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### **Literature, Removal and the Theme of Invisibility in America: A Complex Fate Revisited**

I was reading St. John Stevas collection of Bagehot's essays recently. It struck me that to move into the world of Bagehot's prose is like moving into a peaceable kingdom. He is witty because his world stands around him; he is genial in his wit because he realises there is nothing apocalyptic at stake, for himself, his language, or its subject. Disraeli and Gladstone are focussed—but strangely without being diminished or enlarged. Bagehot is neither Swift nor Orwell. His sanity derives from the fact that he does not have to uphold the order of politics, of society, of the universe, himself. He juggles with the aberrations (usually personal) of a solid y sensed order as a consummate manifestation of that order.

Few Canadians or Americans, it occurred to me, have written or spoken with this degree of urbane confidence. The authority of Bagehot is very English: it is not as heavyweight as Dr. Johnson or Burke, as moral as Arnold. But it is substantial. Neither history, nor society, nor man betrayed him. He is the perfect equilibrium of the nineteenth century at a point when, for a variety of reasons, that century permitted equilibrium.

This led me into a number of generalisations.

In England the environment is organized as landscape. It is a domain of culture, either romantic, neo-classical, or it is allegorized in a religious-medieval context into a symbolic formation.

The people, the human, is organized by class, at a group level.

This has an effect on the subject, on subjectivity. It gives a coherence even when the commonsense pact between the Johnsonian foot and the rock is driven into the stream of consciousness. There are still currents which may be charted in memory and as memories of the world. The consciousness of the prior reality of a concrete society is not seriously eroded by the urgent sense that a writer like Virginia Woolf has that our mode of apprehending this reality may need radical

revision away from the procedures of Mr. Bennett. A metaphysic of consciousness may be deduced from Virginia Woolf but she was not a metaphysical writer—in the sense that her culture and nation are not generally understood to have invested much ambition or anxiety into metaphysics.

Even at the heart of the subject, in the inner reaches of subjectivity, the constraints of an historical community make up the tacit, and hence the controlling, conserving model. The concern with reality is conducted across the decorous ground of manners rather than the indecorous ground of myth.

When we take a fragment of English society across to Massachusetts in the seventeenth century we are in the presence of men who feel the intense pressure upon them as founders of a new colony to uphold a strict order of politics, of society, of the universe. The Puritans of New England brought their religion and their polity with them from old England and in conceptual, doctrinal terms one could say that one patch of ground called Boston had simply been swapped for another piece of ground called Boston an ocean and a few thousand miles apart. From the point of view of Bunyan's Pilgrim, Massachusetts and Lincolnshire are interchangeable. But the American pilgrim could not walk the highways of England, with villages, towns, parties, social orders giving a firmness to his feet and a customed solidity to his beliefs. Given the set arrangements which history had bestowed on society, that society—in spite of division—had bestowed on men, the concern with God could express and expend itself in intellectual, military, political ways. In New England the city is on the hill with a wilderness of sea behind, and a wilderness of land before; in old England the city may be besieged, but it may also be relieved. The battle will find an issue at Naseby or in the beheading of the King. It is all more coherent. The English Civil War is history; King Phillip's War against the Indians is simply skirmish and trauma with captives clutching onto bibles as tchuringas, sacred stones, in the midst of incomprehensible marches, incomprehensible Indians.

There are no Hookers, no Bunyans, no Bagehots in the new world.

We find that even though New England takes its ideas from Europe it cannot take the same comfort or consolation from them. Part of this clearly has to do with the meagre resources of the colony. Some of the discomfort had to do with the Restoration. Much of it is due, I think, to what George Grant calls, the BREAK from Europe:

... we are still enfolded with the Americans in the deep sharing of having crossed the ocean and conquered the new land. All of us who came made some break in that coming. The break was not only the giving up of the old and the settled, but the entering into the majestic

continent which could not be ours in the way that the old had been. It could not be ours in the old way because the making of it ours did not go back before the beginning of conscious memory. The roots of some communities in eastern North America go back far in continuous love for their place, but none of us can be called autochthonous, because in all there is some consciousness of making the land our own.<sup>1</sup>

Grant uses the term autochthony, being connected to the earth in a manner that precedes memory, to describe the privilege of a concrete, identifiable human being which he believes has characterized Europe. In short, the Bagehot phenomenon. But is it not so much the fact that one's forbears have lived continually in one place with a shared history that guarantees the stability of one's existence: it is rather that the total body of reflections which have been given cultural expression by one's society as a consequence of that history is supported by place. Autochthony is the sense of roots in the earth as sacred; but to refer to the sacred is to refer to a conceptual, mythological space. Put Bedford beneath Bunyan and you have Christianity; take it away and re-run the Pilgrim's progress in a Hawthorne short story and you have allegory yielding to the pressures of myth.

The Puritans displaced themselves. By doing so they displaced the quality of fit between their ideas and their persons, the language they brought with them and the language they would need. The wooden rattling of the Bay Psalm Book is almost a retreat from language. One has the sense of God as part of English history; one has little sense of the historical and the social in New England. But God looms everywhere, being wrestled with in the spiritual souls of separated men. He is harder to locate, to take for granted, to pin down. Even the absent God of Pascal is nearer to him in terms of fear and intimacy than the God we meet in Wigglesworth, Taylor, Jonathan Edwards. Europe can sustain absence with a firmness that North America cannot bestow on presence.

The great word which the Indian Department in Washington used for many years is the beginning word for post-Renaissance America: Removal.

This must mean something more radical than removal from one place to another:

from Boston to Boston  
 from old to New England,  
 from Florida, the Dakotas,  
 Georgia,  
 to a trans-Mississippi catchment  
 area for defeated tribes.

from Dahomey to the Brazils,  
to the Caribbean, to the  
American South for black slaves.

Eventually,

the dispersal from New England  
to new plantations, sometimes  
called territories, usually referred  
to as the West (South West, North West)

the dispersal from old plantations  
into the cities of the south,  
the ghettos of the North  
date 1870-1920.

the dispersal, much slower for  
historical & numbers reasons, from the reservations  
into the general American society  
post 1945 —

Removal is wandering, loss of cultural reference, loss of one's meaning. The activity of literature in America records the loss in a furor of myth-concern, symbol-searching, image-groping, ideological rancour, physical anguish, breast-beating, jeremiads directed at God, history, white men, white whales, scarlet letters. It is a literature of Ishmaels, an Ishmaelite literature. Mythological creatures [Enceladus: Adam] pursuing mythological themes [redemption: damnation: defiance: assertion] in a tangle of mythological narrative.

I want to switch now to a proposition I believe is fundamental to an understanding of this hemisphere and to one of the most serious registers of its self-consciousness: literature.

I shall make some general remarks about three distinct traditions sharing a similar complex fate, a fate originating in the phenomenon of removal and issuing in the problematic of invisibility.

Subsequently, I shall touch on the strategies of visibility that have been particularly noticeable in Indian and Black America in the recent past.

North, Central and South America, and the Caribbean, underneath the separate nations, constitute three distinct culture areas:

Indo America - Indian

Euro America - the European presence

Plantation America - that area spreading from Nova Scotia, to the American South, the Caribbean, South America as far as Brazil,

which contained the economic-social structure of slavery and the cultural formations of different African societies.<sup>2</sup>

When we think of the literature of the New World we tend to think of American literature from the Puritans and the Transcendentalists to Whitman, James, Hemingway, Faulkner and so on.

When we think of Canadian literature the survey goes from Susanna Moodie to Margaret Atwood, with a distant nod to the pre-game show made up variously of Stephen Parmenius drowning off Sable Island, explorers, *courier de bois*. And everywhere, with changing connotations: Nature, victims, garrisons, mosaics, the problem of identity in its moral, metaphysical, national and personal dimension: these are the dramatic factors in terms of which literature in English Canada is often considered. In French Canada, studded into a wall of lamentation which used to surround the Province, according to Jacques Godbout, are the triad of sacred terms: land, language, religion.<sup>3</sup> These recurrent themes register the concern of distinct historical communities in Canada, the founding communities.

They are both European in origin, and when we read these literatures we do so as Europeans-in-America. We look in at our own preoccupations, rather than out from those preoccupations toward Indo- or Plantation-America. This is changing: Riel, Wiebe, Mitchell, Richardson. Even then we see the issue as one of content (i.e. of our history) rather than of form and structure of consciousness.

South of the Border, an experimental society with its own mythologies and anxieties has spoken of itself and its literature in a language of wonder and belief: Eden, Adam, a virgin land, a manifest destiny. The United States has conducted its two hundred years of historical nationhood on this continent as if it were enacting some kind of ethical and ontological imperative. It has produced a literature of very powerful philosophical, reflective vitality. Yet that literature is a storm in the teacup of a European culture, tensed and fractured by the presence of this culture in North America; tensed just as much by the absence from Europe.

When Crevecoeur asks his questions: what is an American?

When Henry James worries about his Americans and Europeans with exquisite patience,

When Whitman goes native with putative hurrahs, clinching the meditative, decorous nativism of Emerson,

we are witnessing the ordering imaginative and intellectual gestures of Euro-Americans.

This is not to dismiss it: simply to characterize it.

Euro-American doesn't mean European. It means European-in-

America, which, if what D. H. Lawrence has to say about it is true, is very different indeed from European.

Being a European-American is a distinct predicament, as James says, a complex fate. This is Perry Miller's version of the early post-Puritan American:

They looked in vain to history for an explanation of themselves; more and more it appeared that the meaning was not to be found in theology, even with the help of the covenantal dialectic. Thereupon these citizens found that they had no other place to search but within themselves—even though at first sight, that repository appeared to be nothing but a sink of iniquity.

Their errand having failed in the first sense of the term, an errand upon their master's business, they were left with the second, an errand upon their own, a mission—and required to fill it with meaning by themselves and out of themselves. Having failed to rivet the eyes of the world upon their city on the hill they were left alone with America.<sup>4</sup>

Roughly this adds up to an isolated creature in the middle of nowhere; shorn of class, culture, belief and history.

Plantation America was created by the transplanting of millions of black people from various parts of Africa to various parts of the Americas over a number of centuries. These human beings were subjected to what used to be called "the peculiar institution," which was in effect "a total institution," which systematically deprived them as a group of any serious freedom. The institution of slavery was total in the sense of physical space—it was difficult to escape. It was total in terms of time—one was a slave for life. It was more tragically total beyond one's own death—one's children and their children would be enslaved. It is significant that it was Elkins' comparison with the concentration camp experience that started off the modern re-opening of the debate on slavery. It is clear Elkins overstated the traumatic vastation of the Middle Passage but, apart from the ideological pressures of the present, it seems more in keeping with the bitter tragedy of these events to overstate than to understate.

Elkins was correct to note slavery as the central problematic within the institutional and intellectual life of the United States. Before it is a problem in either of these senses for the country it is a personal problem of enormous magnitude for the Black community.

Being an American is a complex fate; being an American (Black) is a fate with a complexity of its own. Here no Adams re-enter Eden: the trumpets sound around the walls of Jericho, and between God and Pharaoh an innocent people suffers in exile. But this myth says very little; the myth has the marvellous, clean air of a redeemed time: the reality of the slave quarters, the filth of the slave system had the brute, unclean air of what Mr. Rowlandson's Indian-captivity narrative

called "afflicted time." Essentially, slavery turned its slaves into an underground people, into invisible men.

Plantation America has its own literature which mines its own memories and tries to catch the shaping pressure of those memories on the present. This literature runs from slave narratives, autobiography, the Harlem Renaissance, Richard Wright, Ralph Ellison, James Baldwin and a considerable number of novelists, poets and dramatists in the last twenty years. In language, imagery, concern, it is the literature of a separate culture area.

Indo-America, logically and ideologically, should benefit from the great dream condition of existential well-being, according to George Grant, autochthony.

This makes no sense for the Pequod, who are extinct;

for Huronia, which is an archaeologist's subject;

for the many tribes who underwent "removal" to "reservations."

Yet Indo-America in relation to Plantation and Euro-America is a distinct predicament. In relation to itself, to its own memories, its own concerns, it has responsibilities of reconstruction and reassertion morphologically similar to the black American in relation to his past.

Little Rock and Wounded Knee have a similar resonance to the European ear although a different register of displacement within the black and Indian communities.

The Indian, too, after 500 years of contact, in spite of a high profile in the form of historical action, in spite of Sitting Bull, Tecumseh, Pontiac, Geronimo, has deep problems of invisibility. For a century he has been an invisible man, an underground people.

All three groups share the same fate, removal; the same continent, America; the same dilemma within their separate groups; a concern with identity which demonstrates the passionate need rather than the cool possession; a fascination and a fear of each other which is so intense that after centuries of contact the energies remain those of avoidance, ignorance, anxiety.

Peoples who are caught into internal invisibility are cornered into external invisibility also. They do not see themselves, each other. And so the literature they produce is filled with silence, isolation, hatred and a sense of the overwhelming difficulty of the whole business. It is a meditation on invisibility, the main efforts of which are meant to produce a solid coastline of visibility.

I shall look at the word visibility with two texts in mind:

Ellison's novel; *Invisible Man* and Frances Yates', *The Art of Memory*.

Ellison shows us the person-to-person, culture-to-culture dimension of the word. Frances Yates shows us the man-to-nature, memory-to-world dimension of it.

I deal with Ellison first and call him Invisibility: Type I.

Yates becomes Invisibility: Type II.

The central task for the writer is that of making things visible: his world, his history, himself; of finding a language for these. The central ambition is caught by Charles Olson's term, Proprioception: the focussing of our emotional and imaginative antennae so that we can discover balance and equilibrium:

of facts within a field

of persons within a culture

of cultures within a history

of persons, culture, history within that felt but invisible field, the Americas.

This interjected paragraph is the unredeemed but sought-after horizon that haunts the American imagination.

The word invisibility is very real, but very slippery. Ellison wrestled with it. Black men and white men in the United States are blocked from each other's reality by a whole set of inherited prejudices and inbuilt fears. A black man is invisible to a white man; a white man is invisible to a black man. White men, who have power, can control the drama of reality under which life in the United States is supposed to proceed. Part of the white man's conception of reality is a distinct set of conceptions about the black man. So the invisible man of Ellison's novel is the subject of a lobotomy in which a mind scraped clean, a tabula rasa, is reconstituted in the idiom of banal ascription: "Who was Brer Rabbit . . ." The narrator of this novel spends his life searching through the shadows of an absurd expressionist theatre for the possibility of recognition, for the privilege of visibility conferred by the performance of a concrete action in a concrete world by a free agent.

Ellison traces the treacherous paradoxes of a narrator (groping with the perseverance of a blind man fumbling with braille) trying to discover what it means to be black in a white man's world. And he stumbles into the terrible truth that what makes black invisible to white makes white invisible to black: makes black invisible to black, white invisible to white. Eventually, in a man-hole with all lights blazing, man invisible to himself.

The final catch-22.

There are a couple of questions. In what sense is Ellison's invisibility an existentialist, modernist concern? In what sense can this invisibility be traced to the North American, black American predicament? Looked at purely from an individual standpoint, the problem of the narrator of *Invisible Man* is different from the unfortunate protagonists of Camus and Kafka only with respect to the embodied agents



and agencies which oppose him. An arab in the sun on a beach; a white man in an alley in the dark; knives. The form of the anguish and the distraught isolation from the world have similarities, but clearly the riddle of universal invisibility which captures Ellison does so at the end of a long night given totally, lucidly, and with a delicate balance of bitterness and compassion, to an examination of the collective historical no-exits on this continent which have marked the search of the black community since slavery and emancipation. Sartre's heroes negotiate Angst and Nausea with the kind of confidence that Bunyan's Pilgrim negotiates the slough of Despond. The certitude of Bagehot and Virginia Woolf to which one referred earlier is there. Ellison is not an existentialist in a European sense.

What we get in *Invisible Man* is the text of invisibility imposed by history on Plantation America. That might seem a little diluted. Surely we mean a text of invisibility undergone by black Americans and imposed by Euro-America? But, as Ellison, with his stubborn integrity, has grasped, if one could lay the ghost by laying the blame with such concrete certitude, there would have been no real ghost in the first place. The curse of invisibility has forced all Americans to do time on the cross of invisibility. That is part of the complexity and ambiguity of the fate.

#### AMERICA = REMOVAL = INVISIBILITY (TYPE I)

We can step back and look at invisibility from another angle.

Frances Yates tells how the Greeks discovered the art of memory.<sup>5</sup> A poet, invited to read a poem in the house of a rich patron, did so. What should have been a praise-poem for the rich man spent some prefatory lines praising the god of poetry. The patron cut his payment to the portion of the poem dealing with himself. At this point of heated parsimony a messenger (clearly from the gods) directed the poet outside, the house collapsed, everyone inside was killed. A number of the bodies could not be identified and so the poet was called in. From his mental recollection of the layout of the large chamber in which the reading and the reclining had taken place he was able to put names to the unrecognizable dead. The placement of pillows, tables and so on enabled him to remember. The Greeks had discovered the art of memory. And Europe cultivated this art for well over a thousand years.

There has to be a moral here beyond the possibility that poets and coroners should get together over the anonymous dead.

Memory is one of the ways that human beings circumvent the erosions of mortality. Remembering is perhaps the most singular gesture of piety available to us. Remembering is the condition of our private and collective humanity. Until recently most societies have

cultivated their memories with religious obstinacy, and often it is the poet who, by cultivating the art of memory in words and images, has taken this role upon himself.

Memory, Visibility and Man stand over against what without Memory, become Invisibility and Fate.

If you take a context from an act it becomes a shadow:  
if you take landscape from a people they are lost.

Migration (forced, free) throws human beings into a travail of uncertainty about fundamental customs and values. It throws them out of visibility, into invisibility. They may have the future but the past has left them. They may build a city on a hill with the wilderness about them, or a garrison at Sault St. Marie. They may have Adam in their minds; they have Lot's Wife in their bones. The slaves buried their dead with feet toward Africa.

AMERICA = REMOVAL = INVISIBILITY (TYPE II)

Visibility requires memory. But memory requires the past, venerates history, custom, precedence. America, Euro-America, in its cultural heart is a break from the past and has stubbornly, ideologically, rejected the past as the primary reservoir of its values. It has done so in favour of the future. In the future there are no Grecian Urns and when an Aztec urn turns up in the American present it speaks of the nature of a society, the stage of civilization. In short, it may be ideology, archaeology, anthropology—it is not memory. When memory is rejected, or when it fails, there is a logical, *a priori*, compulsion to start from scratch. The Declaration of Independence, with its mixture of Locke and the Enlightenment, was the script for a *tabula rasa* theatre. Some of the greatest works of American literature have fleshed out the universal script.

The United States inherited as its genesis the concern of Western civilization with the fundamental nature of man, society, the state. In what sense however can rational bearings offer a substitute for the concrete visibilities that memory and the past speak for?

The Revolution, the Enlightenment in America, the founding of a new society, set out, by necessity, to negate the authority of the trinitarian association of America, removal, and invisibility. They did so by postulating a new equation:

AMERICA = NEW SKIN (ROOTS) = VISIBILITY.

If we look at this optimistic formulation as a scenario it had two sub-titles:

- 1) the future as memory,
- 2) the future as principle.

The spokesmen of this cultural perspective took a generation to mature. Because the political, constitutional and social circumstances

of a new society were already in place, such that their finding a language for it could be conducted by their looking within their own selves as creatures/creations—however ambiguous—of these circumstances, we are justified in describing their utterances and enactments as the American Renaissance.

The question of whether rational bearings could place onto the future and the domain of principle the burden that, with autochthonic piety, had stubbornly clung to the concrete and the past, was very important for Transcendentalism. It involved no less a theme than the visibling of America.

The whole endeavour of Transcendentalism between 1820-1850 wrestled with this issue. Emerson's radical deconstruction of the past and of the institutions which contained and mediated it, is matched in its fervour only by the strange language of oversouls and transparent eyeballs which he invoked to spell out the harmonious laws which kept man and nature in perpetual good faith with each other. A benign self-regarding, self-reliant, Creation. The syncretic, sermonising, angular essays of Emerson capture very well the tensions of a literature which are epistemological, ontological. When Emerson turns his attention to an experience, an image, a book, he is looking for a law of the universe. When he looks at the figure of Christ for the Divinity students at Harvard, he does it not to reinforce the laws of God as a known stated body of commandments, but to explore those of man himself. Christ is a hint for the humanist in search of his soul. The problem of the self, of the existence of the external world, of the status of our knowledge, of the origin of language, of the relationship between the State and the citizen, freedom: these are his concerns. Emerson is an immense drama of consciousness. Hobbes, Locke, the Scotch Commonsense philosophers, Kant and the German idealists—not totally filtered through Hedge's version of Coleridge's *Aids to Reflection*—rattle around Emerson's mind in his attempt to place America into a pristine, rational landscape, one that is optimistic, transcendentalist, virginal. He will, like many of his countrymen, link these preoccupations onto the myth of Adam, of Eden. But behind the argument the ancestral voices of the Biblical text are muted, and it is the profane figures of the philosophers, who do not speak of God, whom we hear.

When Jones Very insists that his poems are directly inspired by the Holy Ghost and brings his Christianity into his affairs as a non-negotiable insistence, Emerson drops him and waits for Whitman.

Emerson was a severely intellectual man to whom many things were invisible, who dedicated his life to making visible on conscious, rational grounds what he believed was scandalously invisible: man,

America. Whitman was spurred into great assertive poetry by this belief; Thoreau travelled the same road in a more introverted manner. He retreated with fierce pride into a citadel of himself, into a society of one, and called it Walden Pond. From there he could see things clearly, as they are in themselves. He turned his life into a laboratory and his mind into a notebook.

We see optimism flecked with clouds of confusion in Emerson; holding its own with stubbornness in Thoreau. Scepticism and anxiety overwhelm the deeply felt worlds of Hawthorne and Melville. But the hope and the despair of the American Renaissance meet at one point: the search is for first principles which will throw light on, make sense of, what REMOVAL has necessitated: permanent revelation as permanent revolution. And the revelation is nothing less than the structure of the universe: America as mythogenesis.

The ingenuity of Thoreau at Walden is strangely reminiscent of the ingenuity of the narrator of *Invisible Man* in his manhole. What Henry Thoreau does with the labourers at the railroad the invisible man does with the electric light company. Ingenuity and cunning sustain a visibility that would otherwise evaporate.

There are many points of intersection between the Transcendentalists as the great apostles of Euro-America, and Plantation America. Abolitionism and Slavery were the great moral and political issues of the Transcendentalist moment, replacing the concern with the Indian in American life which had held the stage up to the 1830's. But Thoreau's Indian Notebooks record a moving and, in a submerged, mysterious way, an enigmatic concern with every aspect of Indian history and pre-history in the Concord area.<sup>6</sup>

We sometimes see the Transcendentalists as definers of America where they tended to see themselves as diviners. But they are cultural nationalists only in a restricted sense. They are not talking about America, or making plans *for* America; they are whatever America is, in process of enacting itself into consciousness. They found terms for an underlying reality which are often looked at as ideological, intentional items of a discourse which could or might be given other forms.

I do not think this is correct. Emerson and Thoreau give us consciousness in America, of America, a consciousness of America as consciousness itself. In a fundamental way they are the representative men of their continent, irrespective of the cultural group or historical period one has in mind. Their lives were a total interrogation of any aspect of their own society or civilization that detracted from the absolute integrity of the subject under the most universal conception of mankind. This necessarily included Mexican and Indian wars,

slavery and any attempt to remove the accent of universal humanity from other races.

They were the great Americans attempt to elude the dilemmas described by Hegel in his Master/Slave section of the *Phenomenology of the Spirit*. There is some division of opinion as to whether Hegel intended his master-slave comments to be the form taken by self-consciousness in certain historical periods (i.e. Greece) or whether he meant these comments to be the necessary pre-requisites for self-consciousness itself, irrespective of historical factors.<sup>7</sup> I think it is fair to say that Emerson and Thoreau saw themselves attempting to establish the necessary grounds for a consciousness of self transcending the particular forms of history and society and this bias seems to outweigh their concern with specific issues, political and social.

But in America, where submission and conquest have been the founding facts, the historical dimension of the master-slave process has always been classically present, giving rise to its phenomenological fall-out: invisibility. Ellison's novel put its finger on this very accurately. And the further we get away from the 1840's and into the late twentieth century the larger the historical aspect of the relationship of Indo-Euro- and Plantation America as a master-slave affair grows. So large and acrimonious, one might say, that the ideological pressures have superseded the clarity of universal law that the Transcendentalist sought to bring to the visibling of man (all men) in that most invisible of predicaments: America.

The problem of self-consciousness has been given a run-out from the perspective of the "slave" in the last few years in the form of the Prospero-Caliban paradigm which has exercised Caribbean and third-world critics.<sup>8</sup> It has brought the richness of metaphor to the drier lucidities of Hegel and Sartre.

The shift from Hegel to Shakespeare is interesting, however, in that it brings us back to our question: "In what sense can rational bearings offer a substitute for the concrete visibilities that memory and the past speak for?"

Afro-American and Caribbean writers have been positively hostile to Hegel for his placing of the slave within a subordinate and logical relationship to the master (white man) and for characterizing the slave's position as a kind of pre-conscious being. A good deal of ideology and historical research have gone into the attempt to give to the anonymous slave a culture, a domain of action (rebellion: Nat Turner), an origin in Africa (folklore and religious retentions), a place in the development of economic and political power (capitalism and the slave trade).

Writers from within Plantation America and Indo-America have the Emerson-Hegel route of/to visibility.

In negating the thrust of invisibility that the conquest and settlement of North America has imposed on them, they have opted for the New Skin (roots) procedure which I have described in the phrase "the future as remembrance." But they have concluded that rational bearings cannot offer a substitute for the concrete visibilities that memory and the past speak for. Hegel is out; Haley is in.

There are very real problems, however, for a culture which wishes to remember a past which is on the far side of memory, or which has been so painful that forgetting systematically over the three generations has been an attempt at not knowing. The first time a serious effort was made to record the memories of ex-slaves took place during the Depression as a make-work project with the informants dying all around the information seekers. Memory is a complex form of consciousness and Faulkner is probably correct in his *Light in August* observation, "Memory believes before knowing remembers. Believes longer than recollects, longer than knowing even wonders."<sup>9</sup>

But the images that the memory of Plantation America call up are so painful as to constitute a brake on one's self-esteem. Defeated or enslaved people go into a state of shock, dismay, into themselves. Without moving. It is not hard to visualize slavery as an experience that the memories of black Americans cannot recollect. It is an empty space in the mind filled with suffering, stereotype, a few chains, and the balm of myth.

This is Black Bear Bosin, a contemporary Kiowa painter, talking:

Other tribes have a spiritual background that the painters can relate to, but not the Kiowa/Commanche.

The only thing left for us was our imagination and our visions and memories of the past when we were free.<sup>10</sup>

Scott Momaday, the Kiowa writer in *The Road to Rainy Mountain*, himself knowing no Kiowa and knowing only the territory of the Kiowa and having a single memory of a Grandmother remembering a singular moment when as a young girl she witnessed the last Ghost Dance of the Kiowa, Scott Momaday sets out to pick up the threads of memory in an imagistic, episodic book of great beauty. But for few black Americans can the "visions and memories of the past when we were free" beckon.

There are few such memories.

There is no visibility in synthetic memory. There is need and there is will—there is neither fulfilment nor consolidation.

As Roger Rosenblatt puts it: "The idea that one day all black men and women may suddenly disappear, either from a certain region or from the face of the earth, has recurred often in black writing."<sup>11</sup>

It is a fear that, with different historical reference and an altered apocalyptic register, creeps into white American writing as well.

The fantasy, the fear, the exhaustion is caught in this ultimate fiction of removal. Invisibility as final solution. We can map the underground country of the invisible in the internal darkness of our despair at not being able to step out of the castles of our skin into the wide freedom of a substantial visible garden. But all we know is the impotence of invisibility; all we can do is fabricate fictions and mythologies of visibility, and hope they refer to a real world—a human universe where the human has shape, visibility, contour.

## NOTES

1. George Grant, *Technology and Empire* (Toronto: House of Anansi, 1969), p. 17.
2. Charles Wagley, "Plantation America: A Culture Sphere," in *Caribbean Studies: A Symposium*, ed. Vera Rubin (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1960), pp. 3-13.
3. "En fait, aujourd'hui, je reste persuadé que, vues de la gare québécoise, toutes nos voies ferrées, à quelques milles d'ici, sont coupées par un mur de pierres artificielles en couleur incrusté de morceaux de miroirs: le Mur des Lamentations du Québec (Inc.); et c'est ce mur qui empêche tout convoi de progresser." Jacques Godbout, "Ecrire," *Liberté*, 13, Nos. 4/5, p. 137.
4. Perry Miller, *Errand in 'o the Wilderness* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1975), p. 17.
5. Frances A. Yates, *The Art of Memory* (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1969), p. 17.
6. See R. F. Sayre, *Thoreau and the American Indians* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1977).
7. Richard Norman, *Hege's Phenomenology. A Philosophical Introduction* (London: Sussex University Press, 1976). P. 51.
8. See George Lamming, *The Pleasures of Exile* (London: M. Joseph, 1960).
9. William Faulkner, *Light in August* (New York: The Modern Library, 1950), p. 104.
10. Jamake Highwater, *Song from the Earth* (Boston: New York Graphic Society, 1976), p. 161.
11. Roger Rosenblatt, *Black Fiction* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1974), p. 184.

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