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Et Nunc . . . Per Hoc Signum: A Meditation on Genitives in Everyday Life Stories

For Br. K.-N.

It is easy to forget that everyday stories witness an intellectual configuration, as do, in their own way, the apparently more complex discursive systems. In *The Discourse on Language*, at the end of *The Archaeology of Knowledge*—a programmatic statement that on December 2, 1970, projects lines of an inquiry—Michel Foucault sums up some of the alterations on G. W. F. Hegel's conception, initiated by Jean Hyppolite's exegesis of Hegel. He notes that one of the risks, and possibly the most visible, concerns the ambiguous intersection between philosophy and nonphilosophy and, from this, arises a question of origin and a question of identity, the identity of the philosophical discourse.¹ In this, one has to take into account, on the one hand, from the discontinuity represented in Hyppolite's reading, the line of philosophy in a reappropriated perspective as an "endless task, against the background of an infinite horizon" (*Archaeology*, 236), qualifying itself in the very process of a perpetual recommencement. On the other hand, from this view, on the "repeated contact with non-philosophy" (*ibid.*), one has to face philosophy interrogating itself about its genesis, vis-à-vis the empirical dimen-

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sions of existence. That is the heart of questions raised by this passage on Hegel.

First, Foucault justifies his hypothesis by rephrasing its premise on “attempting to flee Hegel” and accents the difficulty of what it would mean “truly to escape Hegel” (ibid., 235) and what that involves. Thirty-five years later, in *Hegel et la philosophie africaine: Une lecture interprétative de la dialectique hégélienne*, a study issued forth by a meditation on an African crisis, Mèdewalé-Kodjo-Jacob Agossou accents a view similar to Foucault’s and emphasizes the singularity of Hegel: “Sa patrie est le monde tout court en son universalité concrète” (“His nation is simply the world in its concrete universality”).² More strongly than Foucault, he maintains the same effective duty in a paradoxical credit: on the one hand, a good philosopher does not necessarily need to “Hegelianize” (“pour être . . . un bon philosophe, personne n’est obligé d’hégéliéniser”; *La philosophie africaine*, 27); on the other hand, no serious student of philosophy can afford to ignore, or pretend to bypass, Hegel (“quiconque aborde le projet philosophique avec un brin de sérieux ne peut éviter ni contourner Hegel”; ibid.).

The second question raised by Foucault’s argument concerns the vagueness of the nonphilosophical vis-à-vis the distinctness of a philosophical practice and its object. In such a representation, one would oppose philosophy, a discursive practice that is explicit, systematic, critical, and autocritical, to nonphilosophy. The nonphilosophical may seem to coincide with, at best, an ancillary role. But the philosophical and nonphilosophical are intimately interrelated. Foucault’s challenge and Agossou’s effort are about assuming their interconnections. In rethinking the Hegelian legacy, as Foucault puts it in *The Archaeology of Knowledge*, one explores “the path along which we may escape Hegel, keep our distance and along which we shall find ourselves brought back to him, only from a different angle, and then finally be forced to leave him behind once more” (*Archaeology*, 235). Playing it safe, I am looking at everyday beliefs on multifarious matters. They are explicit, critical, and often autocritical statements on concrete issues related to the multicultural condition. I am reading them with an eye on a grammatical function, the genitive, following its effects on the stories, as objective and subjective points. In their attestations, genitives simply mark a determinative function. One can even doubt that an author would consider them as having another usage. Nevertheless, within a socio-cultural context, in descriptions or in requisitions of rights about identity and obligations, genitives tend to contribute to a joining between belief and

truth and to amalgamate imperatives and duties in statements justified by the context.

Children's Truth

Tell me the truth, asks the disciple. In the introduction to *Classic Folk-Tales from around the World*, Robert Nye gives focus to this track in human heritage.³ Universally, the wish to know tells of a thesaurus that contains an amazingly limited number of paradigms. As a matter of fact or as a credible hypothesis, this corpus would have a quasi-closed list of archetypes constituting a collective unconscious, according to Carl Jung. *Imperative* is the word for prescriptions that can be deduced from this collection of folktales. The everyday stories tell of virtue and friendship, malevolence and death, in nature and culture. Of what they are not, also. They allegorize the true and the false, the good and the bad, the beautiful and the ugly, begging to measure their own lack. Nye introduces the singularity of the corpus. Let me emphasize three ideas from his testimony. First of all, there is the incredible structural universality of these hundreds of tales: *Tell me a story, cries the child.* "How powerful and pervasive this desire has been is proved by the widely various provenance of the tales in this book, gathered from all parts of the world. Yet it does not surprise me that there are stories here from China and Africa and South America which I heard first from my grandmother who told me versions which she thought were English."⁴ Second, one would agree with Nye that, reabsorbed in their ordinary environments, folktales are about means and ends in the particularity of imperatives. In this capacity, they transmit ethical constructions, explanations of necessary questions in the history of a more general *must*. Succinctly, they offer a *telos*, adorning and embellishing it according to stylistic requirements that define them:

Here are tales that express in simple form the essential imaginings of us all, all of them told with an insistence on virtue which seldom cloys because it is so clean and honest. Folk-tales are not to be confused with popular romantic fantasies of wish-fulfillment. The best of them bring news of heaven and hell, as well as earth. Here the good and the true achieve happiness not by craft or luck or magic, but by love. Living happily ever after, it will be noticed, is not a fate promised or awarded indiscriminately to all.⁵

Finally, individually or in groups, these everyday life stories speak about movements in cultures and their relation to histories of a humanity, ours and its variations. In their diversity, these dynamics state their own process as identical to the time they bring in their own present. On this point, the main lesson from these narratives comes down to an observation of Claude Lévi-Strauss that makes any myth an ethical narrative, any history a mythological narrative.⁶

The stories present themselves as arguments in the most ordinary sense of the concept, that is, in its polysemic value. *Polysemic* can indistinctly designate a course in demonstration, an address intended to convince, the expression of a controversy or a dispute. As arguments, their reasonableness depends on the content. Strictly speaking, should one accept some logicians' ingenuity, can the stories, along with novels and all epic and mythic narratives, pass for *informal fallacies*? This qualification does not negate the possible practical value of their reason. It refers to the how and the situation in which it is actualized. As a matter of fact, in everyday stories, one observes beliefs and their connection to valuing attitudes and actions they inspired, as well as the manner in which these beliefs are aimed at goals. Often, they confirm common sense in the process, and the progressive constitution of an appropriateness, and a good probability of the truth, in what is being valued, designated, or remembered. On valuing, Robert Nozick:

To value something is to stand in a particular close, positive psychological and attitudinal relation to it, a relation itself marked by high organic unity. *Valuing* something is doing that particular relational activity. You might then say that every thing or trait to which we do that specific activity therefore has "value," but that is to project the unity of the psychological evaluative activity onto whatever differing objects that activity was directed toward. The view of value as degree of organic unity, on the other hand, keeps value as just one kind of phenomenon, the activity of valuing being an instance.⁷

I am reading everyday stories, interpolating them, pursuing meanings. In actuality, spacing their time and timing the spaces they reveal and following their instruction, I try to decode imperatives and how they are signified. In *The Imperative*, Alphonso Lingis seems to overemphasize ways in which *musts* express themselves but to underestimate the almost invisible grammatical constraints that often orient value and obligation. He demonstrates how imperatives are assumed in contextual statements, often operating in

transcriptions, and by what exceeds them. The thesis, says Lingis, the good old Kantian measure to be extracted from its account, “shows sensibility, sensuality, and perception to be not reactions . . . but responses to directives. . . it holds that the directives we find in the night, the elements, . . . the faces of fellow humans . . . have to be described separately.”⁸

A Girl's Love Stories

The problem with friendship seems to be more about what it represents than what it might be when lived. In sociocultural terms, analyses of the tension between agape and eros seem to be the best of possibly the worst systematizations. The thematic field of charity is a good illustration. Its overused concepts (generosity, giving, help, judgment, kindness, love, mercy, service, unselfishness, etc.) seem more and more slippery. Their interpenetration with psychotherapeutic exercises has somehow accented the religious uncertainty of most of them.

Sentiments, before being concepts, are lived in concrete experiences. These are often identified with feelings. Theorizing responsibly on agape, for instance, would mean to face one's sentiments about a sentiment. By insisting on using sentiment rather than feeling, one can maintain Edmund Husserl's position as interpreted by Ulrich Melle: “An object must affect us emotionally; otherwise, there is no inducement whatever, no motive for us to be interested in it, to strive for it, or to avoid it.”⁹ In actuality, what is being said concerns the very basis of one's ethical measure, what stabilizes the fundamental sense of the right and the wrong, an imperative. This makes of agape a foundational sentiment, an act in its own right. In friendship, agape addresses the whole of one's commitments to an affected reality. Existing becomes submitted to such an engagement lived in a perpetually recommenced act of creativity. To refer to Maurice Merleau-Ponty, that is the heuristic requisite in the formation of an ethics, a constant encounter of the self and the other in a continuous fascination with the world.¹⁰

Reading Maya Angelou's *I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings* and *The Heart of a Woman* is to face a bird's story on the lightness of the unterrestrial, an education, that which defies everything, including death, said Socrates.¹¹ Yet the truth of its image represses its own reflection. The singularity prior to all singular pregnancies would give birth to what is inscribed on it: the rule of her own eyes. Angelou writes: “The world had ended, and I was the only person who knew it. People walked along the streets as if the pavements

hadn't all crumbled beneath their feet. They pretended to breathe in and out while all the time I knew the air had been sucked away in a monstrous inhalation from God Himself. I alone was suffocating in the nightmare" (*Caged Bird*, 276). In a name, Bertha Flowers, the whole difference between a vocation and the banality of an obsession with pineapples: "I dreamt of the days when I would be grown and be able to buy a whole carton for myself alone" (*ibid.*, 15). The deviation states something: the silent pact of a curved something. On the one side, what founds the beauty of a girl's expectation. On the other, against it, the beyond. The idea of a proper name preceded by a *Mrs.*, a dream. Angelou's story begins with the end. A way of looking at preferences in one's past articulates intersections in which a sentiment for the beautiful transforms its object in the now that arrests a space. The autobiography provides an understanding of what a name projects. Indeed, it also understates: "Mrs. Bertha Flowers was the aristocrat of Black Stamps" (*ibid.*, 90). To observe the alternative reason was a cue. It could saturate the resources of many safety zones—acts of an American black woman or the fate of three mirrors. All of them are concave: *American*, adjective; *black*, another adjective; *woman*, substantive. A noun, in this neighborhood along the Brazos River. Visible, there is a Wm. Johnson General Merchandise Store in the heart of the "Negro area," a mother about whom Marguerite says, "We soon stopped calling her Grandmother" (*ibid.*, 7). The two poles are pillars. So everything hangs warm and expected by the familiarity of "a Fun House of Things where the attendant has gone home for life" (*ibid.*, 26). That accords itself to the will to truth of Gerda Lerner's *Black Women in White America*.¹² Reciting years later her capacity for modeling assignments, Maya decelerates what kept her moving in remembering the phases of a miracle, a law: "'Thou shall not be dirty', and 'Thou shall not be impudent' were the two commandments of Grandmother Henderson upon which hung our total salvation" (*Caged Bird*, 26). Inexplicably, this grandmother was, in business, capable of "being in two places at the same time" (*ibid.*): in East Stamps, she sells lunches to saw men; in West Stamps, to seed men. But it is her store that identifies the Momma with an immense grandmother. Her sign stands like a straight candle. Held to be supernatural in origin, two women in one, they resembled weathered rocks. Even better, a mountain. She determines the atmosphere of a memory: "I sensed that it was tired. I alone could hear the slow pulse of its job half done" (*ibid.*, 16). A gift: arms around excerpts of past fragments in the morning and afternoon, any cause could become an excuse for celebration: upside-down cake, scent of pineapples, shelves of dried fish and tobacco. Slavery, they

say, is outlawed. There are many things, they say. Human achievement, not the devil's. It justifies huge books of scholars. A distance. In God's love, you are told, life was apt to be milk and honey. That is from a Latin antenna in honor of a young rich woman. Martyred, of necessity. Another country, another century, for Agnes the Roman! But you?

The revelation bursts a few years later, at a graduation. Her first one. It coincides with the experience of being inhabited by a circuit of negative feelings. Anger and resentment in an ellipsis structuring death wishes. The commencement speaker was late. The school principal at his task, docile, was calling out friendship: "Our speaker tonight, who is also our friend, came from Texarkana." In the name of this friendship, he came. "But due to the irregularity of the train schedule, he's going to, as they say, 'speak and run'" (*ibid.*, 173).

Marguerite, you reconstructed the whole event. The bad faith in an invoked friendship anchored your reflected awareness of being cheated. And mortifying, the principal's voice as a consenting victim. Everything around seemed insupportable. At eight, a violation led to the hospital. Here, the rhetoric of evidence was supposed to straighten you up. That is the term you used. The principal would have said anything to save the appearance of generosity. "He was talking about Booker T. Washington, our 'late great leader,' who said we can be as close as the fingers on the hand, etc. . . . Then he said a few vague things about friendship and the friendship of kindly people to those less fortunate than themselves" (*ibid.*). The traffic in friendship would antagonize no one. There is no equity court for what was happening to your mind. Later, you remembered the road you took. An education had padded your curiosity, Mrs. Flowers guided the intelligence. With her, no evasion, no illusion. Highly surprising, therefore, that you could name the temptation and the way out, an agenda from Patrick Henry's words:

"I know not what course others may take, but as for me, give me liberty or give me death."

And now I heard, really for the first time:

"We have come over a way that with tears has been watered,

We have come, treading our path through the blood of the slaughtered." (*Ibid.*, 179)

The ritual, its racial subtext, and tricked values ruined a beautiful secret. A love affair with Shakespeare. This was music to you, a conversation with a style, human riddles, rich things. Influence of Mrs. Flowers? With your

brother, you had learned by heart *The Merchant of Venice*. Art and decency, the perfect match. Sure, you could trust Shakespeare on the conduct to have apropos disgrace with fortune and in people's eyes. And, then, against this happiness, a very prosaic predicament. A major one, and it infected your attention: "But we realized that Momma would question us about the author and that we'd have to tell her that Shakespeare was white, and it wouldn't matter to her whether he was dead or not" (ibid., 14–15). This graduation ceremony, with its well-mitigating interests in a practical genre of friendship, had poisoned the beauty of a relationship.

By the age of ten, a young black woman has been working on questions not given to words. Not for her experience. How to emerge from acts of God? Clean and innocent, she steps back. She has no reason to lament. Not really. "Our appreciative customers used to admire: 'Sister Henderson sure got some smart grandchildren'" (ibid., 15). Yet with time, she apprehends herself "like an old biscuit, dirty and inedible" (ibid., 90). Still caught in the trails of her neighborhood, she will never forget the limits of a topography: the house, the Store (with a capital S), the school, and the church. The big truth, a stick. They say it is dogma: "To be of no church is dangerous."¹³ No real infancy, she wakes up a woman, fuses with the only life she has known. They dress her up to fit within norms for appropriating an alienation. She is good. After all, the lesson about such a course came later, with the famous graduation. Again and again, the community was the start and the end of a life. Traces, everywhere, for the rear wagon. Fast, you learn. It is in the dictionary. An imperative is a course that is expected of one by position, by law. To expect another way was unreasonable.

A good girl walks simply, alongside the reminders of her future. Friendship had a name: the memory of a pattern. That is the other name of the present. Some kids may someday emulate the Galileos or Madame Curies, persons you refer to. But in Stamps? For your generation, useless all the unanswered questions posed, apart from the preacher's recitation of Deuteronomy. And the law of the grandmother. On that side, the Lord has taken good care of everything. There is joy in memorizing abominations, doing one's best to avoid them, and curbing all the chances of risking eternal damnation. As to education, you trusted your common sense: "And our boys (the girls weren't even in on it) would try to be Jesse Owens and Joe Louises" (*Caged Bird*, 174).

One day, the swing.

. . . and Genitives' Imperatives

The case of love stories builds an argument, that of a girl pictured in the woman's heart.

It formulates itself within repetitions of voices. Angelou's books, the brief commentary just made, they confess, and what the relation brings about in all these narratives is that the case articulates itself in genitives, and these prescribe ways of reading the case. In Grandmother Henderson's client's devotion, Mrs. Flowers's affection for her protégé, the graduation ceremony and its effects, one might, when reading, accent or antagonize the functional values, objective versus subjective, that the genitive actualizes. Grandmother Henderson's devotion can be indistinctly read as the devotion she has for her people, or that they have for her. In the same vein, an expression like "God's love" is inherently ambiguous in any context, when part of an ensemble, with a subject attesting an attitude or a sentiment, or recognizing its consequence. Thus, the usefulness in distinguishing an objective genitive in the "love of God," its direct object, from the subjective genitive, the love of the subject for God.

In reading Angelou, one would test the complexity of an imperative. In signs of this, we can dissociate objective genitives from subjective ones. The general principle reads this way. In words that designate attitudes, physical or psychological, one finds generally a verbal ideation, easily detectable from the context. The substantive that is the object of the ideation is an objective genitive, and that which is the subject of the ideation is the subjective genitive. For instance, in qualifying the regime of Grandmother Henderson's dedication to the well-being of her neighborhood as reflecting one of the keys to *I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings*, one sorts out two genitives. There is an objective one, the neighborhood, which is the object of the verbal ideation present in dedication, and a subjective one, Grandmother Henderson, who is the subject of the verbal ideation present in the regime. In this construction, a very brief phrase, the genitives would unveil two different statements. They may imply, and be imprudently seen as, the induction of an objective or a subjective judgment. To fear the genitive? Rather, to be cautious in not deducing ethical adjudication from the semantic ambiguity that proceeds from the genitives. The objective and subjective adjectives do not bestow a moral value on a genitive. Instead, they simply qualify a function that the genitive can actualize. Besides the objective and subjective, a third function, a predicative one, may be recognized in any substantive

that, in the genitive, denotes a socially and widely accepted attribute. Fundamentally descriptive, this type of genitive tends to be evaluative and, as such, judicative. From Mrs. Flowers and Marguerite to Maya in *The Heart of a Woman*, the tropes on keeping a stiff upper lip have matured. Predicative genitives magnify a perception of the 1980s world they lack.

The case, Stamps. The case, the characters. The case, Mrs. Flowers, the aristocrat of the neighborhood. And then, also, the case of a girl who is learning how to name her perception according to a law in the singular. That of God and that of grandmother: two genitives. The function, a social one, structures a language and creates a meaning from ordinary cracks in everyday life. Doing and having are normalized in a grammatical culture.

The genitive, a *casus*, in Latin, *ptôsis*, in ancient Greek. What is designated here, as a key to read the practice of an ordinary, everyday perception, is a simple modulation of words in these languages. From Cicero, in *De Oratore*, a definition that most nineteenth- and twentieth-century dictionaries of Latin reproduce: “*ea (verba) sic et casibus et temporibus et genere et numero conservemus, ut*” (“this [word] thus, and respective of cases, tenses, gender, and number now”).¹⁴ This is a first approach focusing on inflection (substantives, adjectives, pronouns) or declension, as indicating qualities according to gender (feminine, masculine, neuter), number (singular, dual, plural), and also through word endings, as in the stipulating of a case (*ptôsis, casus*) by its function (nominative, vocative, genitive, accusative, dative, etc.) and as determining both its morphological and syntactical roles.

Looking at Angelou’s texts on our present-day condition, from such an apparently arcane structure, is an effort in both detachment and critical indifference. First, her texts deliver their visibility in the contrasts spelled out by a grammar in which qualities and functions depend on word orders and the intervention of prepositions. An inwardness documents its features, substantiates fragile items in comparison with a Greek or Latin declension and word-ending systems. In Angelou’s narratives, details signal, for example, the supernatural traits of an absent mother, the virtues of a mythic figure in two women, gendered labors, and only interpretive but systematic comparisons with different linguistic tables and memorial substantives. Second, from a linguistic background—genetically identical with English and some twenty centuries distant—an old framework transforms reading into a perpetual exercise in comparative interpretations. The main functions of the genitive might serve the task of a first vignette.

The meaning of the concept itself demands a better appropriation of what it actualizes in the education of Marguerite. From any lexicographic entry of *ptôsis* or of *casus*, as substantives, to that of *gen-* in *genitivus* (-a, -um), an adjective, one faces a solid idea of origin and generation, present in the field of *ptôsis-casus*, as well as in that of *gen-genitivus*.

First, *ptôsis* concerns the idea of fall, an accidental happening, physical or moral. From this value, a semantic expansion appears as a major opposition, frequent in the language of Aristotle, as in the failure of the soul, of a mind, contra *ἐπαρσις* (the rising and elevation), and toward that of quality in proposition, a technical specialization in Aristotelian logic. Second, we have an explicit metaphorically oriented axis, with values applying to what is impermanent, an occurrence, and in extension, an adverse situation or a calamity.

Of the *genitivus*, the case expressing a determinative function, there are also two main semantic axes; in fact, there are two intertwined lines, one realist, the other allegorical. The first attests the idea of filiation, that of an inscription in a generation. It is well signified in the definition bestowed on the *casus* by the Latin grammarian Varro: *patricius casus*. The basic value indicates a patrilineal descent, the law of a generator—that is, the source attested in the root *gen-* (Greek *γενος*, Latin *genus*) that *genitivus* contains. The best, and classical, situation is about the mythological reference to Rome. In Ennius's *Annals*, one has an exemplary passage that affirms Romulus's origin of divine nature. In this case, the *lex* in a masculine origin attests the idea of generation: *O Romule, Romule die! O pater, O genitor*.¹⁵ In brief, *genitivus*, a determinative adjective, as a functional *casus*, conveys this basic articulation, an idea of belonging and one of a patrilineal lineage.

The imaginaries of Marguerite's education and of Maya in *The Heart of a Woman* duplicate the structuring of Stamps, a climate of strong women, and the preoccupation of an origin without a father figure. On the one hand, for Marguerite, there is a mother who is away, almost erased in exemplary substitutes (Grandmother Henderson and Mrs. Flowers). Her force does not refute a law in biological generation. On the other hand, in *The Heart of a Woman*, Maya, reflecting on Marguerite, faces a boy who resembles her brother in Stamps. She remembers her experience as a girl, and the context brings about a question on origin. In effect, can the genitive stand only as an adjective in the "heart of a woman"? Celebrating her engagement to Africa, in the presence of two men in her life, her son, Guy, and her partner, the matriarch thinks, "Now you'll have two strong men to take care of.

We three will be the only invaders Mother Africa will willingly take to her breast.”¹⁶

Can she really have found a new law?

How to educate Marguerite was the question. In schools, the then classical grid, a value acquisition process, was initiated by *Values and Teaching*.¹⁷ The guiding principle was to clarify the process itself, and the teacher expected to assist pupils in examining the criteria determining values and their whys. The questionnaire can be reduced to three main avenues enabling an ethical expression. The first aims at an evaluation of what happened (its value quality, how it is prized compared to alternatives, how it inscribes itself in a tradition, etc.). The second avenue consists of a reenactment of what happened, a way of bringing to light motivations (is the choice a free one? corresponding to what kind of idea? can its assumptions be spelled out, shared?). Finally, the student was led to the affirmation of a moral position. Why should it be valued as right, and on the basis of which criteria?

The process spells pedagogy with two intersecting objectives: on the one hand, an “equalizer” ethos of educating and schooling that reflects a mainstream system of cultural values and, on the other hand, the recognition of a “multicultural education and cultural pluralism.”¹⁸ Two popular textbooks of the 1980s could be referenced as exemplars: with an emphasis on integration, *Those Who Can, Teach*, and with an insistence on diversity, *Intercultural Studies: Schooling in Diversity*.¹⁹ Symptomatic of a period, the two textbooks convey a pedagogical vision in their understanding of *education* and *schooling*, and their sociological channels of circulation.

Don Anselmo's Trees

In the presence of Juan A. A. Sedillo's Don Anselmo, from “Gentleman of Rio en Medio,” one rewrites a universe.²⁰ To write again gives birth, gives meaning to the act—this particular verb and not another. To decline a verb, to inflect a word. The discourse translates a possible, which is there: *vocabula et verba*. Submitted to both perception and understanding, one might believe. In order to claim that one has it, the memory of a genesis. To possess and feel an obligation, to become *verbosus*, and one has to do it, to incarnate an imperative, and name what is necessary since the word preceded it. A biblical imperative surges: I have named you, you belong to me. In the recollection, an imperative. Open to it. Or to reconciliation and repetitions,

say the wise. Criteria for its integration in an order of consequences, crucial to how we relate to each other, speak about our limits to the list of *musts*. They mind a world of objective data, strained spaces, detached feelings, clear walk-arounds. That is the verbosity of the world. And to mind means to do justice. One thinks rationally by discriminating qualities. A story on friendship should make a case. Be clear, have an intentional direction, aim at an arrangement. It should be aimed at. There is, first of all, its structure. Feel an obligation, whatever it is. Then within its analytics, the succession of events or facts, and their relations. Finally, a conclusion by which to stand. It will proclaim the order of obligations.

The sign of Don Anselmo might be a parable. On friendship. Verbs to express it: *allow, acquire, experience*. Inflections to face. The old sage had consented to a transaction. It took him months to reflect, to wait, to accept the principle of a contract. Twelve hundred in cash for eight acres of land. The story is reported by a lawyer, someone who can speak both English and Spanish. He comments on the affair's background. Don Anselmo and his people have been living in Rio en Medio for hundreds of years. He compares the old man's attitude to Charlie Chaplin's, insists on gestures of obsequiousness in a movie. Yesterday's situations profile today's occurrences. As if Don Anselmo's life were just a fiction. A silent representation of how things may not be.

The signing of papers is an experience. *Per hoc signum*, by and in this sign there are obligations. On one side, the old Don Anselmo: "The old man bowed to all of us in the room. Then he removed his hat and gloves slowly and carefully. . . . He handed his things to the boy, who stood obediently behind the old man's chair" ("Gentleman," 181). Embedded phrases, cohesiveness of associated sets, their mutual interdependence with Aristotle's concepts. They arise. They testify to anyone who can recollect the value of symbols. Foucault has reanimated some of them: similitude and analogy, resemblance and sympathy. To communicate, one retains their lack. Hat, gloves, and the text transform their meanings into figures. Two screens: the old Prince Alberts, for the coat of Don Anselmo vis-à-vis the ghost of Thomas Benton Catron, senator of New Mexico at the beginning of the twentieth century. They are prime signals. Their capacity for persuasion constitutes its own law. Imperatives handle customs and all manners of respectability.

The argument articulates a reason for the meeting: "These Americans are *buena gente*" (ibid., 181). The word that unites and separates: *gente*, from

gens. It means the group of people claiming the same origin through a patri-lineage. Their *gente*, a world. *Mi gente, la gente*. This man says, "They are willing to pay you for the additional land as well, at the same rate per acre" (ibid.). Facing up *la buena gente* and the commentator who speaks Spanish is the silent Don Anselmo. The old gentleman of Rio en Medio carries the skeleton of an umbrella, I am told. Is there a question, the why of such a style? It is in the language of the Spanish-speaking person that an accident happens. An excellent intercultural go-between, he suggests a price to Don Anselmo: "Instead of twelve hundred dollars you will get almost twice as much, and the money is here for you" (ibid.). In its expression, an aspiration excavated real limits. They were obvious. Then comes the response of Don Anselmo. On the fringes of both a reading and interpretations, it exposes a real question: "'Friend,' he said, 'I do not like to have you speak to me in that manner'" (ibid., 182).

The author of this story, Juan A. A. Sedillo, makes it a credible one by its ordinariness. The description of a transaction projects a number of scenarios. Festering an economic practice, it illustrates determinations: inequality of exchanges, anonymity of the buyer, the power of the market, indifference to everything else. Don Anselmo's land was not for sale. The genitive. And this simple linguistic case, Don Anselmo's land, heightens a belonging and the being here of Don Anselmo. It outlines a relation to birth and to life, to a genitrix, the genitive delivering the name of the origin. Don Anselmo does not need the recitation of a mystery he incarnates. *Et nunc*, and now. As in the past and in the future, the old wisdom is still a certainty. In this man's way of relating to his land, to read a wisdom. From Lucretius's *De Rerum Natura*: "Quare 'magna deum mater,' 'materque ferarum' et 'nostri genitrix' haec dicta est 'corporis' una" ("great mother of the gods, mother of the wild, genitrix of mankind").²¹ The recognition of an origination. Earth, grand mother of divinities, mother of animals, and genitrix of our body. To put the land to a good commercial use lights another bend. An activation of what a common idiom might prompt between the commentator and Don Anselmo is expected in order to manage a necessary intimation. A transaction does not call a war. It is an affair. In style: Anglos compromise, that is a rule. Spanish has none of it. In the *lengua*, a compromise is a meeting. Such a cultural bond, causing what it implies, cannot but cohere principles. Here and now, economic impulses in a community of natural liberty identify with a system of perfect liberty. That is a rule from textbooks. Only here, obvious from conflictual genitives, the outcome of

semantic opposites translates a fundamental argument and its variations on Adam Smith's *Wealth of Nations* in a global culture. The efficacy of words does not motivate much, apart from their own value, and mainly within boundaries of their own system of coherence. They are obviously cultural.

Don Anselmo's land. In this expression, the genitive states an inscription. Beyond the act of having and selling, a silent yet fundamental argument brings about symbolic paths in biogeography and physical resources, specifically the basic relationship between nature and humanity. In the banality of wording—Don Anselmo's land—the genitive attests a community's life. According to all models, there must be a genitrix. The genitive, in its materiality and function, acknowledges a well-born descent. In any case, an etymology recollects the origination of *gens*, *gentis*. It affirms also, and simultaneously, the fundamental axis of *gen-*, the meaning and values of the gift of life issued forth. Lucretius's quotation can be reformulated from the dynamics of the Greek *γίνομαι* (*ginomai*) or *γίγνομαι* (*gignomai*; "to come into being, to come into a certain style that is produced, a product, or offspring"), which testify to the etymon *gen-*. The conceptual field between *ginomai* and *gignomai* articulates two remarkable semantic lines. One line is indicative of processes of coming into being, of happenings to be thought of in relation to what signifies and represents another verb, *εἶναι* (*einai*; "to be"). Inseparable from a causation (addition, multiplication, implosion), the values of *gignomai*, generally attested, are similar to those of *ginomai*, when the latter means "to become" or "to come into existence," representing a transformation or what can occur after something else. The Christian symbolic configuration exemplifies the usage with its antithetic structuration opposing death to life, falsehood to truth, and so on. And transcending the dichotomy surges the idea of a remarkable singularity of a virgin mother, a genitrix who transcends the tension between life and death. In Christian representation, Mary, the mother of Jesus, is the only human who did not die; thus, the "assumption" in the Western tradition and the "dormition" in the Eastern Orthodox. From the beginning, Mary has been associated with, and yet detached from, the ancient representations of foundational figures. *Θεοτοκος* (*theotokos*), God bearer, she is born "immaculate" and virgin, the genitrix of a new humanity. The Christian library on Mary genitrix is simply overwhelming.

It does not really matter whether what *gen-* projects in the genitive or prompts in *la gente* frames itself according to lexicographic grids that this reading exploits. In the final analysis, what counts resides in what eman-

cipates the genitive, linking its function to a land and its metaphors. To a meditating attention, Don Anselmo's anger reinstalls a number of principles about mediations and imperatives apropos of having and doing.

The tension that led to a confrontation in the story witnesses to two main competing reasons that reflect different laws in contemporary social physics. The culture of the commentator could well be the most uncomfortable. It can assert convincingly its logic, yet its standards exposed it to a comprehensible measure of dislike. In the address of Don Anselmo, the *my friend* works out at least two types of principles. There is the idea of a normative conception of friendship. One that stands silent, yet is an efficient reference, opposite to what is supposed by the abstract *buena gente*, which obeys its own demands. Second, the by-product of the transaction polarizes two horizons in a game, and an excellent one. It merits an attention toward how the meaning of economic goods sometimes conflicts with the meaning of cultural goods.

Once concluded, the transaction between Don Anselmo and *la buena gente* engenders a crisis. Of course, how could it be detached from two views of economics and culture? To the buyers of Don Anselmo's piece of land, the village children became a nuisance. They disregard all boundaries. And the good friend, in virtue of his position between two cultures, is to negotiate a new agreement. The words that Sedillo uses in pursuit of cooperation maximized the enmity: "Don Anselmo, about the ranch you sold to these people" ("Gentleman," 183). The evidence, indeed. He continues: "They are good people and want to be your friends and neighbors always. . . . Now, it seems that every day the children of the village overrun the orchard" (ibid.). An elder, Don Anselmo would be expected to bring order to the small community. The children must learn the meaning of property rights and privacy. Don Anselmo's response equates the issue of rights to something else and the price of morality to his convictions in cultural authenticity. "We have all learned to love these Americans," he says, "because they are good people and good neighbors. I sold them my property because I knew they were good people, but I did not sell them the trees in my orchard" (ibid.).

. . . and the Ethics of a *Nunc*

Don Anselmo's attitude argues that selling property could displace a manner of "having" and not the need of relating to the profusion of its life in the world.

To think of ethics is to think of its relation to “needs”; it is to think about how it is a need “in the world.” Imprudent expression as it is, it may be the best way of facing John Leslie’s “The Theory that the World Exists Because It Should.”²² The 1960s and 1970s were the years of the “first wave” of multicultural statements. One could measure the steps of the effort through a number of questions it adduces, a classical approach but useful for recontextualization. Namely, “If the world is as good as can be, what room is left for moral effort?” (“World Exists,” 286). Then, are we not forced to be ethical, in the manner of being ethically designated “for existence”? As a matter of fact, the question presupposes an a priori that Leslie labels “axiarchism” (ibid.) or any theory picturing the world as ruled by value. On such a path, from one ethical conditional in need of a world to the following, it assumes conditionals in search of foundations. An interminable regress must end in commonsense evidence. The ultimate effect “would presumably produce any number of similar worlds” (ibid., 285). And, indeed, one may accept Leslie’s vision as too good to be true or disagree that “ethical needs by themselves bring about anything” (ibid., 288).

Leslie’s argument is impeccable if one subscribes to an analogy between “ethical requirement” and “causally effective requirement” (ibid.). The figure by itself would, then, require a distinction between “ethical necessity” and any analogy supporting it, as a way to meet “needs transcending needs for action” (ibid., 289).

Could one not relate this exercise to what precedes it in the same issue of the *American Philosophical Quarterly*, Sydney Shoemaker’s “Persons and Their Pasts”? Shoemaker’s thesis may easily be fused in many multicultural stances and their politics of identity: “A person’s past history is the most important source of his knowledge of the world, but it is also an important source of his knowledge, and his conception, of himself; a person’s ‘self-image,’ his conception of his own character, values, and potentialities, is determined in a considerable degree by the way in which he views his own past actions. And a person’s future history is the primary focus of his desires, hopes, and fears.”²³ This is to say that one’s “past history,” one’s “self-image,” is as past does, is that living construction one does not escape. In a sense, the past is one person’s knowledge and power, and its instruction is what an identity tends to create and reformulates: “a knowledge of our own pasts and our identities provided us by memory, is essentially ‘non-criterial.’”²⁴ In other words, it makes no sense for me to inquire whether that action or experience was my own. We can, thus, reformulate

the claims that qualify the demonstration. First, says Shoemaker, there is a “previous awareness condition” for remembering, and it is “a necessary condition of its being true.” Second, such a “first person memory claim” is, somehow, “in a certain respect immune to what I shall call ‘error through misidentification.’”²⁵ Commenting on contemporary hypotheses on reconstructive and reintegrative memory, Shoemaker is annotating passages of John Locke’s *Essay Concerning Human Understanding*, specifically, Locke’s definition of the “person”: “a thinking intelligent being, that has reason and reflection, and can consider itself as itself, the same thinking thing in different times and places.”²⁶

Contemporary with the debate on multiculturalism of the 1960s and the 1980s, in a philosophical critical restraint, Leslie and Shoemaker write on the cultural memory of a cultural space about which one may remember the demarcation between “education” and “schooling.” A bibliographical distinction of Lyn Miller-Lachmann’s *Our Family, Our Friends, Our World*²⁷ would permit the qualifications of two waves: the first being 1960 to 1970, symbolized by Nancy Larrick’s 1965 intervention, “The All-White World of Children’s Comic Books”;²⁸ the second being the 1980s, which “witnessed a retrenchment in publishing books by and about minorities in the United States.”²⁹

. . . and Maya’s Education

One summer afternoon, sweet-milk fresh in my memory, she stopped at the Store to buy provisions. . . . Momma said, “Sister Flowers, I’ll send Bailey up to your house with these things.”

She smiled that slow dragging smile, “Thank you, Mrs. Henderson. I’d prefer Marguerite, though.” My name was beautiful when she said it. “I’ve been meaning to talk to her, anyway.” They gave each other age-group looks.

Momma said, “Well, that’s all right then. Sister, go and change your dress. You going to Sister Flowers’s.”

—Maya Angelou, *I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings*

A new ritual begins. Without justifications. As they are, things are not good. They are not bad. To justify? Only to assess the obvious: the elected is good enough, and Bertha Flowers stimulates the imagination and senses

of her unusual talent. At least, one can guarantee an old saying. Many are called, few are elected: *Multi sunt vocati, pauci electi*. “I hear you’re doing very good school work, Marguerite, but that it’s all written. The teachers report that they have trouble getting you to talk in class” (*Caged Bird*, 95). Edification in reading first, and after, a matching emphasis in speaking: “Your grandmother says you read a lot. Every chance you get. That’s good, but not good enough. Words mean more than what is set down on paper. It takes the human voice to infuse them with the shades of deeper meaning” (ibid.). Speech, she insists, is language. It describes, prescribes, saves, or damns. Imperatives, all of them. But for her? Is it a lesson or a simple observation? Moreover, she asserts, “language is man’s way of communicating with his fellow man and it is language alone which separates him from the lower animals” (ibid.). Lower? Stepping into what should have been a mundane space, Maya ascends into an unreal vision. From her everyday life, what is the real is Grandmother Henderson’s store. To her eyes, Bertha Flowers’s house surmises the supernatural. The kitchen she walks through, the rooms with their fresh walls. Everything as expected in that rule, which, indeed, is not, cannot, be mine. Nice curtains, furniture, old photographs solemnizing the arcane of a new order of sentiments. Empirical reality, home. Allegories, everywhere. And now, this. How can Maya access its daunting secrets? Possibly, an illusion in perception. The girl wishes to decode the beauty of a vision. She states, “I wanted to gobble up the room entire and take it to Bailey, who would help me analyze and enjoy it” (ibid., 96). How to incorporate the fog of things?

The event has accented an awe in its determinations. As they are, the imperatives on inscriptions are not bad. They are not good either. To face them is one thing. Is ignoring them an option? Grandmother Henderson is of this world. Mrs. Flowers knows ways of accessing some of its trans-actions and their aberrations differently. The issue is about how to actualize one’s quality. Genitives often translate *musts*. Borders to each other, the two women stimulate the same past stories supported by the magnitude of the unsaid. Alienation stands up against the ordinary. No birds, no flowers, no real-life boats. The stillness of a protocol. In anger, from their generation to that of Maya’s, to pass a debt. Don Anselmo did recall such a standard. Almost. Is it really the same? They can hardly be ruthless exceptions. Even this atmosphere with identical ghosts can allow a variety of expressions. And then, there must be a defining note. Language, she said. Each original, its own universe. In Mrs. Bertha Flowers, Maya pictures a goddess who has

“the grace of control,” looks “warm in the coldest weather,” would seem to have “a private breeze” during Arkansas summers (*ibid.*, 90). As a symbol of what these qualities suggest, “she was our side’s answer to the richest white woman in town” (*ibid.*). Don Anselmo, on the other side, is a monument in another intensity.

Grandmother Henderson and Mrs. Flowers. They call each other “sister.” Claiming a terminological proximity, they affirm the veracity of synonyms framed by a history. A quality, and a foundational one. It sustains all comparisons, one would think. What parts of appearances could be negotiated in the eyes of the girl? Marguerite was to echo the unsettling features of two pretty noticeable sets of differences. To entertain the idea of bestowing on her a predictable outlook was one thing. The marketplace logic, another. The Spanish-speaking man who offended Don Anselmo, a nameless guy, probably he would also make a good case, but in a negative manner. Moreover, there were other distinctions on which Marguerite could already elaborate: “Mrs. Flowers didn’t belong to our church, nor was she Momma’s familiar. Why on earth did she insist on calling her Sister Flowers? . . . Mrs. Flowers deserved better than to be called Sister” (*ibid.*, 91).

Sisterhood, in terms of status or in terms of condition? How to name the traits for a distinction that an adult remembers to be a child’s perception? Writing her memoir, did Maya Angelou know of another Sister Flowers who, in the mid-1940s, was living in North Carolina? She made her case, well publicized by the *Federation of Tax Administrators* news bulletin of January 15, 1947. Sister Estelle Flowers, a single mother of four children, needed a pay raise. She was working for a tobacco company, making \$21 per week. A condition difficult to appraise: “We eat beans, collards, cornbread. I can’t afford milk for the children. . . . It takes \$2 a week for coal and that doesn’t keep the home warm.”³⁰ She wants a raise. It makes sense. What does she intend it for? Clothes for the children, more food, more for the church? A program? Should obligations in the name of race be corrected by a differentiating value from elsewhere? Another subtle nuance that bothers the mind of the child. For her, Mrs. Flowers was one of the few “gentlewomen” (*Caged Bird*, 91) she had ever known. *Gentlewoman*. Two worlds collide in the word. Two universes of sentiments also emerge.

A mature Angelou looks back. She remembers a woman “who has remained throughout my life the measure of what a human being can be” (*ibid.*). Between Grandmother Henderson and Mrs. Flowers, the erect body

of a young woman called to stand in their hold. As a figure of interest, she consented to an instruction: how to appropriate a mastery in a variety of lineages, their rhythms, past and present. One supposes: like the young nameless man, but distinctly. That difference stresses divergent paths, but how different? An education becomes initiation. In psychological jargon, for the two, an ethnic supplement to an idea of alterity, and, one would think, that signifies a process in one's self-actualization. One needs a guide, a friend in imperatives.

In Angelou's memoir, it is possible to recognize, against the confessed, that which is unsaid. The inkling testifies to the stepwise phenomenon of gestalt theory, "the sense that a sequence of steps along a continuum is an organized, smooth progression."³¹ It corresponds here to effects of what seems to be Bertha Flowers's unfolding self-imposed task in constructing an economy of duties. The girl's education is an initiation in perception and taste. Did only an ethnicized culture determine other people's imperatives to another faithfulness?

Conformation of intelligence, refinement of senses, temperance of sentiments—*I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings* memorializes a taste for life. "‘Have a seat, Marguerite. Over there by the table.’ She carried a platter covered with a tea towel" (*Caged Bird*, 96). Maya accepts cookies. She remembers: "The odors in the house surprised me. Somehow I had never connected Mrs. Flowers with food or eating or any other common experience of common people" (*ibid.*).

The goddess is a human being. She has chosen her for this initiating journey. A here and now, *hic et nunc*, accommodates positions. It seems the only reasonable way, in good manners, to transmit one's quality. Well, to educate as to enable and disable, in the words of the philosopher Albert Borgmann.³² The person, an object interface, interrelates, teaches two functional units—ways of learning and ways of feeling—and two manners of designating the same thing, a will to knowledge and to what it allows. For instance, eating and reflecting: "As I ate she began the first of what we later called 'my lesson in living'" (*Caged Bird*, 97). An exceptional education allowed a language of memory to condition equally a liking for poetry. Can a disciple's chance obsession emulate her mentor's enthusiasm?

I had read *A Tale of Two Cities* and found it up to my standards as a romantic novel. She opened the first page and I heard poetry for the first time in my life.

“It was the best of times and the worst of times. . . .” Her voice slid in and curved down through and over the words. She was nearly singing. I wanted to look at the pages. Were they the same that I had read? Or were there notes, music, lined on the pages, as in a hymn book? Her sounds began cascading gently. (Ibid.)

Maya reconstructs Marguerite’s recollection. In her untouched joy, she remembers comparing the end of Bertha Flowers’s recitation to the decreasing tempo of a preacher’s voice nearing a sermon’s end. Sacralization of poetry and binding words.

She was nearing the end of her reading, and I hadn’t really heard, heard to understand, a single word.

“How do you like that?”

It occurred to me that she expected a response. The sweet vanilla flavor was still on my tongue and her reading was a wonder in my ears. I had to speak.

I said, “Yes, ma’am.” It was the least I could do, but it was the most also. (Ibid., 97–98)

Bertha Flowers knew what she was doing. Her wager in electing Marguerite was expected by Grandmother Henderson, her relatives, and possibly most of the neighbors. To enhance a particular way of existing in the common language of a social morality, and at the same time accent a measure of dissatisfaction against its incoherences. In consigning this aspect to her autobiography, Angelou stressed the distinctive privilege of an old institution: intergenerational bonds, walking together in a cultural capital, in the spirit of friendship. The same perilous idea of a distinctive privilege founds Don Anselmo’s right to an attitude about a way of being and having, and the moral validity of his vision. Imperatives state their lack every time. A constant reminder of conditionals. If you must or you can, if you desire or detest.

Abraham H. Maslow describes this as the “full use and exploitation of talents, capacities, potentialities.”³³ In sum, for Maya, the initiation meant all the projected of a child and a necessary inscription into what she could not suspect. Sometimes, good things, unexpected accidents, or coincidences happen that way, in genitives. Simply. Maya’s gifts and virtues were requested to coincide with an immeasurable investment. The induction, a cultural hypothesis, confirmed an anticipation. With an adult’s attention,

the young Marguerite entered a vocation. It remains linked to an intersection that constructed its own contingent categorical variations in the universality it projected.

In Angelou's own comments, the truth of an encounter like hers does not need a validation by convincing reasons or sound premises. Love stories do not, in principle.

I was liked, and what a difference it made. I was respected not as Mrs. Henderson's grandchild or Bailey's sister but for just being Marguerite Johnson.

Childhood's logic never asks to be proved (all conclusions are absolute). I didn't question why Mrs. Flowers had singled me out for attention, nor did it occur to me that Momma might have asked her to give me a little talking to. All I cared about was that she had made tea cookies for *me* and read to *me* from her favorite book. It was enough to prove that she liked me. (*Caged Bird*, 98)

A now guarantees a destiny. *Et nunc*, and now, supposes a dislocation: a *before* distinct from this *present*, pregnant with a tomorrow. In any question involving a temporal reference, the present is presumed to be a totality, a clear and neat unit. Is it, and how? An experience fuses with what I intend by a *nunc*. It may recall a Christian formula meant to transcend the time of human history. *Sicut erat in principio et nunc* ("As it was in the beginning is now and forever"). Aimed at exceeding time divisions, it fumbles types of categories in the task of naming what cannot be contained. The source is designated by a genetic concept, the Greek ἀρχή (*arche*; beginning, origin, source), or Latin *principium* (principle). The present is rendered in an adverb, the *nunc*, followed by another adverb, for at all times, the forever, *et semper*, and the future undertaken in a self-reflexive genitive of centuries, *in saecula saeculorum*. The difficulty in expressing these categories of time reflects the arduousness of signifying what is beyond our concepts, even in the apprehension of the evidence of our finitude.

The *nunc* of this mediation coincides with the ordinariness of a perception at this, and not at another moment—in this act of facing grammatical functions. Approached in the explosion of its signified, it assumes its values from all the temporal dimensions, as they correlate in the mind apropos what the genitive can suggest from its functions and in relation to modalities of having and doing.

Martínez's Cartesian Lesson

Are there differences along the journey from Marguerite to Maya, and does it have a particular quality? The words, their materiality, and their scope, could they fit into Don Anselmo's temper? Don Anselmo cannot be compared to anyone. That is a good argument for any uniqueness. Maya's, Don Anselmo's, others'. Indeed, Zora Neale Hurston made a wonderful declaration about her personality: "I am the only Negro in the United States whose grandfather on the mother's side was not an Indian chief."³⁴ Inevitable doubts outflow here, about such a distinction. *Primo*, can the statement be authenticated? If so, where does it come from? *Secundo*, how to evaluate such a stance, as mockery, drollery, allegory? At any rate, is not the subtext apropos the mother's side curious? Neale the Nail, some people used to call her. A nail is meant to hit, to fix things. In accordance, it is some sort of definitive act. In a speculative way, nailing is to harmonize things. One stabilizes whatever should be set, giving it a permanent quality or, in the negative, destroying it. Should the quote be inauthentic, or even if it were only a trifling remark, what would be a more tolerable way of appropriating it and, in dialogues, calling forth another style of love stories?

For a change, this story is not an abstraction but a case in concrete ways of being, the full beauty of a chameleonic authenticity. "Technicolor" is the contribution of Rubén Martínez to the 1999 volume on biraciality, *Half and Half*.³⁵ From arches of one's past and the multiplicity of its legends, how to mobilize believable duties and turn them into a cultural faith? Opposite to the probably composite picture of Don Anselmo, why not face the testimony of a real person? Like Angelou and Hurston, Martínez can be verified. A journalist, an academic who specialized in Chicano studies, he is the author of *The Other Side: Notes from the New L.A., Mexico City, and Beyond*.³⁶

Rubén Martínez. He fits, he has the appropriate everything: birthplace, education, culture. The name? Perfect value in California, even against assumptions. What he says, faultless plausibility with its sense of humor. No reason to doubt. Hollywood, his city, that of his father, grandparents. Impeccable. Correct. Hollywood in L.A., near the Shakespeare Bridge, rebaptized against his very Anglo taste in Franklin Hills. If he could, he would have brought the name back. From home, think of it, this TV and VCR kid can walk to the ABC studios. An accent? Why such a question? In effect, Martínez has stories concerning friends at school. He catalogs

their seasons. Blue- and green-eyed boys and girls living in poor neighborhoods, with Mexicans, imagine! Does he not speak “pocho”? Not yet in the dictionary? A sign that says it all. The only problem would be the father. A bit of an embarrassment, and it seemed a big one to the young Martínez. Indian-Spanish blood, he loved to play cowboys and Indians, to imitate his teachers (John Wayne, Audie Murphy, Gary Cooper). But the son is the real thing. Candidly, he admits that “there was something Faustian about my love affair with Hollywood’s whiteness.”³⁷ An addendum follows. Has it preceded the confession? No importance. “My heroes were white, just as my father’s heroes had been.”³⁸

And, one day, the inevitable. It cannot be. Martínez was still one of those of whom it is written that they have eyes and do not see, have ears and cannot hear. *El vendido* is a metaphor? Being a natural bridge amounts to an almost inconceivable equation. Envy and jealousy, on all sides. They rejoice in insults. Manual Labor, the president of Mexico? He gets it, anyway. Who could miss such a name? Martínez is above these things, should be above them, these sort of bad jokes. Is not who is dating whom on campus a different issue? When the arithmetic of basics surges, it rings false against the logic of a raceless cowboy. *Utopian*, Martínez recognizes the word. But could it not stand for an attribute of James Dean or Pedro Armendáriz? Movies have bred their own notions of utopia. The concept exists, however, in all dictionaries, contrasting or assuming tensions between politics of propriety and normality in life. Kantian or Hegelian, in today’s descriptive definitions: *utopian*, adjective, “someone who believes in the immediate perfectibility of human society by the applications of some idealistic scheme,” according to the *Random House Dictionary of the English Language*. *Utopian*, adjective, “ideal but impractical.” Martínez’s Hollywood, in Los Angeles, lives in California. It is also in California that Chicano playwright and activist Luis M. Valdez situated *Los Vendidos* (1967).³⁹ How could a Martínez have missed its imperatives? At least now, the orders to remember what El Teatro Campesino meant may produce questions on Valdez’s temper. In *Los Vendidos*, a no-problem attitude dramatizes a pretty annoying disgrace, with Honest Sancho telling the secretary: “You know the firm labor camps . . . built out by Parlier or Raisin City? They were designed with our model in mind. Five, six, seven, even ten in one of those shacks will give you no trouble at all.”⁴⁰ True or false, the phrase exposes a fable in one of its strict acceptation: “a fanciful, epigrammatic story, usually illustrating a moral precept or ethical observation.”⁴¹

And then, another day, and you can see what you have known all along. At twenty-five, you cease to be a myth, discover that your mother was born in El Salvador. Stimulating, how you (re-)learn Spanish, reject the cowboy, and become the Indian. Really? Almost, but not quite. A metaphor, it mediates all the styles of acting out *mestizo*. Let us try three of the models. One, American? The response you write should include Jewishness, blackness, Asianness, Scandinavianness. Two, Latino? Any, you say, counted with Indianness, Iberianness, Creoleness, Africanness. Three, more? Smart answer, your immigrantness. This one would have sufficed with, in mind, the theme of your unpublished poem: "I am much more than two." Walt Whitman's intervention supports your view. The last paragraphs of Jean-Paul Sartre's *Being and Nothingness* may make your day even more festive. Collecting memories that could account for this moment, your testimony has been commenting on imperatives about doing and having. After the rapid exegesis on Marguerite's inscriptions, Don Anselmo's standing, Hurston's extraordinary statement, with its implications on ways of having, the recognition of your imperatives demands an interrogation of their status.

And now, an objection apropos this reading. On the one hand, there is objective, real, a deprivation. Isn't there a mistake in aligning narratives about existence too exclusively with anxieties brought about by the decoding of a grammatical function? On the other hand, in which measure can this retrodiction (*retro*, back; *dicere*, to speak) be a speaking on real life when it converts its testimonies into what seem like preconceptions?

Angelou writes with the rule of her own eyes. In a determinative function surges an imperative, and that is real. Categorical principles wear well their name. They are principles. In the her-own-eyes rule, there are, proclaimed, a number of things. A subject, a perceiving subject, a thinking and a ruling subject is to be recognized. From there, the situation of her responsibility in the act of reading. A determinative function expresses a law that is duty-bound in a *nunc*. The phrase conveys a task, a subjective line in the genitive. It states a fundamental assumption that a subject apprehends and expresses in a now: such is my situation, this is my responsibility. An infinite interrogation stands there, supported by a genitive. The absolute of this reading reactivates presuppositions on the inherent capacity of a genitive, that is, a determination, and what is set in motion, obligation and morality. Here I am, thus facing expectations in the act, virtuous self-deceptions, the memory of a black woman, of a Don Anselmo, and that of

Rubén Martínez. In the structuration of an English genitive, an imperative testifies.

In the celebratory mood of our multicultural now, Rubén Martínez, are there duties about these matters—Maya’s education, Don Anselmo’s stance, the manner in which you handle your identities—that would really oblige you unconditionally? In fact, is there a sense of these obligations that you may pass on to the children in Don Anselmo’s village? Moreover, journalist and teacher, if you do not mislead us about your view on your own identity, about what your statement signifies, do you not think, to say the least, that everyone, and your rediscovered *gente*, could mistrust you, including possibly members of your own family? There is no reason to doubt the honesty of your testimony, along with that of Maya Angelou, the symbol represented by Don Anselmo. If you tell the truth, a hypothesis and your right, you should be happy, satisfied. Why should we?

On a good usage of Cartesian conditionals, apropos erring in judgment, the clarity of your negotiations with *musts* and *ifs* amplifies a predicament. In the *Fourth Meditation*, Descartes assures this: *si quidem a iudicio ferendo absteineam sit non satis clare et distincte percipio* (if I abstain from making a judgment, when I do not perceive clearly and distinctly), it is apparent that I act correctly (*me recte*), and I do not err (*et non falli*).⁴² Common sense. But the argument continues. Should I affirm or deny, then I do not use my freedom of choice correctly (*non recte utor*). Elegant, this manner of indicting truth by chance. The interminable debates on *clare et distincte* might miss the ordinariness of the predicament about imperatives in the practice of everyday life.

Notes

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- 5 *Ibid.*, xv.
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- 7 Robert Nozick, *Examined Life: Philosophical Meditations* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1989), 166.
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- 14 Cicero, *De Oratore*, book 1, sections 3, 11, and 40.
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- 16 Angelou, *Heart of a Woman*, 132.
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- 24 *Ibid.*, 283.
- 25 *Ibid.*, 269.
- 26 John Locke, *Essay Concerning Human Understanding* (London: William Tegg and Co., 1879), book 2, section 9, 222.
- 27 Lyn Miller-Lachmann, *Our Family, Our Friends, Our World: An Annotated Guide to Significant Multicultural Books for Children and Teenagers* (New Providence, NJ: R. R. Bowker, 1992).
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- 30 Quoted in Lerner, *Black Women in White America*, 267.
- 31 *Penguin Dictionary of Psychology*, third edition, s.v. "Gestalt therapy."
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- 40 *Ibid.*, 43.
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