *Quad* (1984), a television play, Beckett also presents a similarly abstract environment: "[a] piece for four players, light and percussion."[20] The setting is undefined and abstract, devoid of any specific location. The space is simply a square or quad, offering no extraneous details to distract from the action and movement of the characters. Moreover, in *Rockabye* (1981), the setup is equally minimal, featuring a single character: "subdued on chair. Rest of stage dark."[21] *Footfalls* (1976) continues this stark approach, focusing on the character's minimal movement and the recorded playback of its own voice. The stage is nearly completely dark, with only a narrow strip of light illuminating a corridor-like path[22] along which May paces back and forth in measured, rhythmic steps. There is no furniture, no detailed backdrop—only the sound of May's footsteps and the disembodied voice of her unseen mother, which emanates from offstage.

These minimalist environments strip away familiar theatrical structures, focusing the spectator's attention entirely on the symbols and gestures presented. Beckett's works are densely layered with signs, inviting a multiplicity of interpretations. As meanings shift and evolve, spectators are compelled to confront their own readings, fostering a contemplative and active engagement with the performance. This symbolic richness creates fertile ground for analysis but also installs a sense of instability, reflecting the existential uncertainties central to Beckett's vision. His non-naturalistic style subverts traditional theatrical expectations, blurring the boundary between reality and performance. Without a stable representational framework, spectators are prompted to question perception itself, engaging in a reflective process that transcends passive viewing. Yet this very destabilization often generates discomfort, as Beckett's theatre forces confrontation with unsettling themes of isolation, fractured identity, and the inexorable passage of time.

To the same extent, Churchill constructs a theatrical space charged with ambiguity and complexity, prompting spectators to move beyond passive observation and actively participate in the creation of meaning. This engagement unfolds within the intermediate space between the performance and the spectators' personal experiences, fostering a dynamic environment open to multiple interpretations.

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[19] Beckett, *Collected Shorter Plays*, 228.
[20] Beckett, *Collected Shorter Plays*, 291.
[21] Beckett, *Collected Shorter Plays*, 273.
[22] Beckett, *Collected Shorter Plays*, 239.

Cloud 9 (1989) for example, explores the intersections of sexual and colonial oppression by disrupting traditional gender roles, racial hierarchies, and societal expectations. The play is set in two distinct time periods—Victorian colonial Africa in Act I and 1979 London in Act II. Churchill uses cross-gender and cross-racial casting to underscore the absurdity of these imposed identities and to reveal how such roles are performed rather than inherent. Churchill critiques imperialism and patriarchy by highlighting how systems of power shape personal and political relationships. The casting choices are central to this critique: having a male actor portray Betty, as she "has no respect for women … and wants to be what men want her to be,"[23] is to emphasize the constructed nature of femininity, framing it as a learned performance rather than a biological essence. As a result, Churchill collapses the boundaries between sex and gender, suggesting that "the distinction between sex and gender turns out to be no distinction at all."[24] Similarly, "for Edward to be played by a woman is within the English tradition of women playing boys; for Cathy to be played by a man is a simple reversal of this."[25] Moreover, the black servant, Joshua played by a white actor reflects the internalized racism of colonialism, as he is "aspiring to be what white men want him to be."[26] Victoria, represented by a ventriloquist's dummy, becomes a striking symbol of female passivity and the suppression of voice under patriarchal structures, embodying her lack of agency within the system. These casting choices are not merely theatrical devices but deliberate strategies to complicate the spectator's understanding of identity. By unsettling assumptions about gender, race, and power, Churchill in *Cloud 9* invites spectators to confront the performative and constructed nature of these categories, transforming spectatorship into a space of critical interrogation.

In *Top Girls* (1982), the blending of historical and contemporary figures alters spectators' perceptions of history and time. "Marlene hosts a dinner party in a London restaurant to celebrate her promotion to managing director of 'Top Girls' employment agency. Her five gusts are women from the past."[27] By positioning Marlene alongside notable women from

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[23] Caryl Churchill, *Cloud 9* (London: Nick Hern Books, 1989), viii.

[24] Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity* (New York and London: Routledge, 2002), 9.

[25] Caryl Churchill, *Cloud 9* (London: Nick Hern Books, 1989), viii.

[26] Caryl Churchill, *Cloud 9* (London: Nick Hern Books, 1989), viii.

[27] "In order of arrival, the characters are Isabella Bird (1831-1940), who lived in Edinburgh and travelled abroad extensively between the ages of forty and seventy; Lady Nijo (b. 1258), Japanese, who was an Emperor's courtesan and later a Buddhist nun who travelled on foot through Japan; Dull Gret, who is the subject of the Brueghel painting Dulle Griet, in which a woman in an apron and armor leads a crowd of women charging through hell and fighting devils; Pope Joan, who disguised as a man, is thought to have been Pope between 854-856; and, arriving late, patient Griselda, the obedient wife whose story is told by Chaucer in the Clerk's Tale of *The Canterbury Tales.*" See Caryl Churchill, William Naismith, and Nick Worrall, *Top Girls* (United Kingdom: Bloomsbury Academic, 2008), vii.

different periods, Churchill disrupts the conventional linear progression of history, creating a space where past and present converge. This temporal collapse encourages spectators to "bracket" their prior assumptions, suspending preconceived notions in order to engage more deeply with each character's narrative. As Marlene converses with historical women each of whom has endured significant personal and societal struggles—the spectator is prompted to reflect not only on the progress of women's rights but also on the unresolved issues that continue to shape contemporary gender politics.

While the historical and contemporary figures in *Top Girls* reshape our understanding of time and history, *The Skriker* (1994) deepens this exploration through an experimental and symbolic approach that blends mythology, fantasy, and the contemporary world. The grotesque figure of the Skriker and its encounters with earthly women blur the boundaries between reality and fantasy. Churchill disrupts linear time and space by merging the supernatural underworld with contemporary life, creating an unsettling, unreal reality. At its center is the Skriker, described as "a shapeshifter and death portent, ancient and damaged."[28] This elusive figure constantly transforms through its shifting disguises, as an old woman, a motherless child, or even inanimate objects like a sofa: "Josie and Lilly are sitting on a sofa … The Skriker is part of the sofa, invisible to them."[29] The 'space between' in the play becomes a liminal realm where the boundaries between human and other, real and imagined, dissolve. Through this constant shifting between forms, times, and realities, Churchill's use of dislocation destabilizes any fixed sense of identity or place, immersing the spectator in a world where meaning must be continually renegotiated.

Churchill's use of dislocation extends beyond cross-gender casting to the very structure and aesthetic of her theatre. In *Far Away* (2000), she destabilizes perception by staging death as spectacle. The parade of executors is intended to be brutal and violent, is juxtaposed with the hats—designed for a fashion show or carnival—that appear beautiful. "*Far Away* manipulates perspective and illusion to bring into view the 'far away' social and political landscape that people fail to see or overlook."[30] In this regard, Churchill shifts the focus to the hats, drawing attention away from the human bodies themselves. Through this dislocation, she creates a distance between the spectator and the performance, highlighting the way harsh realities are obscured and beautified. "The hats of *Far Away* manage to be, grimly, both dislocational and marvellous. They are extravagant creations."[31] In this statement, Una Chaudhuri highlights Churchill's use of dislocation to create a space where

[28] Caryl Churchill, *The Skriker* (London: Nick Hern Books, 1994).
[29] Churchill, *The Skriker*.
[30] Elaine Aston, *Caryl Churchill*, 3rd ed. (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2010), 116.
[31] Una Chaudhuri, "Different Hats," *Theatre* 33, no. 3 (2003).

beauty and violence collide, forcing the spectators to confront uncomfortable truths about societal structures. Therefore, "[t]he hats are 'beautiful' [a]nd 'sad' [a]s dislocations are [a]nd marvellous, as dislocations are."[32] The hats symbolize a contrast between superficial beauty and the harsh realities of exploitation, embodying both allure and sorrow in their dislocated representation. This 'space between' invites reflection on how harsh realities are obscured, offering a disorienting, critical lens through which spectators can reconsider their perceptions of the world.

In a similar manner, Kane creates reflective space between spectators and performers; she invites critical engagement from the spectators to reconsider their preconceived notions about reality. Her plays often begin with a semblance of reality, only to deconstruct it and reveal underlying horrors, absurdities, and existential crises. *Blasted* (2011), for instance, is notable for its deconstruction of a naturalistic world to create complex, often surreal, and fragmented new reality. The play opens in a rundown hotel room in Leeds, England: "[a]very expensive hotel room in Leeds—the kind that is so expensive it could be anywhere in the world. There is a large double bed. A mini-bar and champagne on ice. A telephone. A large bouquet of flowers. Two doors-one is the entrance from the corridor, the other leads off to the bathroom."[33] However, by scene three, "[t]he hotel has been blasted by a mortar bomb. There is a large hole in one of the walls, and everything is covered in dust which is still falling."[34] Kane shifts the setting from a seemingly naturalistic one—a hotel room in Leeds—to a horrific, war-torn landscape, thereby shattering any illusions of normalcy. Initially, the play presents a domestic scene with realistic dialogue and interactions between Mark and Ian. The hotel room is depicted with mundane details, creating an illusion of a familiar, relatable setting. As the play progresses, the reality collapses into chaos as a soldier enters, and the violence of war invades this sheltered space. The graphic imagery and brutal actions that follow strip away any pretense of safety, collapsing the naturalistic facade. This transition emphasizes the brutality of human existence and reflects the chaos of contemporary society.

Another example of this reflective, deconstructive approach can be found in *Cleansed* (1998), where Kane similarly destabilizes the boundaries of reality to create a space for visceral, emotional, and critical engagement. Set in an institution that vaguely resembles a university but functions more like a torture chamber, Kane deliberately blurs the line between the real and the surreal. The stage directions themselves defy conventional logic—characters undergo extreme physical transformations; limbs are severed and reattached and

[32] Una Chaudhuri, "Different Hats," *Theatre* 33, no. 3 (2003).
[33] Sarah Kane, *Blasted* (London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2011), 3.
[34] Kane, *Blasted*, 37.

acts of violence and love coexist in ways that challenge naturalistic representation. The play opens with a clinical, almost sterile atmosphere, "The White Room - the university sanatorium. Tinker enters … He fills the syringe."[35] Yet, as the narrative unfolds, the university transforms into a site of psychological and physical trauma. In one scene, after "Carl's tongue is cut out. Rod appears and dances with Carl."[36] These surreal and harrowing shifts rupture the spectators' expectations and mirror the phenomenological encounter, encouraging a suspension of habitual perception.

The joint text: imagination and interpretation in postdramatic theatre as 'a theatre of perceptibility'

Lehmann argues that "theatre performance turns the behaviour onstage and in the auditorium into a joint text, a 'text' even if there is no spoken dialogue on stage or between actors and spectators."[37] Lehmann's concept of 'joint text' is constructed by the spectator who bridges gap between the world of theatrical performance and their own pre-existing world. This process enables spectators to perceive alternative variations and potentialities beyond what is immediately presented to them. However, this would not be possible without the element of imagination, which plays a crucial role in transforming the spectators experience from mere perception to analytical deduction. In this context, Goethe's concept of 'productive imagination' becomes relevant.

This phase of cognitive transformation through imaginative engagement is also highlighted by Lehmann, who describes a style of theatre that transcends traditional realism and "manifests itself in poetic and visual ecstasies of the imagination."[38] Goethe's concept of 'productive imagination' emphasizes that the impact of a performance lies in how spectators engage and interpret it. Theatre encourages spectators to expand their perspectives and explore new possibilities, freeing them from conventional thinking. As Goethe says, "this process of constructive imagination enables us to see alternate versions and possibilities outside of what is immediately preset."[39] Building on this idea of collaboration, I argue in this section that Beckett, Churchill, and Kane engage the spectators' imaginations by

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[35] Sarah Kane, *Cleansed* (London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2000), 6.
[36] Kane, *Cleansed,* 12.
[37] Lehmann, *Postdramatic Theatre,* 17.
[38] Lehmann, *Postdramatic Theatre,* 117.
[39] Iris Hennigfeld, "Goethe's Phenomenological Way of Thinking and the Urphänomen," *in Goethe Yearbook*, vol. 22, ed. Adrian Daub and Elisabeth Krimmer (Woodbridge: Boydell & Brewer, 2015), 143–168.

embracing minimalism, ambiguity, and fragmentation to construct alternative interpretations and realities beyond the confines of the scripted text.

Starting with Beckett's economical language and stripped-back stage, spectators are compelled to delve into the subtext and emotional undercurrents of the piece, creating space for imaginative interpretation. The absence of clear resolution allows for multiple perspectives, prompting spectators to project their own meanings onto the work. For example, the ending in *Waiting for Godot* encourages the spectators to imagine futures and realities beyond the existential waiting that defines the play. Similarly, in *Not I*, the visual appearance and physicality of the character—often referred to as mouth, are deliberately left ambiguous. This intentional vagueness invites spectators to envision the character's physical attributes and the specific positioning of its body. By leaving the character's visual details open to interpretation, Beckett makes the experience of *Not I* deeply personal and resonant for each one of the spectators.

In *Footfalls*, May engages in a dialogue with an unseen figure, referred to as Mother. The minimal stage direction, combined with May's physicality—her pacing and the sound of her footsteps—urge the spectators to interpret the emotional significance behind her interactions. The ambiguity surrounding her mother's presence creates a surreal quality, prompting spectators to imagine the relationship dynamics and the psychological undercurrents that shape May's existence.

In *Krapp's Last Tape* (1958), Beckett masterfully evokes a range of characters in the minds of the spectators, even though they remain absent from the stage. The play centers on Krapp, a sixty-nine-year-old man, who listens to an audio recording of his thirty-nine-year-old self, reflecting on life and love. Over the course of more than four decades, Krapp has recorded annual tapes, capturing what he considers the most significant moments. The tape recorder itself becomes a live actor/character that communicates with Krapp. Miller notes, "media that is used as storage for experience, sensation, and emotion. *Krapp's Last Tape*, which turns tape recordings into a kind of character that interacts with Krapp,"[40] As Krapp listens to the recordings, the voices of his younger selves—his thirty-nine-year-old and middle-aged self—interrupt and converse with him, creating a dialogue between past and present. Remarkably, in the recording each "voice cannot be entirely claimed or owned by its speaker; it has autonomy."[41] Despite originating from a single individual, these voices

[40] Edward D. Miller, "The Performance of Listening: Samuel Beckett's 'That Time'," *Cinema Journal* 51, no. 3 (2012): 3, http://www.jstor.org/stable/23253899.

[41] Jacques Derrida, "Economimesis," trans. Richard Klein, *Diacritics* 11, no. 2 (1981): 3–25, quoted in Edward D. Miller, "The Performance of Listening: Samuel Beckett's 'That Time,'" *Cinema Journal* 51, no. 3 (2012), 5. http://www.jstor.org/stable/23253899.

exist as distinct entities, each with its own identity. The voices on the recorder represent different stages of Krapp's life, underscoring the fragmentation of his identity over time and the disconnection between the man he was and the man he has become.

Moving forward, Churchill in *Far Away* presents a different yet equally compelling narrative, where the ambiguity and surreal quality of the conversation between Joan and her aunt, Harper invites spectators to reflect on and interpret the deeper implications of their discussion. Their exchanges hint at a world filled with chaos, conflict, and unsettling truths. As they converse, fears about the world emerge, along with the lies Harper tells Joan. For instance, Joan says, "there was a light on. That's how I could see the blood inside the shed. I could see the faces and which ones had blood on."[42] Harper responds, "That's from before. That's because they were attacked by the people your uncle's saving them from."[43] She continues with an inconsistent justification: "it's nothing bad, that's just friends of your uncle was having a little party with."[44] These contradictions prompt the spectators to question the authenticity of Harper's reasoning, leaving it up to their imagination to fill in the gaps regarding the causes of these lies.

Kane's plays often explore challenging themes such as trauma, mental illness, and existential angst. In *4.48 Psychosis* (2000), she breaks with traditional narrative structures inviting spectators to piece together emotional and psychological experiences. This fragmentation encourages spectators to use their imagination, envisioning alternate interpretations of both the narrative and the characters' psyches. Moreover, the number of the characters is not specified, and its ambiguous endings and non-linear storytelling create space reflection on the possibilities that lie beyond the text. Kane pushes viewers to envision alternative realities and emotional truths that transcend the immediate performance. *4.48 Psychosis* unfolds as a one-hour and twelve-minute exploration of major depressive disorder through multiple voices. Productions range from solo performances to versions featuring three actors, as in the original staging, symbolizing the fragmentation of an individual into victim, perpetrator, and bystander simultaneously[45]. Some productions feature only two actors, with the doctor character engaging in dialogue with the patient and references to other physicians like "Dr This, Dr That, and Dr Whatsit."[46] By leaving the number and identities of characters undefined, Kane invites

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[42] Caryl Churchill, *Far Away* (London: Nick Hern Books, 2000), 139

[43] Churchill, *Far Away,* 140.

[44] Churchill, *Far Away,* 137.

[45] *4.48 Psychosis* first staged at the Royal Court's Jerwood Theatre Upstairs on 23 June 2000, directed by James Macdonald. This production featured three actors: Jason Hughes, Marin Ireland, and Jo McInnes. See Steve Earnest, "4:48 Psychosis (Review)," *Theatre Journal* 57, no. 2 (May 2005): 298–300, https://doi.org/10.1353/tj.2005.0058.

[46] Sarah Kane, *4.48 Psychosis,* (London: Methuen Drama, 2000), series Modern Plays; Bloomsbury Publishing, 209.

diverse interpretations, allowing both directors and spectators to shape the performance. Consequently, the text in *4.48 Psychosis* does not hold absolute authority; Kane subverts the conventional control of the script by leaving it open to multiple interpretive possibilities. She allows both directors and spectators to exercise their imagination by determining key aspects of the performance, such as the number of actors on stage.

This fluidity exemplifies the concept of the 'joint text' in postdramatic theatre, emphasizing the transformative role of imagination in the collaborative process of meaning-making. Through the works of Beckett, Churchill, and Kane, minimalism, ambiguity, and fragmentation emerge as techniques that not only invite but also challenge spectators to engage actively with the material presented. They empower spectators to envision alternate realities and construct personal meanings that resonate beyond the confines of the scripted text. This transforms the theatre experience from passive observation to an active, participatory journey.

Achieving a final stability remains elusive to the spectators in Lehmann's theatre. The spectator of post-dramatic theatre experiences an 'altered state of mind'. Lehmann employs the term as a method of analytical; one's eyes must stay wide open to associations, resemblances, and hints that may provide previously spoken information in a totally different context or at entirely unexpected times. However, in her discourse, Erika Fischer-Lichte (b. 1943) highlights the observer's 'altered state of mind' brought about by the performance serves as a potent instrument for generating diverse meanings. As a result, the spectators experience a sense of uncertainty, which is mainly marked by feelings of instability. She writes:

The attempt to generate meaning hermeneutically proves a Sisyphean task. The shifts leave the perceiving subjects in a state of instability. The aesthetic experience here is largely characterized by the experience of destabilization, which suspends the perceiving subjects betwixt and between two perceptual orders. A permanent stabilization lies beyond their control. [47]

Elaborating on Fischer-Lichte's point, the spectators find themselves suspended between different interpretations or 'perceptual orders.' They are unable to fully commit to one interpretation because they are aware of others that might conflict or coexist. This liminal state adds to their feeling of instability. Hereafter, she concludes that the nature of this aesthetic experience—rooted in ambiguity and fluidity—precludes any lasting resolution or control over the meaning the spectators seek.

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[47] Erika Fischer-Lichte and Saskya Iris Jain, *The Transformative Power of Performance: A New Aesthetics*, 1st ed. (London: Taylor & Francis E-Library, 2008), 157.

While Fischer-Lichte emphasizes the spectators' oscillation between perceptual frames and their desire for coherence, Lehmann challenges this inclination. His goal, however, is not to achieve a definitive understanding, but rather to embrace the fluidity of meaning and recognize that the journey of interpretation itself is as valuable as any conclusion one might draw. In this light, the aesthetic experience can become a powerful catalyst for personal growth, inviting to navigate the complexities of existence and the multiplicity of perspectives that art can evoke. For Lehmann, postdramatic theatre is "a theatre of perceptibility,"[48] challenging traditional views on narrative for deeper explorations of how spectators perceive and interpret the performance.

Thus, postdramatic theatre has a close affinity with phenomenology. Clearly as postdramatic challenges ingrained perception—a phenomenon that occurs before any predictions are made—it shares common ground with phenomenology. The goal of phenomenology is to accurately depict human experience that is guided by perception, "all knowledge takes its place within the horizons opened up by perception."[49] Phenomenologists consider perception the primary source and the foundation of experience since human beings are inextricably linked to the way they see the world. Merleau-Ponty grounds his philosophy on what he sees as the false premise that the world is experienced passively subjected to pre-given determinative structures and introspections. Through this philosophical perspective, he promotes a fresh approach to perceiving the world, similarly, Lehmann in his postdramatic theatre endeavors to explore the various ways in which spectators would observe theatre—from a distinct standpoint.

This capacity for theatre to provoke thought and reflection is further underscored by its inherent nature, which emphasizes the importance of attentive engagement. While everyday occurrences are most probably designed to pass over with a minimum attention, performances in theatre are meant to be read, appreciated, and attentive. According to Leach, "the exceptional power of theatre performance comes from its aesthetically inspired nature. It appears that the aesthetic experience is not only about what is shown to the recipient, but also about how the recipient processes it.[50] When the spectator is required to perceive something as both real and unreal, it gives rise to a creative and imaginative tension. This tension allows spectators to transcend the ordinary aspects of real life and fosters a sense of playfulness.

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[48] Lehmann, *Postdramatic Theatre*, 99.
[49] Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology of Perception*, 241.
[50] Leach, Robert. *Theatre Studies: The Basics.* 2nd ed. London: Routledge, 2013, 4.

Merleau-Ponty and the act of seeing in postdramatic theatre

Perception, as emphasized by Merleau-Ponty, is not a detached, purely visual or intellectual act but one deeply rooted in the body's engagement with the world: "to perceive something is necessarily to be related to it by means of the body."[51] Therefore, the body itself becomes a site of knowing and perceiving —a notion further developed in his book *Phenomenology of Perception* (2012), which grounds experience in the body and shows how it conditions perception and action across various domains, especially in the act of seeing. This understanding implies that the gaze is not simply a matter of looking with the eyes—it's an embodied, relational act. Seeing is rooted in the lived body and is always shaped by how we are situated in the world, physically and experientially. In this context, the act of seeing becomes central to the formation of understanding. As stated by Merleau-Ponty, the acquisition of knowledge is a "passing from 'seeing' to 'knowing.'"[52] Moreover, Derrida also contributes to this understanding, stating that "the act of seeing is at the outset a respectful knowledge."[53] Thus, seeing is not passive observation but an active process of meaning-making.

This phenomenological understanding of embodied perception can be integrated into Lehmann's theory of postdramatic theatre as he emphasizes that the performance is "addressed to [the spectators], to their gaze as corporeal creatures."[54] The term 'corporeal creatures' portrays spectators as bodily beings who respond to theatre not just intellectually, but through sensation and presence. This makes their gaze a tool of interaction—active, participatory, and responsive—rather than a mode of passive observation. Moreover, Benedek's suggestion to replace Lehmann's poststructuralist approach with a phenomenological one introduces the concept the 'boundless Leib'[55] in theatrical performance, in contrast to the semiotic model of a static 'joint text.' Benedek explains, "[a]s a Leib, theatrical performance is a living, breathing, and pulsing phenomenon, rather than a joint text, a readable, dead corpus (Körper), as Lehmann would suggest."[56] This shift emphasizes the dynamic, embodied nature of theatre, where both performers and spectators actively shape the experience.

Another point of articulation lies in Merleau-Ponty's assertion that "[w]e must - precisely in order to see the world and to grasp it as a paradox—rupture our familiarity with it."[57] He invites a break from habitual ways of understanding the world—an approach that resonates

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[51] Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology of Perception*, 20.
[52] Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology of Perception*, 44.
[53] Derrida and Garver, *Speech and Phenomena*, 96.
[54] Lehmann, *Postdramatic Theatre*, 148.
[55] The 'boundless Leib' is a German term referring to the lived, felt body (distinct from the physical Körper).
[56] Benedek, "The Phenomenology of the Theatrical Performance," 193.
[57] Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology of Perception*, 277.

with postdramatic theatre's emphasis on *presenting* rather than *representing* experience: "the postdramatic theatre does not represent; it presents. It does not show; it lets the spectators see. It does not communicate meaning; it releases energy. And it does not create visual images; it offers the opportunity for seeing."[58] In this context, the gaze of the spectator is dispersed, fragmented, and constantly shifting, allowing the spectator to engage with a multiplicity of visual and sensory stimuli simultaneously.[59] This mode of perception is not purely intellectual or detached; it is grounded in the body. The act of seeing becomes an embodied experience, as the spectator's physical presence, sensory awareness, and emotional responses all contribute to meaning-making within the theatrical space.

These theoretical insights are reflected in the works of Beckett, Churchill, and Kane. They invite spectators to engage in a highly embodied and intersubjective experience, where the act of 'watching' goes beyond intellectual interpretation to encompass visceral, emotional, and physical responses. In the following section, I will highlight how these playwrights use the concepts of embodied perception and intersubjectivity to create immersive experiences that actively involve the spectators' body, mind, and emotions.

In *Not I* and *That Time* by Beckett, the action transcends conventional physicality and instead delves into the complexities of inner experience, memory, and existential reflection. Throughout the performances the spectators experience an unsettling sense of presence, as mouth in *Not I* seems to navigate the very space it occupies. This movement through darkness blurs the lines between the performer and the spectators. They sense the disembodied part moving around them, appearing beside them whenever they turn their heads. Lisa Dwan, who plays mouth in *Not I*, reflects on her experience in a talk for 5x15, one of London's leading cultural events organizations. She notes that "the spectators experience a kind of group hallucination; they start to see that the mouth roam and travel across the stage, and it is individual for every single member of the audience."[60] Thus, the action does not simply occur on the stage; it extends throughout the entire theatre space, challenging the boundaries of where the performance truly resides. The darkness enveloping both the performance and the spectators' area creates an immersive environment where perception is altered. As the spectators, immersed in darkness, focus on the unfolding performance, they rely on their bodily senses to engage with it. This phenomenon intensifies emotional engagement, turning the spectators into a cohesive community and enriching the overall impact of the experience.

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[58] Lehmann, *Postdramatic Theatre*, 146.

[59] Lehmann, *Postdramatic Theatre*, 157.

[60] Lisa Dwan, *5x15 Stories. Playing Beckett's 'Not I' | Lisa Dwan | 5x15*, YouTube video, March 12, 2020, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=mxlsruHcfP0&t=21s.

Voyeurism in Churchill's *Far Away* becomes an embodied act shared among characters and spectators alike. According to Trémouilhe, "the representation of terror leads to another related issue: the position of characters and spectators who acquire the status of voyeurs."[61] The play features trials that are supposedly broadcast throughout the night. Churchill provides little information about the object of trials. but one might hypothesize that the accused are prisoners, some of whom are executed after the processions. Furthermore, the parades themselves suggest that a crowd, or at least a jury for the hat contests, is watching. This raises the question, '[w]ho are the voyeurs?"[62] As characters like Todd obsessively consume the nightly trials— "I stay up till four every morning watching the trials"[63]—spectators are pulled into this same act of watching, mirroring the characters' fixation. In the parade scene, where processions of prisoners make their way to trial,[64] spectators become complicit in voyeurism. By watching the spectacle unfold alongside the characters, the spectator blurs the line between observer and participant, making them, in a sense, voyeurs themselves.

Kane often depicts graphic and brutal violence in her plays. Sarah Kane's theatre—often described as in-yer-face or postdramatic—relies heavily on provoking visceral, bodily responses from the spectator. Rather than offering a safe distance from the stage, her work collapses the boundaries between the performance and the spectators, engaging their physical presence and embodied perception. The extreme imagery, raw emotion, and confrontational staging draw the spectators' gaze into moments of intense discomfort, making them feel the weight of what they see not only intellectually, but viscerally. In this way, Kane's theatre transforms the act of watching into a fully embodied experience. For example, in *Blasted*, the brutal and graphic scenes of violence—such as the rape of Cate and the shocking moments of war violence—are not just witnessed by the spectators; they are felt, causing them to embody the terror and physicality of the scene. Moreover, the spectators are confronted with the act of consuming human flesh; first when the soldier eats Ian's eyes, and later when Ian devours the dead baby. The violence on stage forces spectators to confront not only the horrific content but also their own reactions as Tuba Ağkaş Özcan puts it:

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[61] Julie Trémouilhe, *Caryl Churchill's Aesthetic of Silence: Terror and Language in 'Far Away' and 'Escaped Alone'* (Faculté de philosophie, arts et lettres, Université catholique de Louvain, 2019), 66. http://hdl.handle.net/2078.1/thesis:21431.

[62] Trémouilhe, *Caryl Churchill's Aesthetic of Silence*, 67.

[63] Churchill, *Far Away,* 145.

[64] "A procession of ragged, beaten, chained prisoners, each wearing a hat, on their way to execution. The finished hats are even more enormous and preposterous than in the previous scene." Churchill, *Far Away*, 149.

> The uncomfortable experience of the audience in these particular scenes, where different bodily sensations are awakened at the same time destructing the boundaries between the performer's body and the audience's body. It is the audience's body's being extended to the stage by means of such sensual scenes that creates the interaction between the spectator and the actors.[65]

Based on this, the portrayal of visceral scenes compels the spectator to confront the raw and brutal realities presented on stage, provoking both physical and emotional responses. Kane's use of shocking imagery and intense dialogue intensifies this reaction, blurring the lines between the spectator's experience and the trauma and violence faced by the characters.

Conclusion

This paper has explored the intersection of postdramatic theatre and phenomenology, highlighting how the application of the Husserlian concept of the *epoché* disrupts habitual modes of perception within theatrical experiences. By analyzing the works of Beckett, Churchill, and Kane, it has shown how these playwrights use the suspension of quotidian intentionality to challenge traditional performative structures and invite the spectators to engage in the co-creation of meaning. The study has also examined the concept of Lehmann's 'joint text' and Goethe's 'productive imagination,' further linking these ideas with Merleau-Ponty's theory of perception and the embodied nature of the gaze.

Postdramatic theatre, with its focus on embodied and perceptual engagement, calls for a radical shift in spectatorship, positioning spectators not as passive observers but as active participants who shape the performance's meaning through their corporeal presence and perceptual involvement. This phenomenological approach redefines the spectators' role, transforming viewing into a reflective, dynamic process where meaning unfolds and is co-constructed

[65] Tuba Ağkaş Özcan, "Uncomfortable Seats: 'Enactive Spectatorship' Explored through Sarah Kane's Blasted," *Folklore & Literature* 29, no. 1 (Winter 2023): 305, https://doi.org/10.22559/folklor.2263.

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Cinema, Religion, and Secularism: In a Roundabout or an Intersection?

Pro&Contra 7

No. 2 (2023) 101–106

https://doi.org/10.33033/pc.2023.2.101

Review on Mark Cauchi's Cinema and Secularism. Bloomsbury Publishing. 2023.

The relationship between cinema and secularism has long been a forum for debates on the visibility, even the co-existence of religion, the secular, and cinema; thus, to coincide in one sphere that would be detectable in both study fields, religion studies, and film studies.

The assumption that film is secular is derived from the seemingly inevitable conclusions on the secularization thesis that is related to modernism. Hence the way cultures and societies touch upon secularism once they are in touch with modernism as Philip Maciak argues in his book *Disappearance of Christ*. Furthermore, on the same supposition, in one of the early works on the scholarship of cinema and secularism, Sophie Sunderland observes that it is rare for secularism to be an organizing trope in film, which highlights a neglect of the secular in the contemporary study of film as Mark Cauchi suggests. Regarding the assumption mentioned above, Cauchi addresses the problem of the missing secular and that it affects how scholars understand and perceive the study of film in a meta-reflective mode. Moreover, to expand on scholars' understanding of the missing secular matter, Cauchi offers a valuable argument on the secularist gaze by utilizing Laura Mulvey's analysis of Hollywood and the scopophilic gaze as well as female sexuality in *Through the Olive Trees* (1994). He argues that the scopophilic gaze in film not only objectifies women but also shapes how audiences interact with the world, thereby influencing secular viewpoints. By linking the pleasure derived from cinematic viewing to secular ways of understanding, Cauchi proposes that the visual experience of cinema can lead viewers away from religious or spiritual interpretations of reality.

Cauchi shifts then to how religion studies stand with cinema and secularism where he elaborates on the issue of situating religion and the secular. He raises questions in relation to Conrad Ostwalt's *Secular Steeples: Popular Culture and Religious Imagination,* along the lines of "what does secularity consist in?" and "what makes cinema secular?" (9). Cauchi raises such questions for Ostwalt's provocative remarks such as religion being a part of the secular world and religion being a "secular cultural form." The above-mentioned questions and remarks that Cauchi highlights beg the question of whether cinema, religion, and secularism are in a loop, or if they intersect. Thus, what is the dynamic of either case? *Cinema and Secularism* is a treat to those who are questioning where cinema is situated among religion and secularism. Indeed, Cauchi and the contributors take on the mission to investigate and explore the relationship between cinema and secularism on a global level, where they analyze several vital cinematic spheres from various cultures and religions in a thematically coherent structure in which diverse outlooks share the same primary questioning of the matter. They fulfil this investigation through multifaceted analytic scopes in a crossroad of multiple study fields such as film studies, religion studies, philosophy, cultural studies, and so forth.

Cinema and Secularism indeed thrives due to its structure, which is crucial for the conversation that the book brings upon its readers. Cauchi clarifies at the beginning of the book that the conversation on cinema and the secular in film studies must go beyond "the Anglo and Western European worlds" (29). Therefore, the book is coherently structured and based on three sections where the chapters in each section share a theme that helps reach the principal thesis while being involved with national cinematic spheres from around the globe such as Indian, Middle Eastern, and African cinemas. The first section is titled "Is Cinema Secular? Genealogy, Theory, Philosophy." The section starts with Cauchi's own chapter on secularist film studies and the occlusion of the secular. In his chapter, Cauchi sets the tone of the section by arguing that the unchallenged secularist perspective inherent in film studies stands as the obstacle to question secularism in cinema while considering the hybridity of secularism and religion. Arguably, secularism at its core is not always attentive to the act of enchantment, as presumed in the case of arts such as film. Hence, secularism and religion hold values of disenchantment and enchantment, respectively. Based on Max Weber, intellectualization translates to disenchanting the world by using means that are not magical *per se* (in the sense that intellectualization, disenchantment, and secularism are somewhat equal). Nonetheless, Cauchi argues that a critical reason behind film studies' blindness towards the secular is the lack of adequately acknowledging the hybridization of the secular and religion in relation to cinema. Utilizing Bruno Latour's theory of modernity, Cauchi establishes that with the separation and purifying the secular and the religious, they rather entangle and intertwine, hence hybridize. Furthermore, on modernity and its resemblance in secularity, John Caruana follows with his chapter on Deleuze's time-image. Caruana claims that Classical cinema has helped shape the "human-centered subjectivity" in replacing sovereignty, thus, what modernity supposedly sets up cinema for (81). He also points out that Deleuze's time-image offers an alternative to the prevailing secular ideology, an alternative to liberate us from the "ideological secularism" in which modernity presumably fails, giving his argument that time-image emphasizes the need to trust reality (66). The first section of the book ends with the third chapter titled "The Secular as Sacred, Cinema and Buddhist Ritual," where Francisca Cho argues that secularism is a religious category in Buddhist contexts and that cinema is "a ritual experience" which enables the non-religious and non-Buddhist to experience one's sense of the world (88).

The second section of the book enlarges on culture, politics, and cinema in situating secularism among them. The section takes off with Nikolas Kompridis's chapter analyzing Ousmane Sembene's film, *Moolaade* (2004). Kompridis explores sacred spaces as refuge and political agency. Besides his thorough analysis of the film, he employs Foucault's concept of heterotopia by claiming that Foucault himself would have identified *Moolaadé* as an extraordinary example of heterotopia. This section of the book shifts direction later to the

Cinema in the Middle East where Walid El Khachab provides a rich analysis of viewing cinema as a secularizing medium in the region. Based on Talal Asad, there are two notions of secularism: ontological and political. Khachab highlights that "cinema is ontologically a performance of the secular;" furthermore, the Middle Eastern cinema is an example of cinema that is only able to produce political secularism (144). Khachab uses the Weberian notion of disenchantment to establish two models of cinema in the Middle East: firstly, a cinema of disenchantment that situates religion below rationalism; secondly, a cinema of multiple enchantments that does not "evacuate religion" but rather acknowledges the multiplicity of religions (158). In relation to multifaith, the third chapter of the second section is titled, "The Impossible Possible, Secularism and Hindi Popular Cinema." In this chapter, Sheila J. Nayar argues that India's secularism is actually not to be centered around one established religion but to embrace pluralism of religions given India's divers religious situation. To support her main argument, Nayar quotes Kajiri Jain stating that India blurs, then she erases distinctions between spirit and matter, hence, state and religion. Nayar also underscores that commercial and profit-driven cinema, such as Bollywood, naturally "appeal to the most secularist market," yet in a sense that is religiously pluralistic (165). Furthermore, in the case of Indian cinema, she claims that "defending India's honor" is the utmost wanted redemption in the end (176). This claim is important in understanding the "good" secular film in a sense where the religious protagonist can be replaced by another from a different religion. The last chapter of this section expands on the notion of the observational secular with Kathryn Lofton on religion and documentary film in the U.S.A. Lofton opens with the claim that documentary films poorly address religion with little to no criticism that engages with religion; though, religion has historically been a big part of documentary film. Lofton highlights that the "claims of observational neutrality by Direct Cinema filmmakers" have not been fulfilled due to interventions in the editing which deprives the film from its objectivity to a certain extent (199).

The third and last section of the book is a sophisticated revisit of the notions of enchantment and disenchantment. The section starts with Catherine Wheatley's chapter on the wonder of film. Wheatley explores a mode of "secular enchantment" as Paolo Costa names it; she claims that cinema "offers reassurance" for our mastery of the world yet asks us to acknowledge this mastery (210). Based on Warren Buckland, Wheatley argues that through wonder/speculation the possible becomes believable. From wonder to plant-soul, the next chapter, "Vegetal Life, Plant-Soul: Early British Film" by Sarah Cooper, covers enchantment in regard to vegetal life. Cooper analyzes F. Percy Smith's *The Birth of a Flower* (1910), where she investigates Smith's work in terms of the "tendencies toward the divinization and anthropomorphization of the vegetal" (227). She argues that Smith's film permeates the plant with qualities which are neither wholly secular nor wholly religious.

The last section ends with Robert Sinnerbrink's chapter on the Uncanny Secularity where he delves in David Lynch's *Twin Peaks: The Return* (2017). Sinnerbrink initially claims that Lynch's third series prospers when it comes to "exploring the tension between secularist and post-secularist dimensions." Sinnerbrink further argues that the series' uncanny secularity can be seen as an allegory for our modern cultural and political senses of ethical ambiguity and existential unease.

Overall, *Cinema and Secularism* is an astonishing collection that is rich with diverse perspectives that offer provocative thoughts and remarks on vital subjects such as post-secularism, ontological and political secularism, uncanny secularity, and so forth. Mark Cauchi and the respected contributors shine a light on crucial conversations on cinema and secularism that need to be restudied and reexplored in a stage where the relationship between cinema and secularism is still challenged academically. The book's strongest suit lies in its ability to go far and beyond to touch on the matter globally in various settings. What this critic finds the most enjoyable and comforting about this book is the authors' ability to study the matter as objectively as possible, which bred a well-constructed and well-structured argumentative environment. This book is strongly recommended for those intent on investing and deepening their knowledge and understanding of the scholarship on cinema and its intertwining relation to religion and secularism.