

Feminist Memorializations in Marge Piercy and Rafael Carter

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Abstract

Marge Piercy's *He, She and It* and Rafael Carter's *The Fortunate Fall* render the future of the Global North as dominated by corporatism, patriarchal militarism, and technological stratification. Piercy and Carter investigate the problematics of memory and memorialization to imagine possibilities for ethical subjectivities for worlds transformed by advanced technology and AI. These novels accuse their fictional states of mobilizing advanced technologies to seize power over their citizens. Emphasizing the pernicious consequences of gendered violence committed by state institutions, Piercy and Carter show in their novels that while state memory practices and memorializations are brutally authoritarian, social and personal memory practices generate a means of recuperating feminist resistance against state violence.

Marge Piercy's *He, She and It* (1991) and Rafael Carter's *The Fortunate Fall* (1996) fuse cyberpunk tropes with feminist concerns to contest state brutality and constraints on women's citizenship. Piercy and Carter highlight the threats to women's autonomy and citizenship under patriarchal militarism and technocultural dominance at the end of the twentieth century. For the editors of *The Routledge Companion to Cyberpunk Culture* (2021), cyberpunk is "everywhere" and fertile ground for "interrogating the future of identity from feminist, queer, Indigenous, and Afrofuturist perspectives, as well as broader cultural interrogations of (sur)veillance and cultural activism" (McFarlane, Murphy, and Schmeink 1, 4). While it emerged as a subset of science-fiction, dominated by masculinist (and Orientalist) motifs, cyberpunk literature is experiencing a revival in the twenty-first century in response to increasing consolidation of power among high-tech and digital technocrats.¹ According to Fredric Jameson, as an exemplary sign of postmodernism, cyberpunk "is fully as much an expression of transnational corporate realities as it is of global paranoia itself" (38). Corporate practices of obfuscation, single-minded pursuit of profit, privacy infringement, and data collection validate nervousness about current and future manifestations of technocracy. In examining two novels published several years shy of the start of this new century, I want to highlight the first-wave zenith of cyberpunk's literary visions of feminist futures-to-come. I propose that Piercy and Carter's novels herald utopian possibilities for women's full participation in the world, as women, as cyborgs, as fluid in their identities and desires. Piercy and Carter complicate this possibility of expansive subjective freedoms for women, however, with depictions of corporate, militaristic, technocratic domination that constrain women's personhood.

Both novels portray futuristic states as patrilineal, militaristic, and corporatist, reflecting the political economies of the Global North in the 1990s. They also situate sites of resistance outside the Global North, in the Middle East (Piercy) or Africa (Carter). In Piercy's novel, the Jewish "free-town" (3, 7) Tikva is a geographical mirror of Israel and exists as a counterpoint to the North American, patrilineal, and corporatist Yakamura-Stichen (Y-S). With much of the novel unfolding in this utopian city state, Piercy fleshes out the ways in which her protagonists, Shira Shipman, a former Y-S coder, and Yod, a futuristic bio-engineered cybernetic being, learn to challenge the oppressive ideologies and

¹ Lisa Yaszek's "Feminist Cyberpunk" identifies four phases of feminist cyberpunk: Proto-Cyberpunk, from 1818-1979; First-Wave Feminist Cyberpunk Second, 1980-1990; Second-Wave Feminist Cyberpunk, 1990-2005; and the Third-Wave, from 2005-present. Yasek provides an incisive coverage of major trends and concerns of each phase of literary cyberpunk.

governance that undergird the patriarchal and militaristic corporate-state in *He, She and It*. Rafael Carter's *The Fortunate Fall* similarly unveils a futuristic geopolitical state, reminiscent of the former Soviet Union, where the earth has been ravaged by capitalism and where technology stratifies society and has turned its protagonist, Maya Andreyva, into a robotic mimic of a citizen. Living under an oppressive state called the Fusion of Historical Nations, which has surveillance nano-tech capable of suppressing people's memories as well as national archives, Maya struggles to piece together her country's long history of authoritarianism. In both of these cyberpunk works, state apparatuses mobilize advanced technology to seize power over memory practices. Piercy and Carter suggest that state seizure of memory and memorialization, which includes the silencing of personal and communicative memories and the imposition of one sanctioned narrative of history, ironically produces persistent attempts to uncover alternative ways to remember and commemorate ethical subjectivities.

Globalization, Anti-Genderist Sentiments, and Memory after the Cold War

He, She and It (1991) and *The Fortunate Fall* (1996) were published shortly after the end of the Cold War and during the early days of the globalized technoculture that shapes the new millennium. As some totalitarian states crumbled at the end of the twentieth century, advocates of globalization celebrated the end of authoritarianism, geographic isolationism, and economic inequalities (Gelleny and Richards 871; Neumayer and de Soysa 1067). Since then, however, the world has seen increasing disparities and ecological exploitation. Economic, political, and social equality for women across the globe has remained broadly unsecured, despite proliferating globalization. Twenty-first-century perspectives on globalization that use Foreign Direct Investments and trade negotiations as measures of progress for industrializing nations, particularly in the Global South, postulate that women's participation in the labor market, access to healthcare, and educational opportunities all increased with greater foreign trade and international openness (Meyer 361). However, Allison Jagger and Seo-Young Cho, among others, argue that when coupled with neoliberalism and capitalism, globalization can improve women's economic, political, and social wellbeing *only* within nations where conditions are already in place or at least underway to transform women's subjugated positions in society (Jagger 298; Cho 683). Moreover, even as high finance, technology, commodity flows, and media become increasingly transnational, populist voices in countries like the United States, Hungary, Poland, and France have strived to secure national consensus by silencing women's rights and concerns. The populist challenge to democracy in the first two decades of the twentieth-first century treats (progressive) elites as anathemas to the common

people and “natural law,” masking what Birgit Sauer denotes as a “masculinist identity politics” that reaches for the “charismatic leader [who] might increase the self-confidence of subordinated masculinities” (cited in Graff and Korolczuk 7). Agnieszka Graff and Elżbieta Korolczuk judge that the “morally heightened militant rhetoric” (4) of anti-genderists (ultraconservative pundits and right-wing religious groups) proactively frames the struggle for reproductive rights, anti-domestic violence measures, economic parity, and LGBTQ+ rights as illiberal radicalism endangering “traditional family values” (4). My intention in glossing the three decades since the first publications of Piercy and Carter’s novels is to emphasize that the novels’ themes of technological, political, and discursive threats to women’s autonomy and citizenship, exacerbated by patriarchal militarism and corporate control, remain relevant.

In *Fear of Small Numbers* (2006), Appadurai notes that nations are often built around a presupposition of “ethnic genius” (3), a characteristic fantasy of national unity that requires the suppression, if not the expulsion or even eradication of minorities. Moreover, in countries without a strong populist presence, Appadurai sees a “social productivity of violence” (7) that engenders fears that globalized migration, information, and economy will bring about a loss of coherent national identity. Globalization, he argues, has concretized a version of nationhood that is destabilized by the “collusion course between the logics of uncertainty and incompleteness” (Appadurai 9). As a result of this uncertainty, Appadurai, suggests

[n]umerical majorities can become predatory and ethnocidal with regards to *small numbers* precisely when some minorities (and their small numbers) remind these majorities of the small gap which lies between their condition as majorities and the horizon of an unsullied national whole, a pure untainted national ethos. (8)

As a result, national memory practices around the end of the twentieth and start of the twenty-first centuries at times work to shore up national boundaries and practices. For Andreas Huyssen:

As particular nations struggle to create democratic polities in the wake of histories of mass extermination, apartheid, military dictatorship, or totalitarianism, they are faced [...] with the unprecedented task of securing the legitimacy and future of their emergent polity by finding ways to commemorate and adjudicate past wrongs. (16)

Huyssen goes on to emphasize that the “*political* site of memory practices is still national” (16) for the nation constitutes a major boundary of psychic and lived resonances. Memorialization evinces the national conscience, which is why I would like to think through the role of memory and memorialization in illiberal nation-building as represented in late twentieth-century cyberpunk prose and as perform futures-to-come (and in some cases presents) for women and other minorities.

One of the bonding agents of nationhood and its majoritarian “national character” can be seen in the way nation-states enact remembrances of their formation and development; through cultural artifacts and memorials that synthesize national defeats and victories, nations form the foundations of collective memory. In “Communicative and Cultural Memory,” Jan Assmann argues that collective memory is best understood as “communicative memory” as “it lives in everyday interaction and communication and, for this very reason, has only a limited time depth which normally reaches no farther back than eighty years” (111). Cultural memory, by contrast, is embedded in the textual, figurative, and narrative symbolization and institutions of a culture. Communicative/ collective memory is “non-institutional” (Assmann 111), for it is “not cultivated by specialists and is not summoned or celebrated on special occasions” (111). Whereas cultural memory is sanctioned by official institutions and shaped by those in power, communicative memory is passed on and honored by those often silenced and disenfranchised by those in power. Communicative memory fuels the development of Piercy and Carter’s novels, for this form of memory provides the oppressed and the marginalized with hope and strategies for obtaining power over their lives.

Community and Dissident Memory Practices in Piercy’s *He, She, and It*

Piercy’s work is unabashedly feminist in its politics, as the author herself explicitly addresses in the “Acknowledgments” of *He, She, and It*. She notes that “Donna Haraway’s essay ‘A Manifesto for Cyborgs’ [sic] was extremely suggestive” (431) for her novel. One idea from “A Cyborg Manifesto” that may have been particularly compelling to Piercy is Haraway’s sense that “[l]iberation rests on the construction of the consciousness, the imaginative apprehension, of oppression, and so of possibility. The cyborg is a matter of fiction and lived experience that changes what counts as women’s experience in the late twentieth century” (149). While *He, She and It* features a destroyed future ravaged by biological and chemical warfare and governed by corporations, the novel and its cyborg women are nevertheless driven by hope for seeds of resistance against patriarchy, capitalism, militarism, and isolationism. In an interview in *Utopia* magazine, Piercy states:

utopia tends to be possible when people are coming to consciousness [...]. I am more interested in the type of utopias women have created. Basically women’s utopias have been places where what women do not have can exist—i.e., a sense of community, since many women are isolated while raising their children. A place where women are not punished for their sexuality, a place where raising children is communal or quasi-communal, a place where in old age people are respected and taken care of. A place where a lot of the tasks that are denigrated in this society are respected. (Furlanetto 421)

For Piercy, then, a promised land for women is characterized by communitarian engagement and networks, sexual freedom, and care and respect for older populations.

While *He, She, and It* hinges on utopian ideals, it renders the power and governance structures as dystopian. Norika, geographically evocative of North America, is juridically governed by the multinational corporation Yakamura-Stichen. Y-S's global reach achieves maximum efficiency and profit by treating citizens as employees, color-coded according to their labor uses. Y-S enacts violence at the micro and macro levels, as it participates with the other major corporate states to monitor the Megaglopolis (Glop), a stretch of ecological wasteland inhabited by those disenfranchised by the novel's corporate nations. When Shira, the protagonist, travels to Tikva with a detour through the Glop, she is reminded that this is where her housekeeper Rosa lives: "Day workers and gang ninos and the unemployed lived in the Glop—the great majority of the people on the continent" (33).² Piercy's quick sketch of Rosa, whose name marks her as ethnically Latina, and the Glop resonates with the message of the Executive Director of the United Nations Development Fund for Women, who asserted at the Beijing Conference on Women in 1995 that women constituted "70 percent of the world's 1.3 billion absolute poor" and "work[ed] two-thirds of the world's working hours, but earn[ed] only one-tenth of the world's income and own[ed] less than one-tenth of the world's property" (cited in Stark 339). In Piercy's novel, women and particularly non-white women carry the burden of economic inequality and labor injustice.

Despite the technological innovations in Piercy's future, migrant workers exist as mnemonic threats; they are symbols of the dangers of disobedience and expulsion from corporate states. Wearing color-coded uniforms, migrant workers visibly communicate the state's power to shield its citizen from the toxic environment outside of corporate domes and to provide a comfortable lifestyle. Because no food can be grown in the Glop, the corporate state maintains control over migrants by withholding supplies of vat food, a cheap mixture of algae and yeast (32), and other life-sustaining commodities, including information. The Glop, from which the domestic workers emerge and into which they disappear again after their work is done, is a nexus of travelling memory; as a territory discarded by the corporations and unprotected from the damaged earth by a dome, it houses all those who travel into gated nations to work. Astrid Erll contends that "all cultural memory must 'travel', be kept in motion, in

² While Piercy's novel radically re-centers the geographical and emotional core of the story to a Jewish and female point-of-view, Elyce Rae Helford points to troubling Western biases in Piercy's work that sully portrayals of Latinas, Japanese, and other minorities (128-130).

order to ‘stay alive’, to have an impact both on individual minds and social formations,” and then further explains that “[s]uch travel consists only partly in movement across and beyond territorial and social boundaries” (Erl, “Travelling Memory” 12). To imbue memory with movement and present-ness acknowledges the dialogic and collaborative nature of ethical memory formations.³ Memories pass through, intersect and transact with, and are embedded in national, social, political, and global flows.

An open, ecologically barren wasteland—similar to wastelands found in many feminist’s science-fiction novels, from Atwood’s *Madaddam Trilogy* (2003-2013) to Sarah Hall’s *Daughters of the North* (2007) and River Solomon’s *Unkindness of Ghosts* (2017)—the Glop is not merely the home of the disempowered. It also functions as a site of potential resistance. Halfway through the novel, after an attack against Tikva, Shira and a group of volunteers that includes Shira’s mother’s lover Nili, Yod, the cyborg, and Gadi, Yod’s human half-brother and Shira’s childhood friend, travel to the Glop on a mission for information about the attack. They meet Lazarus, an information “terrorist,” and The Coyotes, an underground resistance fighting to liberate people and knowledge from the corporation states. Lazarus explains to Shira that he and his clandestine movement are building their own information Net, as an alternative to the World Wide Net controlled by the major corporate states, to serve a different citizenry (308). In this exchange, Shira contributes her historical knowledge of labor unions to help the resistance empower workers, an act of dialogic remembering in times of political silencing (309). Raffaella Baccolini argues that Piercy’s “recovery of history and literacy, together with the recovery of individual and collective memory, becomes an instrumental tool of resistance for their protagonists” (520). The Coyotes’ alternative Net and the transmission of knowledge between those characters involved in resistant movements expand the imaginative possibilities of citizenship and technological access for the displaced and disenfranchised inhabitants of the Glop.

As a corporate town that is also patrilineal, Y-S encourages heteronormativity and gender inequality. Piercy evokes a familiar sense

³ Conceptualizing memory via mnemonic traces, Erl argues for the need to go beyond Pierre Nora’s “social frameworks of memory – a notion which implies a certain ‘framedness’ connected to all memory, and may this connote boundaries and a certain stability,” for those who must remember atrocities and mass exterminations do not experience those events as a stable event in the past; they are also not a homogeneous group and instead inhabit a position of “multiple memberships” (see “Travelling Memory” 10). The “five dimensions of movement: carriers, media, contents, practices and forms,” submitted by Erl, affords deep insight into Carter and Piercy’s representations of state violence. These categories afford a recalibration of the impact of memorialization activated in times of state totalitarianism.

of capitalism's investment in patriarchy, an illustrative practice that calibrates prestige and the individual's worth to consumerism; wives of wealthy and powerful male executives spend their days devoted to cosmetic enhancements and policing class boundaries via their consumption of goods and services. In essence, women of the Y-S upper-class are reduced to passive ciphers for capitalism's flows. Because of rampant infertility in the population, wrought in no small part by the toxins in the environment, much of these women's time is spent trying to conceive. They seek out the help of doctors, who acquire the status of the third parent "who does all the chemistry" (191-21). Reproductive privacy and bodily integrity are abolished, and knowledge about reproduction remains in the hands of the few, while women are treated as vessels for childbearing. For Shira, a gifted coder for whom Y-S "outbid the other multis" (5), the corporate state withholds promotions and prevents her from sharing custody of her son in the wake of her divorce in order to psychologically manipulate her (289). The totality of Y-S's ideological control is captured in its architecture of domination:

The room glittered in black and white marble, higher than wide and engineered to intimidate [...]. But she had enough psychological background to recognize the intent of the chamber where with their assigned lawyers they sat upright and rigid as tuning forks for the blow that would set them quivering into sound. (Piercy 1)

The corporate state memorializes its political authority through its architectural form as well as through ideological practices in order to suffocate alternative ideologies. For Aleida Assmann, political and cultural memories, as materialized in monuments and edifices, ritual practices, and state policies, embody "durability and trans-generational transmission" and work to define the nation (Assmann, "Four Formats" 26). Piercy demonstrates that Y-S's national identity, coalesced in its patriarchal ideologies, class and race hierarchies, architecture, and judicial system, transmits the belief that women are inferior to men.

After losing custody of her son to her ex-husband without just cause, Shira flees Y-S to the free-town Tikva, signaling a narrative break from patriarchal norms of citizenship. In Y-S, heterosexual marriage is seemingly the end-goal for women, in the sense that heterosexual familial structures "serve both to shape and to perpetuate middle-class values, including a gendered vision of citizenship" (Silbergleid 156). The mythic western nuclear family that Y-S upholds as the norm engenders violence against women's struggle for self-actualization and community. By disconnecting Shira from her Jewish grandmother Malkah, Y-S works to promote forgetting and stifle ideological dissent. Shira's belief that the "tradition" of giving up children to grandmothers to be raised is in fact a fabrication by her grandmother to explain the absence of Shira's mother,

Riva, who had gone into hiding many years ago for information terrorism against the multinationals (79). Riva, who eventually rejoins her mother and daughter, carries herself like “a general” (315) and is skilled at stealing high-tech secrets to share with the Glop. A warrior in mind and body, Riva is matched by her female lover Nili.⁴ Nili explains that she is a child of the Black Zone, a geographical area that corresponds to the Middle East, and a “joint descendent of Israeli and Palestinian women who survived” (198). While Elissa Gurman argues that Piercy’s feminism is one of continuity and tradition, where “empowered and technologically-enhanced women are valued primarily for their mothering or reproductive abilities” (460), I see Piercy’s depiction of Riva and Nili as an expansive challenge to patriarchy’s imperialist corporatism. Riva and Nili signify a continuum of female resistance against the interlinked forces of capitalist greed and violent patriarchy. They bear witness to the stranglehold of nation-states on information and knowledge, especially reproductive knowledge. In answer to the question of whether she was “born from a woman,” Nili explains: “We have no men. We clone and engineer our genes. After birth we undergo additional alteration. We have created ourselves to endure, to survive, to hold our land” (198). In a comedic twist, Shira discovers that she is actually her mother’s lover’s aunt because Riva used the same sperm donor that Nili’s mother used to conceive (191). This genealogical remixing is a bold counter-narrative to ideals of “legitimate” sexuality, gender roles, or familial kinship promoted by Y-S for its national success.

As a Jewish free-town, Tikva memorializes several millennia of Jewish persecution, but it also means hope. Malkah and Shira take on the roles of humanist storytellers who craft alternative explanations and myths. For Huyssen, “[t]he real can be mythologized, just as the mythic may engender strong reality effects” (16). In Piercy’s novel, myth bears witness to state-sanctioned brutality against minoritarian cultural and religious identities; it also prepares as well as preparing future generations for possible violence. Malkah’s bedtime story for Yod, the cyborg, is a key example of storytelling as a vehicle for contesting official (cultural and political) memory. According to Aleida Assmann, stories can expand the scope of social memory, which is often circumscribed by generational limits (“Four Formats” 26). In Piercy’s novel, social memory deepens the fault lines between national practices and lived experiences, empowering dissidence against Y-S’s patriarchal ideologies. Malkah’s narrative voice is sensual and tactile, weaving metaphors and images

⁴ Nili may be drawn from Sarah Aaronsohn, who was part of the Nili spy network that battled to free Palestine from the Ottoman Empire. See Sarah Aaronsohn in *The Shalvi/Hyman Encyclopedia of Jewish Women* <<https://jwa.org/encyclopedia/article/aaronsohn-sarah>>.

delicately to socialize the newly conscious cyborg into a history of Jewish humanist values: “I am telling this story for you as I lie alone in my own huge antique bed in the bedroom shaped to me like an old familiar garment, with the scent of narcissus from the courtyard, in this house of my family with its oasis of green in the desert the world has become” (18). However, Malkah senses that there is a threat lurking outside her “modern ghetto” (18). In weaving an origin story for Yod about Rabbi Judah Loew, his Golem, and the Jewish pogrom of sixteen-century Prague, Malkah commemorates Jewish history and gives to Yod the seeds of Jewish-humanist principles of honour, hard work, community, self-defense. Malkah embodies what Aleida Assmann’s delineates as “remembering to never forget” (“From Collective Violence” 50), that is to say, a therapeutic act of sharing the burden of remembering among all members of a society, allowing victim groups to feel as an integral part of majoritarian constituency. Assmann theorizes that forgetting or silence is a form of conflict resolution to control and contain those defeated by another regime, while dialogic remembering allows for new forms and pathways to emerge without annihilating the past (“From Collective Violence” 3). In Piercy, the ethical imperative to remember communally is also an act to commemorate historical violence.

Piercy molds her characterization of Yod after Haraway’s depiction of the cyborg as “a cybernetic organism, a hybrid of machine and organism, a creature of social reality as well as a creature of fiction” (149). Avram creates Yod, in secret, as a bio-weapon to protect Tikva and its technological advancements from Y-S and other corporate states. Yod is the literary materialization of Haraway’s sense that cyborgs “are the illegitimate offspring of militarism and patriarchal capitalism, not to mention state socialism” (151). Haraway finds promise in this origin story, for “illegitimate offspring are often exceedingly unfaithful to their origins. Their fathers, after all, are inessential” (151). While Avram’s intentions in creating Yod are uncomfortably close to that of patriarchal capitalism and militarism, Piercy emphasizes Yod’s potential, as a liminal figure, for interrupting the legacies of these socio-political realities. Yod is socialized by Malkah’s Jewish feminism, surrounded by reverence for both ecological preservation and technological innovations, accepted as a citizen, held responsible for civic duties (such as defense patrolling) in Tikva, and encouraged to embrace fluidity in his sense of gender ideations. Unloved by his creator and erstwhile father Avram, Yod finds a family amongst Shira, Malkah, Gadi, Avram’s biological son, and Ari, Shira’s biological son (349). Yod also embodies every vital human characteristic, including the ability to love and to formulate ethical positions.

Stories of the Golem as well as Frankenstein's creature teach Yod about social relations and sharpen his longing for citizenship and familial bonds (406). The dialogic nature of Piercy's novel weaves Jewish mysticism with Shelley's science fiction to disrupt the masculinist cyberpunk of early William Gibson and Neal Stephenson. As a being without a trove of lived memories, Yod appreciates both the story of Frankenstein's monster and the Golem because they generatively prod self-reflections about justice and belonging (174). Stories and books are pre-eminent technologies of collective, non-institutional memory. Communicative memory is profoundly human. The act of memorialization can be empowering for those who hold the power to enact memorialization practices. Piercy's novel suggests that Tikva nurtures individuals as memory carriers and practices that empower its people to act ethically and to think about their actions' implications for the future. Because Yod fears the "[i]ntense pleasure" (106-7) he experienced during combat against Y-S drones (he feels this pleasure because killing is part of his programming), he blows himself up at the end of the novel. He also destroys Avram's lab and with it the bioengineering intelligence behind his creation to prevent the militaristic expansion of Tikva, Y-S, or other corporate states. Yod's death is also a sacrifice to free Ari, Shira's son. This is a renewal of the novel's ethical commitment to the non-repetition of state and mass violence. An important aspect of ethical memory practices is to prevent past atrocities from re-occurring.⁵ Yod's death commemorates an anti-militaristic social memory; he will become a part of Tikva's memory fabric and its memorialization of the ethical way of life.

⁵ I borrow this idea of non-repetition from transitional justice scholarship that tackles the subject of symbolic reparation and prevention of future atrocities. The 2005 *UN Basic Principles and Guidelines on the Right to a Remedy and Reparation for Victims of Gross Violations of International Human Rights Law and Serious Violations of International Humanitarian Law (the UN Guiding Principles)* stipulates that all victims of gross violations of human rights are entitled to "adequate, effective and prompt reparation for harm suffered," whereby reparation includes "restitution, compensation, rehabilitation, satisfaction and guarantees of non-repetition" (IX.18). For me, the salient points of transitional justice is the creation of a political site for equal participation in nation-building as well as an ethos of non-repetition so that militarism, corporatism, and patriarchy do not continue to consolidate absolute power. Greely et. al. suggest that as "a secondary form of redress, memorialization is rarely considered vital to promoting the active participation of victims as equal partners in a political community" (Greely et. al. 168). Bell and O'Rourke argue that the nineteen-nineties have sharpened into focus the need, as the nation remembers and is rebuilt, to ensure that gendered violence against women are not repeated under the expediency of war (Bell and O'Rourke 23).

Memory Suppression and Recovery in Carter's *The Fortunate Fall*

Like Piercy's novel, Rafael Carter's *The Fortunate Fall* represents a violent future of patriarchal, militaristic control, but it is compounded by sophisticated nano-technology. The novel, which borrows its detective-like structure from noir fiction, portrays a long history of state-sponsored atrocities and information suppression. In the twenty-third century, the novel's present day, telepresence, a technology that allows humans to transmit images, emotions, and information to other neuro-altered humans, has emerged as a pre-eminent medium and mediator of information and news. People like Maya Andreyeva, Carter's protagonist, are "wired" and serve as human (cyborg) cameras, or conduits, for an audience that experiences and sees what they see. In the novel, nano-tech prostheses are widespread, though the poor must settle for older versions, and most people tune into the kind of virtual reality Maya provides to escape their dilapidated environs wrought by centuries of war, famine, ecological exploitation, and socio-political stratification. Both the physical and the virtual worlds are surveilled by state-controlled policing bodies keen to "neutralize," meaning to terminate individuals who exhibit deviancy from heterosexuality or resistance to official narratives of history.

Carter's construction of cyclical regimes of state terror is revealed in fragments as Maya Andreyeva exhumes traces of several centuries of terror across a geographic territory reminiscent of the United Socialist Soviet Union. After some devastating decades of political and cultural control under the so-called "Guardians," a political elite in the era prior to the novel's nano-tech breakthrough, whose "McGulags" were spread far and wide, an AI virus emerged with the ability to absorb people's minds into a mega-database. Some inhabitants under the Guardian's control had their memories and identities "erased and filled with data, so the memories of others would remain inviolate" (17), while others were used as cannon fodder whose purpose was to "walk blindly into everything and see if it will kill them" (18). By November 2246, the AI's Unanimous Army's "One Mind" (18) mob had been marching through the Guardians' territory for two years in a genocidal war called the Calinshchina. When victory was at hand, the Army's software "suddenly erased itself from all its component minds, [which meant that] more than half the people in the world found themselves at least a thousand miles from home" (18). In the aftermath of the starvation and displacements wreaked by the UA, a new government called the "Fusion of Historical Nations" emerged as a unifying, authoritarian regime for the former USSR region.

After the genocidal Calinshchina event, the Fusion of Historical Nations used monolithic historical accounts to promote a national ethos for those living under its control. However, these national narratives

sacrificed lived experiences as well as social and individual memories, i.e. communicative memory. The Unanimous Army's massacres during the Calinshchina acts as a collective wound in the world of the novel, a national memory that haunts, organizes, and governs people's expectations and fears about mass violence and sustains the ascendancy of martial and authoritarian law in the Fusion of Historical Nations. Those in power employ the Calinshchina as a national trauma, disabling citizens of the nation from healing or moving on from violence. Individual memory is buried and delegitimized through suppressor devices or threats of eradication by virtual or physical law enforcement officers. Having been arrested by the physical Post-cops for sexual deviance, Maya, who had faced a death sentence for her same-sex relationship, lives with a suppressor implant that reduces not only her libido but also her sensory experiences of food and life in general. Additionally, the other sockets and slots in Maya's head allow the state to surveille and suppress emotions, actions, and experiences it deems threatening to the nation. While Maya says that the suppressor is a comfort after she has lived with it for more than a decade, it is a pre-eminent tool of state control.

Carter's protagonist is an eccentric character who loves to quote Humphrey Bogart, is ironical, and refuses to upgrade her nano-technology, despite working as a journalist who can provide her audience with near-immediate sensory experiences through telepresence technology. Maya's journalistic investigation into the history of Calinshchina can be seen as a means to document and memorialize national silencing. Her reconstruction of the fragmented history of the Guardians' defeat as well as the rise of the Fusion of Historical Nations, via the massacre performed by the Unanimous Army, parallels her fraught technological and psychological recovery of her own suppressed memories. With the help of Keishi Mirabara, her replacement "screener," a wired functionary who mitigates Maya's tangential thoughts or desires during the broadcast so they do not disturb the illusion that Maya is a robotic vessel of news, Maya digs up hidden archives of the Holocaust and the "Terror-Famine"—perhaps a reference to the Holodomor of 1932/1933. Keishi's super-computing power allows the two women to process a vast trove of information and condense it for viewers. There are no first-hand witnesses of any of the Square Mile prison camps employed by the Guardians to imprison dissidents, because the Unanimous Army absorbed the prisoners and haphazardly drilled nanotech into their heads to displace their individual memories (44). By following the women during their investigations, Carter shows that the more Maya mines the past, the more it is palpable that state terrorism breeds more state violence, whether in martial, technocratic, or symbolic forms.

Because the Guardians, the Unanimous Army, and the Fusion of Historical Nations are all authoritarian regimes, to exist while bearing the traces of the atrocities committed by the nation states is the seed for resistance in the novel. However, resistance is more difficult when the multi-generation states of the novel have systematically silenced and suppressed communicative memory for Carter's characters. Keishi leads Maya to Voskresnye, a shadowy dissident and survivor of both the Guardians' and the Unanimous Army's violent regimes. Voskresnye has survived through a Frankensteinian experiment performed by the Guardians' top scientist, Aleksandr Derzhavin, who fused his sentience and corporeal being with the last living whale held captive in a secret lab underground. Nano-tech cables join Voskresnye to the whale, and he keeps her—the whale is female—alive against her will to extend his own life. Voskresnye appears to Maya either as a projection or in cyberspace throughout most of the novel because his physical body is yoked to the long-living whale. The whale's capacious selfhood is eventually also colonized by Keishi, who turns out to be Maya's former lover, who had to disassemble her mind into millions of data parcels to escape the Weavers' justice (that is, death for the crime of sexual deviance). Voskresnye and Keishi sacrifice their bodily existence to be able to continue existing in cyberspace and to carry on their objections against state authoritarianism. Their ultimate plan is to broadcast the existence of the whale on Maya's news program and to expose the Guardians' and the Unanimous Army's history of state cruelty and terrorism as a way of calling on people to overthrow the oppressive Fusion of Historical Nations government.

Voskresnye's and Keishi's sacrifice complicates ideas about heroism. While they perform it to fight state oppression, it is shown to be deeply unethical insofar as it includes the whale. Without a pod, trapped in the underground tank, isolated from her natural environment, mutilated by experiments, and impaired by old age, the whale speaks of her life as a dream of death: "a dream where the water will not hold me up, and I am moving my fluke all the time I wish to be a man, in order to [...] to make die [...] That. Yes. It is a dream come out of hating" (225-26). After the fall of the Unanimous Army, Voskresnye freed the whale by unhooking himself from her subduing hardware to allow her to swim away. The whale found herself in a world where all traces of her kind had been exterminated, and so she returned to her underground tank, as Voskresnye returned to the lab because he remained a hunted dissident and a terrorist under the Fusion of Historical Nations. Carter's critique is poignant and devastating, in that Keishi and Voskresnye's desire for survival includes betrayal, subterfuge, and the arrogation of another living being. For them, their human selfhood and continuous existence

supersedes nonhuman collateral damage as well as multispecies ethics. As Maria Mies theorizes, the consequence of “patriarchal capitalism,” is that “the accumulation process itself destroys the core of human essence everywhere because it is based on the destruction of women’s autarky over their lives and bodies” (2). A system that exploits and terrorizes its people forces people into desperate acts that can lead either to further tyranny, in this case over nonhuman others, or to potential resistance, or, indeed, to both at the same time.

The cultural and political memory of *The Fortunate Fall*, with its totalitarian negation of personal and social memories, engenders cyborg figures (Voskresnye and Keishi) that are, unlike Piercy’s Yod, “single vision[ed]” (Haraway 154). Rejecting dualistic or reductionistic thinking, Haraway alternatively advocates for a cyborgian, feminist approach of assemblage and “partiality, irony, intimacy, and perversity” (Haraway 151) to decode and recode the “systems of myth and meanings structuring our imaginations” (164). For Voskresnye, telepresence and nano-prostheses have the ability to erase what Haraway describes as “the sins of *locality*, all the errors that arise from being prisoned in one body and no other—as racism, sexism, classism, and of course and especially nationalism” (229). Voskresnye sees himself and those with advanced nano-tech modifications, advanced cyborgs, or as he puts it, as “a race of gods” (Carter 284) superior to unmodified humans prior to the twenty-second century who did not have the ability to store souls in cyberspace or to merge one’s self with that of another. The question of ethics and individual autonomy does not matter to him, and his violence against the whale reproduces old structures of capitalist and patriarchal imperialism. Maya, on the other hand, is not only troubled by the commodification of memories and experience that the take-over of the whale entails, but also by the erasure of individual self-expression and self-actualization. When the whale dies, shredded by nanotech that Voskresnye has implanted in her DNA, Voskresnye screams at Maya for refusing to telecast the event: “You will let this be forgotten?” (282). Maya is also concerned that Keishi helps Voskresnye to turn the “death of the last whale in the world into something you can buy shrink-wrapped off a spinner at a grocery” (229, 284). When Maya remains adamant in her refusal to broadcast Voskresnye’s propaganda about the whale, Keishi steps into tele-broadcast the tragic event. Keishi’s complicity is an ethical ignorance engendered, I argue, from an absence of rich memory transmissions.

The whale represents not what Voskresnye imagines, i.e. his triumph over the Guardians and the Weavers, but the persistence of history. She signifies the history of environmental and ecological exploitation as well as society’s increasing (state-sponsored) dependence on advanced

computing to store or manufacture memory. One consequence of this long prehistory of violence is Voskresnye's hubris; that is, the idea that he has the right to transcend the immanence of his human body by co-opting another body, without consideration for the ethical violence this entails. Carter's rendering of the whale and the protagonist as female adds specificity to the consequences of such violent state ideologies for women. The whale experiences a twofold trauma: her separation from her pod and the oceanic world and the occupation of her body by others. As a symbolic double for Maya, the whale is a living memorial of oppression that the repeated invasion of women's bodies in the world of the novel constitutes.

When the whale dies, taking Voskresnye with her, Keishi begs Maya to be allowed to store the core parcel of her soul in Maya's mind, arguing that this would allow them to be together forever. Maya rejects this proposition, however, commenting: "And will you hold me when I'm frightened, Keishi Mirabara?" (283). This suggests that having uncovered the many gruesome histories of state violence against women, sexual minorites, conscientious objectors, and nonhuman beings, and having witnessed Keishi's and Voskresnye's colonization of the whale's body, Maya is deeply suspicious of technological transcendence. Sherryl Vint suggests that Carter employs the "subversion of cyberpunk tropes" such as the transfer of minds "precisely to restore the repressed body and marginalized material reality" (124). Bronwen Calvert and Sue Walsh reflect that "Cyberpunk science fiction is about the mind," but also note that feminists' "close identification with 'the body' means that it is difficult for women to see liberation in a transcendence which effectively rubs them out" (96, 98). Although Calvert and Walsh focus on Pat Cadigan's *Synners* (1991) and William Gibson's *Neuromancer* (1984), their analysis hinges on the idea that the cybersphere is a site of transcendence while the corporeal world is one of decay and archaism (102). I contend that Piercy and Carter embrace the corporeal and the spiritual, not in opposition to technological transcendence, but in a feminist remediation of the cyborg body, with special attention to the material engendering and exploitation of female bodies. Their versions of cyberpunk trouble the dualisms of science fiction and recalibrate the body question to bring into focus the ethical lapses of nation-states for women and minoritarian groups.

With the ubiquity of nano-technology conjoined with environmental collapse, virtual reality is preferable to the "real world" in Carter's novel. For both Voskresnye, who is bound to the whale by physical cables, and Keishi, who is alive only as a hologram, virtual reality extends their consciousness, but their lives are entirely chimeral. The flatness of their lives is a product of state consolidation of technological control of

personal, social, cultural, and political memories. The Fusion of Historical Nations strategically seizes the technologies of memory and historical traumas to undermine both individual and common histories. Narratively, in making the sign of terror visible on her protagonist's body, Carter calls attention to the lasting harm state violence inflicts on the cyborgian body of his protagonist Maya. Her disfigured cyborg body symbolizes the cyclical repetition and inadequate emotional and existential compensation for victims. Because Maya has been "rehabilitated" by her authoritarian nation-state and turned into a camera medium, she blacks out while driving a car when a memory of her past lover threatens to surface (25). The re-mapping of her cerebral cortex by the suppressor implant intended to obviate personal memories and desires, terrorizes the individual as well as the society to which she belongs. To think this another way, the state suppresses personal and social memory in order to negate self-actualization and autonomy.

Recuperating Communitarian Memory Practices

Read side-by-side and with a focus on memory and memorialization, the overlaps and divergences between Piercy and Carter's novels reveal the dire state of signifying memory practices and lived experiences under authoritarian regimes. Carter and Piercy both demonstrate the dangers of memory technologies that delegitimizes corporeal, lived memories, making minoritarian subject positions all the more vulnerable. The destruction of the cyborg Yod in *He, She, and It* and the destruction of the whale, Voskresnye, and Keishi in *The Fortunate Fall* are accusations fired at futuristic authoritarian states. While Shira insists that Yod is "a purer form of what we're all tending toward" (150), Piercy denies the importance of the singular, perfect (cyborg) being, emphasizing, instead, the strategic union of technologically-enhanced communities and culturally-situated memories. Piercy, more than Carter, embraces dialogic remembering, uniting people across raced, sexed, gender, class, and ethnic lines through conversation, which helps to build communitarian politics.

To different degrees both authors suggest the necessity of connection and coalition politics in the formation of memories and memorials. Piercy's novel emphasizes the role of social and communicative memory as vehicles for combatting political domination. Borrowing from noir fiction to highlight the emptiness of individual's lives under an interventionist, authoritarian state, Carter portrays the devastating fragmentation to the self and society when social and personal memories are obliterated; the Fusion of Historical Nations deploys technology to control what is recorded and remembered of history, in addition to displacing literature and personal testimonials as

holders of memory. If Jan and Aleida Assmann are correct in claiming that collective memory persists for three generations, or eighty years, then Carter's characters exist in a world where persistent state control over memory and history has endured for so long that the powerful "can destroy not just a people, but all memory of a people" (62). It is also revealed that people are educated about but also by way of television and movies, rather than novels or written texts. In "Traumatic Pasts, Literary Afterlives, and Transcultural Memory" (2011), Astrid Erll posits that literature is a technology of memory, producing and shaping cultural memory rather than simply a passive vessel of it (n.p.). When Maya is introduced to Melville's *Moby Dick* and then Shelley's *Frankenstein*, she is stunned at the richness of these written worlds. In both novels, official, i.e. corporate-state-sponsored educational content is the indoctrination tool par excellence.

Employing twentieth-century popular and formulaic film and television programming as the basis of educational curriculum, the Fusion of Historical Nations actively discourages introspective and self-actualizing representations and narratives, especially in written works, in *The Fortunate Fall*. Unlike Piercy's novel, where Shelley's *Frankenstein* and Malkah's storytelling revives a Jewish humanist tradition as a needed antidote to cyber-ahistoricism, Carter's novel does not offer a hopeful vision of ethical correction. In Carter's novel, the Guardians regime was able to "raise new generations that have never known anything but tyranny" (62) through technological appropriation of narrative and memory. However, in a (slim) sketch of the political situation in Africa (represented as one unified nation in the text), Carter acknowledges the potential for communitarian belonging, even as it is stipulated that His-Majesty-in-Chains, Africa's ruler, has rigid rules for keeping out those whose skin does not retain pigment. Africa's high-tech innovations, which has the ability to hold space for the souls of the nation's inhabitants on its own version of the Net, registers the possibility of a technologically-advanced nation-state that does not consign the non-cerebral aspects of human existence to silence and forgetting.

Feminist cyberpunk like Piercy's and Carter's advocates for accountability and the inclusion of voices from the margins through memory work and technologies (storytelling, books, first-person accounts, alternative transmission pathways) that advance coalitions and assemblage knowledges. In both Piercy and Carter, the transition toward an ethical society is one that requires destruction before reconstruction. The destruction of dogmatic and oppressive myths about the nuclear family, heterosexual and reproductive naturalness, capitalistic growth, ecological expendability, powers of the nation-state, and technology's liberatory powers are embraced as a politics of non-repetition and *The*

Fortunate Fall. Yod's death in *He, She and It* symbolizes the power of not non-repetition to disrupt the global hegemonies upheld by the patriarchal, militaristic corporate states. In *The Fortunate Fall*, Maya's refusal to participate in the exploitation of the whale and her denial of Keishi's request to have her life prolonged through virtual colonization upholds a politics of accountability and non-repeating violence. Both novels reject the possibility of a technological utopia because, in the authors' constructions, dominant nations are invested in their citizens' obedience and conformity to patriarchal values, which are concomitant with heterosexuality, militarism, and corporatism. For Piercy as well as Carter, technological advancements are too readily abused by nation states to erase communicative memory. New memory pathways must be forged in order to remake the biological boundaries of the human without reproducing violent memory practices of nation-states.

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