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## Repression and reduction: the apparatchik's discourse in the works of Ammianus Marcellinus, Denis Diderot, Victor Serge and George Orwell

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**REPRESSION AND REDUCTION  
THE APPARACHIK'S DISCOURSE IN THE WORKS OF AMMIANUS  
MARCELLINUS, DENIS DIDEROT, VICTOR SERGE AND GEORGE ORWELL**

A Dissertation

Submitted to the Graduate Faculty of the  
Louisiana State University and  
Agricultural and Mechanical College  
in partial fulfillment of the  
requirements for the degree of  
Doctor of Philosophy

in

The Interdepartmental Program in Comparative Literature

by  
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## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Le travail historique ne me satisfaisait pas entièrement; outré qu'il exige des moyens et un calme dont je ne disposerai probablement jamais, il ne permet pas de montrer suffisamment des hommes vivants, de démontrer leur mécanisme intérieur, de pénétrer jusqu'à leur âme. / Historical work no longer satisfied me entirely; other than it demands both means and peace of which I will probably never have, it does not permit sufficiently for showing living men, demonstrating their interior mechanism, penetrating all the way into their soul. (Victor Serge, *Mémoires d'un révolutionnaire*, 716)

The relationship between these two disciplines of history and literature has always interested me, particularly in regards to the relation between the individual and the larger society. This is even truer for the authoritarian state. History by itself no longer satisfied me completely, either, and I found in literature another means of looking at the relation between individuals, state and society. This relationship is crucial in understanding relevance of any political doctrine to daily life's needs and concerns. History and literature presented an excellent way to understand this dynamic. I did not, however, come to these ideas on my own. There are many people I would like to thank for their support and effort on my behalf.

First, I am grateful to my professors, especially to Dr. Adelaide Russo, my committee chair and major advisor. She introduced me to Victor Serge, Denis Diderot and the Surrealists. She has been a mentor and inspiration for many years now. She has kept faith with me, cautioned me on theoretical errors and has never doubted my "pedagogical gift". Both Dr. Robert Edgeworth and Dr. Gary Crump are, I am sad to say, no longer with us. They were inspiring teachers and both introduced me to Ammianus Marcellinus. I am also grateful to Dr. Michelle Zerba. She introduced me to the world of Greek and rhetorical thought and has been an excellent guide on the proper role of the

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## ABSTRACT

In monopolizing political power, the state claims to possess the best idea towards leading a society and solving its problems. While these claims may vary according to regime, all face the eventual failure of expectation on the part of its subjects. No regime can master all the variables in running the country, and so it must convince their subjects otherwise of its legitimacy, despite the reality of their failure. The apparatchik's discourse is the interaction of the state's discourse and that of its institutions. This discourse is used to uphold the state's legitimacy through the expertise of its institutions. The most insidious application of this involves attacking dissidents who point out the state's failure. Paul Ricoeur, in his work on character and identity, demonstrated the tension between two halves of human personality, the *ipse*, which is initiated by the self, and the *idem*, by society. The apparatchik's discourse can attack this *ipse* and try to reduce the dissident to a state derived *idem*. Thus the discourse becomes a weapon in the struggle between the state and the dissident.

This dissertation examines the apparatchik's discourse through the works of four authors, Victor Serge's *Ville Conquise*, *S'il est minuit dans le siècle*, and *L'affaire Toulaév*, Ammianus Marcellinus' *Res Gestae*, Denis Diderot's *Essai sur la vie de Sénèque* and *Essai sur les règnes de Claude et de Néron*, and George Orwell's *Burmese Days*, *Homage to Catalonia*, *Animal Farm* and *Nineteen Eighty-Four*. Despite the differences in time and culture, a thread runs through their works that reveals a continuous form in this discourse in political activity and, more importantly, in the lives of individual people. Despite this similarity, there is an important degree of difference between these works. Some texts explore the discourse as a means of understanding

political activity and its role in human lives, while others use it both to destroy and uphold specific people. Lastly, some try to banish the discourse completely. Through these similarities and differences, this study will explore the use, abuse, and impact of the apparatchik's discourse on representations of the individual.

## CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

Émile Benveniste, in his study of linguistics, compares the language of bees with that of humans. Through their dances, bees have the ability to formulate and to interpret signs that include, for example, the existence of food, its direction and distance.<sup>1</sup> Despite the many points of resemblance with human language, however, Benveniste recognizes many differences. For example, bee dances create signs that simply refer to the physical world and its phenomena. Humans, on the other hand, can use language to create signs that communicate ideas that may not necessarily refer to the physical world and, moreover, humans can share them with each other in dialogue.<sup>2</sup> In short, unlike the bee dances, human language can express both abstract and physical concepts.<sup>3</sup> This use of language to both shape and to communicate thought to another human is discourse.

A discourse stands for more than one ideal or concept; it represents a set of competing or interrelated concepts.<sup>4</sup> One set of competing concepts, or discourses, exists among the state, its institutions, and its bureaucrats. The state's discourse must justify its control over society; therefore, it uses many competing ideas to maintain authority. A late Roman emperor, for example, could claim to be "the sole fount of law" and the representative of God on earth.<sup>5</sup> On the other hand, he was still bound by existing law. "There was no sanction for this principle, but it was in general respected by the emperors and regarded by public opinion as binding upon them."<sup>6</sup> Two competing ideas thus exist side by side and shape the state's discourse. Many centuries later, the leaders of the new

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<sup>1</sup> Émile Benveniste, *Problèmes de linguistique générale*, (Paris: Éditions Gallimard, 1966), 60.

<sup>2</sup> Benveniste, 60-61.

<sup>3</sup> Benveniste, 63.

<sup>4</sup> Robert de Beaugarde, "Discourse Analysis", *The Johns Hopkins Guide to Literary Theory & Criticism*, Michael Groden ed. (2005): 263.

<sup>5</sup> A.H.M. Jones, *The Later Roman Empire 284-602: An Administrative, Economic, and Administrative Survey*, (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1964), 321.

<sup>6</sup> Jones, 321.



Soviet Union disagreed on the discourse of the new Soviet state. Leon Trotsky, for example, argued for a discourse of “permanent revolution”. Trotsky saw the proletarian dictatorship in Russia as “a bridge between the bourgeois and the socialist society” that was dependent on revolutions in other countries.<sup>7</sup> Joseph Stalin, on the other hand, countered this with the notion of “socialism in one country.” The Soviet state could achieve socialism itself without revolutions in other countries.<sup>8</sup> Thus, permanent versus national revolution became the discourse of the Soviet Union. The main objective of any state’s discourse is to convince society of the legitimacy of its control.

Institutional discourse, unlike the state, uses a discourse of expertise. M. Agar defines an institution as “a socially legitimate body of expertise together with those persons authorized to implement it.”<sup>9</sup> The state has its own institutions and these are often charged with making the state’s discourse a reality. The interaction between the state’s discourse of control and the institution’s discourse of expertise is the apparatchik’s discourse. I will use the terms bureaucrat and apparatchik as synonyms. The apparatchik himself articulates a state discourse, but only through the discourse of his institution. Each individual apparatchik might select a different discourse to uphold, reject and so forth. This dissertation examines the apparatchik’s discourse through the texts of four authors: Victor Serge, Ammianus Marcellinus, Denis Diderot, and George Orwell. Despite differences in time and culture, the texts of these four authors illustrate similarities in the form and content of the apparatchik’s discourse and its effects on

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<sup>7</sup> Leon Trotsky, *The Revolution Betrayed: What is the Soviet Union and Where is it Going?*, (New York: Pathfinder Press, 1970), 52. See also Walter Daum, *The Life and Death of Stalinism: A Resurrection of Marxist Theory*, (New York: Socialist Voice Publishing Co., 1990), 98-99.

<sup>8</sup> Daum, 146.

<sup>9</sup> M. Agar, quoted in Bethan Benwell and Elizabeth Stokoe, *Discourse and Identity*, (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2006), 88.

society and individuals. Before examining the texts, it is necessary to define the apparatchik's discourse more carefully.

The term "apparatchik" has an interesting linguistic history. *Аппаратчик*, a Russian term, was originally a derogatory word for a professional bureaucrat in the Communist bureaucracy. Such bureaucrats did not usually work in the higher echelons of the government. Citizens believed that bureaucrats wielded power from below, blocking initiatives and creating red tape. The equivalent word in English would be "functionary". "Apparatchik", however, has even older roots than the Russian term. In Latin, *apparāre* usually means "to provide" or "to make ready", definitions which are not substantially different from its root, *parāre*, but which indicate the idea of service. The related verb, *apparēre*, can mean, "to serve". A working definition of the apparatchik develops from the Russian and Latin terms: a professional, full-time functionary who ostensibly serves the state's discourse and oversees its manifestation in society via his expertise, but who tends to view the institution for which he works as a crucial part of his personal identity.

The apparatchik's discourse is an expression of a state's discourse through an individual institutional discourse. It has a variety of forms, but it always displays at least one of the following four traits: a use of jargon, an emphasis on nomenclature, the enforcement of asymmetrical speaking rights, or a consistent use of a specific formula in problem solving.

Jargon, like apparatchik, is usually a derogatory term. S.I. Hayakawa referred to jargon as "snarl words" that are designed to obfuscate.<sup>10</sup> In his own work on linguistics, Stalin identified jargon as the result of language that has "ceased to be a means of

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<sup>10</sup> S.I. Hayakawa, quoted by Tom Fahey, *The Joys of Jargon*, (New York: Barron's Educational Series, 1990), 7.

intercourse between people in society.”<sup>11</sup> In other words, jargon is the cant of a specific group that is often unintelligible to anyone outside that group. The apparatchik must carefully distinguish between those who belong and those who do not. Jargon is a way of distinguishing individuals; it is also a common method of expressing legitimacy and expertise since the person in question seems to have a special knowledge unavailable to most people. The apparatchik’s discourse does at times resort to jargon, using terms that would be understood by other members of that institution, but not by the public at large, and perhaps not by another institution in the same bureaucracy.

Nomenclature operates in a similar fashion. Like jargon, it is used to distinguish between those in the institution and those outside. Nomenclature refers to the use of titles, grades, positions and other designations of authority of a particular institution in discourse. The sixth century Byzantine bureaucrat John Lydus, for example, consistently invokes in his text the antiquity of his office and the titles associated with it over the centuries.<sup>12</sup> The invocation of a title confers a form of legitimacy that clearly puts anyone outside that institution at a disadvantage. The title identifies a person with an institution and thus alerts others that the person in question speaks and acts for that institution. Nomenclature, like jargon, can be an appeal for legitimacy and expertise, since both use specific words outside normal vocabulary to impress outsiders. Apparatchiks use nomenclature to identify themselves and others.

Jargon and title refer to the words in the discourse; whereas, asymmetrical speaking rights refer to its structure when the apparatchik is in dialogue with someone from outside the institution. While most forms of dialogue involve taking turns,

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<sup>11</sup> Joseph Stalin, *Marxism and Linguistics*, (New York: International Publishers, 1951), 11.

<sup>12</sup> Ioannes Lydus, *On Powers or The Magistracies of the Roman State*, translated by Anastasius C. Bandy, (Philadelphia: The American Philosophical Society, 1982), I. 14-15, II. 6, III. 22.

apparatchiks, as representatives of state institutions, depart substantially from the normal form of conversation.<sup>13</sup> Like jargon and nomenclature, this form tends to create distance between the speaker and the listener. Thus, the apparatchik controls the questions, the order of discussion, and has the right to terminate and to restart the dialogue at any moment. Above all they do not share any information.

Lastly, the apparatchik's discourse often revolves around formulas or standard methods that are consistently used in problem solving. Unlike the other three criteria, this refers to the usual content of the discourse. Many attack bureaucracies for relying on tradition more than on innovation. More interesting is that this bureaucratic attitude seems to persist throughout time and across cultures. For example, in his analysis of the late Roman civil service, A.H.M. Jones cites the Roman bureaucrats as being "...excessively devoted to forms..." and "unenterprising" as a class.<sup>14</sup> Milovan Djilas says the same thing about the Soviet bureaucracy. It was becoming an oligarchy and its legal system could not "...free itself from formalism".<sup>15</sup> Trotsky, too, saw the Russian state moving "...in backwards steps" as a result of a bureaucratic triumph over the masses.<sup>16</sup> The apparatchik's discourse, however, uses the repetition of formula as strength. Using familiar mantras is an easier path to legitimacy for the state than innovation because many people fear change. Furthermore, innovation involves experimentation and thus threatens the institutional discourse of expertise. Unfortunately, sometimes the old formulas do not work, and if the institution cannot implement a new solution, it must explain away its failure in order to retain its legitimacy. The most

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<sup>13</sup> Benwell, 90.

<sup>14</sup> A.H.M. Jones, 601-602.

<sup>15</sup> Milovan Djilas, *The New Class: An Analysis of the Communist System*, (New York: Frederick A. Praeger, 1957), 40, 93.

<sup>16</sup> Leon Totsky, 104.

effective formula for explaining away problems is the use of constructs in their discourse. Karl Marx analyzes this form in *The Holy Family*. According to his study, a construct is an explanation that does not explain; it only seems to do so. The key lies in saying something that appears true and relevant, though it will not stand close investigation.<sup>17</sup> It is obvious that such a formula would be common when the institution in question fails at solving problems. To openly admit a failure is to lose legitimacy. Apparatchiks, who represent institutions, are often called upon to use institutional discourse to explain failures; each apparatchik's own personality adds variance to the discourse.

To explain away problems with constructs is one formula, but there is another more insidious formula: explaining away people. By emphasizing the distinction between one who is a part of the state or institution and one who is not, the apparatchik can reduce individuals to an *idem* that is consistent with the apparatchik's discourse. Paul Ricoeur's concept of sameness is consistent with a discourse that reduces people to a specific, socially accepted role, regardless of their individuality. Ricoeur used the term *ipse*, self, to denote that part of one's character that was not derived necessarily from a socially accepted norm.<sup>18</sup> Such a characteristic can be a hinderance to a bureaucratic institution, which is interested in preserving the state's control. At times, the apparatchik's discourse does not merely reduce but represses specific individuals who are a threat to that regime. Using the formula described above, the discourse can create a construct to explain away a dissident against the regime in the manner it explains away problems. Constructs can be used to replace the material history of a dissident and repress him, turn him into an *idem*

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<sup>17</sup> Karl Marx and Frederick Engels, *The Holy Family, or Critique of Critical Criticism: Against Bruno Bauer and Company*, in *Collected Works 4* (London: Lawrence & Wishart, 1975), 57-60.

<sup>18</sup> Paul Ricoeur, *Soi-même comme un autre*, (Paris: Éditions du Seuil, 1990), 142.

that suits the institution. This formula works, of course, with other more familiar measures in controlling dissidents: arrest, incarceration, and torture.

A professional full-time functionary may try to uphold the legitimacy of the state and his institution, but he is also holding on to his job. The apparatchik employs a discourse, but he must face daily problems: the demands of the state, society, the competition of other institutions, incompetence within the institution itself, and his own personal attitudes. Each apparatchik interacts with the discourse in a different manner. This study examines a variety of apparatchik characters, who use discourse to reduce and repress individuals in the name of the institution and the state. There is no other study of this kind. Given the role of the state bureaucracy in history and the common problems of such institutions and their members, it seemed necessary to look at the apparatchik's discourse over the centuries with the aid of four authors who all experienced the discourse in one way or another. With the exception of Orwell's *Animal Farm* and *Nineteen-Eighty Four*, however, these texts are not canonical and thus require much plot exposition. These specific authors and their works were picked because the plots and characters in their texts offer multiple perspectives on the apparatchik's discourse. Serge and Ammianus were by occupation even apparatchiks themselves. Serge, Ammianus, Diderot, and Orwell observed the phenomena and incorporated it in their literature.

Victor Serge (born Victor Lvovich Kibalchich) (1890 – 1947) was the son of Russian expatriates in Brussels. Both mother and father had been involved in revolutionary activities in Russia and were forced to flee the country. An uncle, Nikolay Ivanovich Kibalchich, was part of the revolutionary terrorist organization *Narodnaya*

*Volya* and, in fact, manufactured the bomb that killed Tsar Alexander II in 1881.<sup>19</sup> Poverty and strong familial revolutionary traditions marked him from an early age. His first writing in the early part of the century was journalistic in nature, and he also edited various anarchist publications. Later, he went to Russia and, despite his anarchist beliefs, joined the Bolsheviks. He later worked as an official in the Communist International. Despite his apparatchik role, he continued to be a journalist. His attachment to the “Left Opposition”, however, forced him to stop expressing his opinions openly. He had already started writing his first novel, and the loss of journalistic freedom encouraged him further to use the novel as his principal means of self-expression. His novels are semi-autobiographical in nature ranging from his life experiences in a French prison to his time with the revolutionary unions in Barcelona. Most importantly, he focuses on the fate of political dissidents in Stalin’s Russia. Unlike many of these dissidents, Serge was allowed to leave Russia and later to immigrate to Mexico. *S’il est minuit dans le siècle* (1939) and *L’Affaire Toulaév* (1948) were written after his release from the U.S.S.R. These two, along with an earlier novel, *Ville Conquise* (1932), illustrate the form and content of the apparatchik’s discourse better than any other text in this study. Thus, these texts will be examined first.

Ammianus Marcellinus (born c. C.E. 330) was a Syrian-Greek army officer who wrote an annalistic history in the manner of Tacitus. According to his own words, the history is a continuation of Tacitus’ work, beginning in C.E. 98 with the reign of Nerva and ending with the death of Valens C.E. 378. Unfortunately, the first thirteen books of

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<sup>19</sup> The *Narodnaya Volya* (People’s Will) was a Russian terrorist organization dedicated to overthrowing Tsarism. It sought this end by assassinating key officials including the Tsar himself. It had arrived at the tactic after the failure of earlier efforts, under different organizational forms and names, to arouse the Russian peasantry to throw off the Tsarist yoke. See Franco Venturi, *The Roots of Revolution*, trans. by Francis Haskell, (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1960).

the history are not extant. The remaining books (14-31) cover twenty-five years, 353-378. A number of questions on the pacing of the work and the point where Ammianus may have shifted from an abbreviated style that simply summarized the reigns of emperors, in the manner of Eutropius, and moved to the fuller, more detailed history that now exists have been raised.<sup>20</sup> It is interesting enough that an army officer would wish to follow Tacitus' example, but as Latin was not Ammianus' first language, the result is all the more remarkable. The history he wrote has been praised for fair-mindedness and balance on the part of the author, despite his pagan beliefs in an increasingly Christian empire.<sup>21</sup> He also records many scenes from first-hand experience, thus giving the text an immediacy rare in historiography.

Using such a modern term to analyze Ammianus's text may seem strange, but it is consistent with the description of the apparatchik and what is known about the late Roman state. Ammianus was connected to perhaps the most important institution of the late Roman Empire, the army, since he was a staff officer. In this role, he served a leading representative of that institution. Though the army was not part of the civil service, it was a bureaucratic institution of the Roman state and struggled with other institutions in upholding the state's discourse of imperial power. Ammianus' text shows the conflict between various institutions who in fact sought to monopolize and control the government, thus giving them control over the state's discourse. His text is valuable to this study as a picture of the apparatchik's discourse at an early point in history.

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<sup>20</sup> Eutropius was a fourth century writer of the *Breviarium*, a short history of Rome from the city's foundation. A.H.M. Jones characterized his work as a summary for Roman nobles who could not tolerate reading all of Livy. See A.H.M. Jones, *The Later Roman Empire 284-602: A Social, Economic, And Administrative Survey Volume 2*, (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1964), 1010.

<sup>21</sup> For the standard assessment of Ammianus as a writer, see Jones, 1011.



In contrast to Ammianus, Denis Diderot (1713-1784) is far better known as one of the major writers of the French Enlightenment. The son of a master culter, Diderot received an education from the Jesuits, and later went on to the University of Paris to study law. He was also interested in language, philosophy and science. One of his early works, *Lettre sur les aveugles* (1749), for example, is the first written attempt at devising a system of writing for the blind. It is, however, for his role as editor of the *Encyclopédie* that he is best known. Diderot is most responsible for turning what was originally a project in creating a French translation of Ephriam Chamber's *Cyclopedia* into an all-encompassing document of knowledge that became a repository of erudition for the burgeoning Enlightenment. He wrote on various scientific, philosophic and historic topics as well as novels such as *Jacques le fataliste et son maître* (1773) and *Le Neveu de Rameau* (1774). He never held a position that would qualify him as an apparatchik. On the other hand, he examined the bureaucratic institutions of early imperial Rome, late Bourbon France, and the Russia of Catherine II. He saw in all bureaucratic institutions the enemy of good government. His last important works, *Essai sur la vie de Sénèque* (1778) and *Essai sur les régnes de Claude et de Néron* (1782) address these concerns. To date they have not been translated and have been regarded by scholars as disorderly and cumbersome.<sup>22</sup> Despite this, they offer an interesting look at the apparatchik's discourse.

George Orwell (born Eric Arthur Blair) (1903-1950) is very well known, especially for his last two novels, *Animal Farm* (1946) and *Nineteen Eighty-Four* (1949). His career as a writer, however, began earlier. Orwell was born into a wealthy family and lived part of his early years in India. He joined the imperial police in Burma, but his disgust over the imperial system in particular and capitalism in general turned him to

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<sup>22</sup> Anthony Strugnell, *Diderot's Politics*, (The Hague: Martinus Nijkoff, 1973), 74.

writing. He was an ex-apparatchik and his texts display an antipathy to the apparatchik's discourse. The experience in Burma yielded one of his first novels, *Burmese Days* (1934). Later he went to Spain to fight on the Republican side. He enlisted with a militia unit but saw little action, despite receiving a nasty wound. After returning from Spain he wrote a memoir of his experience both at the front and behind the lines in Barcelona, *Homage to Catalonia* (1952). Orwell served with the B.B.C. during the Second World War and died shortly after.

This dissertation is the first to connect these four authors' use of the apparatchik's discourse. Serge's novels remain largely unknown and are rarely studied. His turbulent life included several periods of incarceration or deportation, which disrupted the publication of his work. In addition, Serge's politics made him enemies on the Right and the Left, especially with many publishers.<sup>23</sup> Only Bill Marshall's *Victor Serge: The Uses of Dissent*, which is an examination of Serge's novels from a stylistic and political perspective, indicates a possible change from neglect. Marshall compares Serge with both Trotsky and Koestler. In contrast, many scholars have examined the work of Ammianus, including his politics, abilities as a military analyst, and use of language. Scholars typically compare him with other figures in classical literature, especially Tacitus and the anonymous writer of the *Historia Augusta*. Ammianus, however, has not been linked to any modern writer, even though he stands in a long tradition of historians, who took to literature after an active political or military career including Thucydides, Machiavelli and Trotsky.<sup>24</sup> For many years, Diderot, too, remained overshadowed and noted only for

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<sup>23</sup> See Victor Serge, *Mémoires d'un révolutionnaire* in *Mémoires d'un révolutionnaire et autres écrits Politiques 1908-1947*, (Paris: Robert Laffont S.A., 2001) 716-718 on Serge's publication difficulties.

<sup>24</sup> Important scholarship on Ammianus' text includes: E.A. Thompson, *The Historical Work of Ammianus Marcellinus*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1948); Sir Ronald Syme, *Ammianus and the*

his role as chief editor of the famous *Encyclopédie*. Scholars traditionally have focused more on his contemporaries, especially Voltaire and Rousseau. The early twentieth century saw a change in this neglect and with the establishment of *Diderot Studies* in 1949, by Otis Fellows and Norman Torrey, Diderot finally received more broad based scholarly attention.<sup>25</sup> As with Ammianus, scholars typically compare Diderot with contemporaries, or other figures such as Hobbes or Newton. Anthony Strugnell has written the only major monograph on Diderot's political theory. Orwell is well known, even among non-scholars; his novels have had extensive publication; some, such as *Animal Farm*, have been used as textbooks in schools and two of his novels, *Animal Farm* and *Nineteen-Eighty Four*, have been made into feature or televised films.<sup>26</sup> There is a wide body of scholarship on his work.<sup>27</sup> There is, however, no work connecting Orwell with any other author in this study.<sup>28</sup>

Naturally each text in this study has its own background in a particular time and culture, which ensures some difference in understanding the apparatchik's discourse. A strict chronological format is not used. Serge appears first and then the others in

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*Historia Augusta*, (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1968); Robert Blockley, *Ammianus Marcellinus: A Study in his Historiography and Political Thought*, (Bruxelles: Latomus, 1975); Gary Crump, *Ammianus Marcellinus as a Military Historian*, *Enzelschriften 27*, (Wiesbaden: Steiner Verlag, 1975); Robin Seager, *Ammianus Marcellinus: Seven Studies in His Language and Thought*, (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 1986).

<sup>25</sup> On the state of Diderot Studies earlier in the twentieth century, see Otis Fellows and Norman Torrey, "Introduction", *Diderot Studies* 1 (1949): vii - xiii.

<sup>26</sup> On the use of Orwell's novels in school, see Stephen Sedley, "An Immodest Proposal: *Animal Farm*" in *Inside the Myth, Orwell: Views from the Left*, (London: Lawrence & Wishart, 1984), 156. On Orwell's publication history, see John Newsinger, *Orwell's Politics*, (Houndmills: Macmillan Press LTD, 1999), 55-56.

<sup>27</sup> There are too many books on Orwell to list here. A partial list would include: George Woodcock, *The Crystal Spirit: A Study of George Orwell*, (Boston: Little, Brown, and Company, 1966); Raymond Williams, *Politics and Letters*, (London: NLB, 1979); Lynette Hunter, *Orwell: The Search for a Voice*, (Milton Keynes: Open University Press, 1984); Christopher Norris, ed, *Inside the Myth, Orwell: Views from the Left*, (London: Lawrence & Wishart, 1984); Daphne Patai, *The Orwell Mystique: A Study in Male Ideology*, (Amherst: The University of Massachusetts Press, 1984); Jeffrey Meyers, *Orwell: Wintry Conscience of a Generation*, (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 2000).

<sup>28</sup> See Bill Marshall, *Victor Serge: The Uses of Dissent*, (New York: Berg Publishers, 1992), 136 ff. See also Jeffrey Meyers, *A Reader's Guide to George Orwell*, (London: Thames & Hudson, 1975), 130-131.

chronological succession. Serge is singled out because his novels and histories offer the best examination of the apparatchik's discourse; they explain both the content and form of the discourse in detail. None of the other authors have his insights. Serge, an apparatchik himself, was trying to find a constructive role for the discourse in a revolutionary context. In his novels, both the characters use the apparatchik's discourse against each other in the name of revolution. Ammianus's text, on the other hand, lacks the conscious understanding of the discourse that we see in Serge's works. Diderot's texts tend to be clouded by their emotional need to vindicate a perceived victim of state oppression. His view of apparatchiks and their discourse is one-sided.

Orwell's approach is also unique. His novels use both sympathetic characters and a narrator, but unlike Serge's novels, neither the characters nor the narrator find a constructive role for the apparatchik's discourse, but rather try to banish it and all ideology completely. This attempt at an escape from ideology often leads Orwell's texts, to end up buttressing the state or institution they ostensibly criticize. Of the texts, only Serge's demonstrate a comprehensive understanding of the role of ideology, in the form of the apparatchik's discourse. All the texts demonstrate the state's use of constructs in repression and reduction of individuals, but only Serge's could also demonstrate a constructive use of the discourse for the dissident as well. Therefore, the texts of Ammianus, Diderot, and Orwell will be compared to Serge's texts.

## CHAPTER 2: VICTOR SERGE: SYNTHESIZING THE DISCOURSE

In recent years more and more scholars have turned with interest to Victor Serge's fiction and non-fiction texts, in an attempt to find an open mind aligned with a true revolutionary spirit amid all the sectarian writing concerning the Russian Revolution and its aftermath.<sup>29</sup> In point of fact, Serge is no less sectarian than any other participant or writer in these momentous events, but he is an introspective writer whose texts have an autobiographical streak that provides much insight into the workings of the revolutionary mind. Serge had experiences with the apparatchik's discourse from both sides, that of an apparatchik and that of a dissident, yet he was never completely comfortable in any political camp. Serge moved through reformist, anarchist, syndicalist, Bolshevik and Trotskyist circles, and his intellectual searching shows a greater appreciation of the use of the apparatchik's discourse and its relation to the state and institutional discourse once he becomes a dissident himself. It was in this condition that he began not only to write novels but also to look more closely at the Bolshevik Revolution, its aftermath and its effect on both apparatchiks and dissidents. The use of the same revolutionary ideology to both support and to oppose the state forms a crucial part of Serge's fiction and conditions his view of the apparatchik's discourse. The discourse of the apparatchiks and the dissident Communists in Serge's novels appears, at first glance, as a product of the same revolutionary Marxist heritage. This does not hold up, however, to a closer examination. Serge's novels are not objective. Serge's novels present rival apparatchik discourses in the context of revolutionary politics. Thus, there are often at least two sets of apparatchiks. Serge explores the Russian Revolution and its impact. "In other words, there exists in the text an investigation of what has gone wrong (in the Russian

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<sup>29</sup> Walter Laqueur, "The Case for Victor Serge", *Partisan Review* 70 (2003): 133.

Revolution). The colossal ‘opponent’ in the narrative...is of course the Stalinist regime in the USSR, which is itself, in a *problematic* way, a product of the revolutionaries’ activity.”<sup>30</sup> Serge was not objective in his political views, but in his novels an objective view emerges of the apparatchik’s discourse. Even the discourse of the dissident, apparatchiks will lurch into unreality. For Serge, the revolution needs its imaginations and perhaps even some illusions. The key is how they are used and for what reason.

#### *VILLE CONQUISE*: THE DISCOURSE OF NECESSITY

Serge retreated from politics and history and turned to writing fiction, following the defeat of the United Opposition (1926-1927), which saw the Old Bolsheviks Zinoviev and Kamenev join forces with Trotsky to topple their former ally, Stalin, and the expulsion from the party of its members. In his autobiography, Serge states that literature is better able to show the interior *mécanisme* of human beings. He first began writing novels in Vienna in the mid twenties while working for the Comintern. Later, in 1930, he took up his pen again and within three years had completed three works: *Les Hommes dans la prison*, *Naissance de notre force*, and *Ville Conquise*. These early novels were written in a period of political isolation and physical hardship as Serge’s family had a precarious existence in Leningrad. He was impoverished, burdened with an ailing wife and was being shadowed by Soviet security, due to his status as an oppositionist. Serge’s only other political contact at the time was Alexandra Bronstein, Trotsky’s first wife. He was in constant danger of being picked up at any time. He had to write with the intent of getting his material out as soon as possible and for the greatest possible readership. Thus, he wrote in French and sent chapters of his novels, as they were written to Paris for

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<sup>30</sup> Marshall, 99.

publication.<sup>31</sup> He had time neither to revise carefully nor to wait until the entire book was written. The effect on the novels is telling. The chapters are short and are almost vignettes in themselves, which can be combined with the others to form a collage effect, with no key central character or climax in the traditional sense. The last named, *Ville Conquise*, however, illustrates Serge's concept of the apparatchik's discourse.

*Ville Conquise* takes place in civil war Petrograd in 1919, the year of Serge's arrival in Russia, two years after the February Revolution which overthrew the Tsar Nicholas II. The intervening months between that event and the October revolution saw the rise and fall of many political movements and parties and articulation of many ideas before the Bolshevik dictatorship took hold. By the time Serge arrived, therefore, much of the popular ferment was over. This has implications for Serge's view of Bolshevism and the apparatchiks' discourse.

*Ville Conquise* opens with a city that is harassed from the outside by General Yudenich's White Guards; the city has a fair number of problems: food shortages, conspiracies, and worker discontent. The revolution has created many difficulties, and many characters in the novel question the worth of the harsh Bolshevik regime. The Cheka, the "Extraordinary Commission for Repression against counter-revolution, speculation, and desertion" is charged with maintaining order. This institution, nominally under the control of the Council of People's Commissars, had emergency powers to arrest, to try and to execute people suspected of engaging in any activity harmful to the

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<sup>31</sup> Serge was born in Belgium and spent his early years in France. He was equally fluent in both French and Russian. His decision to write in French appears to be due to political, cultural and possible financial reasons. At the time of his decision to focus on novels, writers in Russia were facing more censorship and by writing in French, Serge found a greater audience outside Russia. He likewise kept contact with literary circles in Paris and had such friends as Jacques Mesnil, Magdeleine Paz, Marcel Martinet, Georges Duhamel, and Léon Werth. Serge did later sell his books but how much money he may have received at this time is unknown. See Serge, *Mémoires d'un révolutionnaire*, 717-718.

new Soviet state. Its expertise is that of Red terror to oppose that of the Whites and their allies. Some of the apparatchiks in the novel are members, and indeed do address various concerns. The life and death struggle that forms the background of this novel coupled with the revolutionary milieu throws the words and deeds of the Chekists into bold relief. When two Chekists, Kirk and Zvéréva, investigate dossier 42, “affaire du Centre-Droit”/ “the center-right affair”, at the behest of their superior, Ossipov, the result is an excellent exposé of the apparatchik’s discourse from the three separate vantage points of the characters.<sup>32</sup>

A Chekist named Kirk, for example, is an aggressive revolutionary, but he is also an anarchist at heart, and this comes out in his behavior and speech. It seems, therefore, surprising that the Cheka would recruit such a man, especially as Kirk himself is in fact an outlaw in many ways. Before the revolution, he tramped his way across America with hobos for company and had even been in jail a few times. Now with Russia in revolution, he had come home to find things even more detestable than before, given his hatred of paper revolutions. Despite being a Chekist, he has no use for the apparatchik’s discourse and seems totally incompatible with the goals of the state. How and why he joined the Cheka is a mystery, but Serge leaves us with no illusions as to why the Cheka would accept him. “Il y a aussi les autres tempéraments anarchiques et romantiques dont, au fond, le parti n’a besoin que pour un temps” / “There are also the other anarchic and romantic temperaments, which basically the party only needed for a time.”<sup>33</sup> The Cheka will use anyone, provided he or she is not an out and out counter-revolutionary. Kirk

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<sup>32</sup> This affair involved a conspiracy by a White agent, Danilov, newly arrived in Petrograd, with dissatisfied bourgeois elements in the city.

<sup>33</sup> Victor Serge, *Ville Conquise* (hereafter referred to in text as VC) in *Les Révolutionnaires*, (Paris: Éditions du Seuil, 1967), 436. All translations are mine.



himself knows his value and wonders, “Qu’est-ce qu’on pourra bien faire de moi quand on m’aura vidé?” / “What will they be able to do with me once they have drained me?” (VC, 437) He already sees himself as a man condemned, but this does not prevent him from stating his grievances to his superior, another Chekist, Ossipov. The resulting conversation between Kirk and Ossipov is a dialogue between two apparatchiks, but one is more a dissident in spirit. While Kirk’s being in the Cheka seems almost incidental, Ossipov is a believer in the institution, though he is not blind to reality.

Kirk complains to Ossipov largely about the corruption stemming from the concentration of power into Bolshevik hands. A true anarchist scorns institutions and revolutions based on the *fausse majorité* / “false majority”. More importantly, they create elites, which profit from their position. Kirk has already witnessed this in the form of another Chekist, his partner in the investigation and antithesis, Zvéréva, who already appeared earlier in the novel than Kirk. She takes great advantage, using her position, for example, to take her pick of the rare flowers left behind in the old imperial greenhouses. Gavril is the old horticulturist who brings the flowers and who lives with scarcity, drinking tea made from carrot scrapings. She thrives on the use of nomenclature in her discourse. Gavril, for example, must address Zvéréva, who receives special rations as a Chekist, with the title of “comrade”, while she merely refers to him by his first name. She revels in the distance created by her discourse. After all, she is a Chekist, while Gavril is not even in the party. When Gavril uses the occasion of bringing flowers to ask a favor, Zvéréva gladly agrees and starts to give orders over the telephone in order to meet his request. Her joy, however, does not come from helping anyone, but rather from giving orders over the telephone. This is an example of what M. Agar calls the “binary and

asymmetrical roles” generated by institutional discourse.<sup>34</sup> Gavril has the privilege to make a request, provided he brings rare flowers, but Zvéréva has the power to use the telephone and make things happen. She uses her discourse to reduce Gavril to a suppliant.

Serge concludes the scene with the remark, “Il y a, voyez-vous, les organisateurs-nés: ceux-là savent se faire écouter, manier les leviers de commande, donner des instructions précises...” / “There are, you see, the born organizers: those who know how to make others listen, to manipulate the levers of command, to give precise instructions....” (*VC*, 436) Kirk, however, sees her as nothing more than an obvious social climber with the name of the latest superior she has seen constantly on her lips.<sup>35</sup> Indeed, when summoned to late night meetings with the president of the local Petrograd Cheka, Zvéréva always dresses smartly, and hopes people will see her in the hall going about important business (*VC*, 424). When in public, she is always uses the apparatchik’s discourse, principally through the invocation of nomenclature. Despite this, she excels in the type of expertise needed by the Cheka; she is able to solve cases. She arrested Danilov, the principal White agent, in the city. Kirk, nevertheless, believes her to be a perfect institutional woman, who will make herself indispensable under any regime, always careful when speaking in public and never seen voting with a minority (*VC*, 435, 441). Furthermore, underneath all this, unknown even to Kirk, is a layer of cruelty. She does not flinch at recommending torture to further an investigation and later after tiring of responding to Kirk’s snide comments about party decorum with the phrase, “Vous servirez le parti, Kirk” / “You will serve the party, Kirk”. This is another use of

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<sup>34</sup> Quoted in Benwell, 88.

<sup>35</sup> Kirk’s exact words about Zvéréva “A plat-ventre devant les pantouffles du président...” / “flat on her belly before the slippers of the president...” point to a sexual angle involving the character. In her first scene, for example, Serge portrays Zvéréva alone in her room, undressing in front of a mirror and fondling her breasts. (*VC*, 438)

nomenclature, reminding Kirk of his identity as a member of the party and by extension, the Cheka. Nevertheless, she thinks to herself of the day when she would be interrogating Kirk himself, “Elle savait qu’il faut accepter comme son dû bien des avanies de pouvoir les infliger à son tour.” / “She knew that it was necessary to accept as her due insults as well before being able to inflict them in turn.”<sup>36</sup> She knows what Kirk knows, that while Kirk is a man of revolution, she is a woman of an institution and state, and after the revolution has subsided, only the institution and state will be left. She is a true apparatchik; he is not.

Zvéréva acts as a lightning rod for Kirk’s criticism of the new Bolshevik regime in general and the Cheka in particular, allowing Ossipov to be dismissive of Kirk’s concerns. After all, she is not that significant a problem; there are not that many Chekists, and there is enough work as it is. This, however, is merely a lead up to Ossipov’s main point. While he is not blind to the party’s shortcomings, the only alternative to the party is defeat and possibly death. He gives two reasons for this conclusion. First, organization is the best tool for victory, even though it becomes dirty. Revolutionary romanticism, spirit, even brilliance, by contrast, is useless; the health of the revolution depends on the three virtues, “de l’ordre, de la méthode, de la cohésion...” / “of order, method, and cohesion....” (*VC*, 445). This, incidentally, reinforces his earlier argument over keeping Zvéréva, since maintaining the Cheka, is more important than its individual personnel. Ossipov’s discourse is that of the apparatchik, invoking both the Cheka as an institution and by extension the state, but unlike Zvéréva he does not try to take advantage of it. Second, Ossipov sees the Cheka, the party and the proletariat as being completely linked.

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<sup>36</sup> Like her sexuality (see note 31) Zvéréva’s cruelty is secretive and shows the real person beneath her façade (*VC*, 438).

He is linking his institution, the state, and society together. If one falls so do the others. The party is working for the proletariat under very distressing circumstances, like a ship at sea taking water. This last point also serves to justify the superior privileges of party members and especially the Cheka. The party members are the “états-majors” / “state-leaders” of the proletariat, who will receive their full due only once revolution has spread across Europe. In the meantime, it is only natural for the party leaders to eat and live better, as their responsibility to the proletariat is greater (*VC*, 445). This is another invocation of nomenclature. The title of Chekist carries some rewards, but Ossipov, unlike Zvéreva, is troubled by such claims. They seem to reproduce the old class privileges. Thus, he retreats from this somewhat, claiming that the privileges of the party are not that great. While he does fear some of Kirk’s accusations, especially that the Russian Revolution will go the way of the French, he quickly stifles them by reversing himself and trying to reassure Kirk in the process:

“Vivre, voilà ce que veut la classe ouvrière en chair et en os, ce tas de gens affamés que nous avons derrière nous, que nous avons l’air d’entraîner, et qui nous poussent en réalité. Sitôt qu’il faut choisir, renoncer ou continuer, ils continuent. Continuons, prenons l’habitude de vivre” / “To live, that is what the working class in the flesh wants, this heap of hungry people we have behind us, whom we seem to lead, and who really push us. As soon as it is necessary to choose – to give up or continue, they continue. Let us continue, let us take up the habit of living.” (*VC*, 446)

Immediately after Ossipov’s statement, both he and Kirk notice the sun rising. The men go outside sit under trees, look at the sky and take in full the meaning of Ossipov’s words, “...prenons l’habitude de vivre” / “...let us take up the habit of living”. Thinking momentarily of their childhood, the two men then immediately start discussing the case at hand.

The case of the “affaire du Centre-Droit” itself not only sets up the interactions discussed above but also confirms the nature of the apparatchik’s discourse of the Cheka in this novel and its effects on the discourses of the individual apparatchiks. As the leading investigator, Zvéréva shows efficiency, aggression, and subtlety that mark her as a natural in dealing with espionage. It is she who fingers a leftover from the old regime, Bobrov, and putting him on the Cheka’s payroll, uses his encryption skills to decipher messages. This leads to the arrest of several dissidents, whom both Zvéréva and Kirk interrogate (*VC*, 439-441). It is also Zvéréva who notices that one of the members of this conspiracy was in fact arrested some months earlier under a different name and then released with no comment. This leads to her discovery of corruption in another Chekist, Arkadi, and his eventual arrest. Throughout she shows herself the expertise that enables the Cheka to uphold the state’s discourse of control. Furthermore, having ferreted out a bad element that might have brought down the current Petrograd Cheka. Thus Zvéréva saves her institution and members (*VC*, 455). Ossipov, faced with treasonous corruption from Arkadi, will not save him. Although the revelation saddens him, he will not act against the party or the Cheka and votes with ten others on the committee board to enact “L’article 15 du Reglement intérieur” / “Article 15 of the Internal Regulations”, the decree that Serge described as having “d’une precision de couperet” / “the precision of a guillotine blade”. Ten apparatchiks align their discourse with that of the institution. In effect, the board will sacrifice Arkadi to the central bureau of the Cheka to save the Petrograd bureau from more serious investigation.

Kirk also had a hand in the investigation and was the sole vote against enactment. When he goes to confront Ossipov, the earlier discussion is replayed. Kirk is accusatory:

“Tu sais, frère; nous commettons un crime” / “You know, brother, we are committing a crime” (*VC*, 463). Although an apparatchik himself, Kirk’s discourse has nothing in common with the forms of the apparatchik’s discourse. Ossipov is incredulous over his statement. After all, Arkadi is merely paying for his right to be *impitoyable* / “unmerciful”. Ossipov still thinks in institutional terms and again uses the nomenclature to justify Arkadi’s condemnation. Just as the Chekists had special privileges, they also face special dangers. All Chekists will end up like him, and if he could not be saved, though Ossipov admits he tried, then all must share in the responsibility for his condemnation. Turning to the attack, Ossipov points out the essential dispute here, “Toi, tu es un Don Quichotte, avec ta manière de faire cavalier seul” “You, you are a Don Quixote, with your manner of going it alone” (*VC*, 463). He goes on to ridicule him for amusing himself with his one vote, to dismiss the whole affair as unimportant and then to give Kirk another, completely different assignment (*VC*, 463). While Kirk sees a reality of people sacrificing someone to save their careers, Ossipov, in true apparatchik fashion, dismisses the whole thing, using the argument of natural “attrition” as a construct to explain the failure of a member. There is a price and a responsibility that goes with being in the Cheka. Kirk looks at the affair with his own personal discourse, for which Ossipov berates him. Ossipov looks at the matter through an institutional discourse and state discourse: Cheka and state stand against Arkadi in the name of revolutionary progress. Ossipov had regard for Arkadi and knows just as well as Kirk that someone’s life is at stake, but he chooses to view the affair from the point of view of the party, and more specifically the Cheka, whose job is to be ruthless with the revolution’s enemies, including members of the Cheka who make deals with White agents. Ossipov does not

want to reduce Arkadi's identity to that of a "traitor" or "counter-revolutionary", but for the greater good of the revolution, he will change the perception of Arkadi from man misguided by love to that of an enemy.

Ossipov sees good purpose in revolutionary institutions and as we shall see, this is the key question for Serge on the nature of the apparatchik's discourse, especially when compared to the attitudes expressed by Ammianus, Diderot and Orwell. In the works of these others, the individual stands against corrupt organizations, which appear to have no objective worth. Serge alone of all four authors questions the perceived goodness of his heroes against the perceived goodness of the institution and state. The party's unity is a necessity even to the point of executing a man guilty of folly. This is a construct in the apparatchik's discourse of both Ossipov and Zvéréva, which is in line with the discourse of both the Cheka and the party: revolutionary necessity. Serge portrays it from both sides. On the one hand Kirk upholds his own individual discourse, while Ossipov upholds the institutional discourse. Serge acknowledges the argument from Kirk, but it is clear that he sympathizes by necessity with Ossipov. The apparatchik's discourse that triumphs in this instance is like Article 15 mentioned above, an unsparing weapon of the revolution, which must be used with care, and this makes the motivations of Serge's characters all the more important in his view of the discourse.

Throughout this dialogue, and indeed the novel, emerges a discourse of hard realism, tinged with some resignation. For example, Ossipov tries to steer the middle course between Kirk, who pleads for the lives of traitors, and Zvéréva, who is pitiless and abuses her position for personal pleasure. He combines an almost blind faith in the party's link with the proletariat and the long-term victory with a firm conviction of the

principles of organization and collective responsibility, highlighted by the current crisis. He truly wants to serve the people and bring them justice, but to do so he must be hard, brutal, and arbitrary. This leads exactly to the loss of freedoms for which, ostensibly, Ossipov is fighting. Here Serge has managed to fix the important points of the debate on the new regime and thus give an impressive series of responses. Kirk's discourse is that of the dissident. He is an outlaw by nature and abhors organizations because they are artificial and really do not represent the people or their needs. His presence in the Cheka is anomalous, and he knows his days there are numbered. His discourse has its own speculative construct. For example, while he protests, as we saw, over the arrest of Arkadi, he cannot meet Ossipov's objections based on the needs of the party and the revolution. Here we see Kirk's construct of "paper" revolutions, which he despises but can offer nothing to replace them. His moral objections are based on idealistic notions of right and wrong that really do not satisfactorily answer the question of Arkadi's guilt in the given circumstances. While he can see the reality of Arkadi as a fellow human being, Kirk cannot see his crime.

Zvéreva represents a diametrically opposed response. Although she is corrupt, her discourse is the apparatchik's discourse. Her institutional role is her guide: she is a Chekist suppressing counter-revolution. Whatever corruption lies behind her mask, or whatever revulsion she may inspire in people, she is an effective policewoman and saves the position of the Petrograd Cheka and party. More importantly, she reveals the personal side of her nature, what Ricoeur labeled the *ipse*, the self that has no necessary reference to any outside trait or disposition, that which makes us unique, to only herself or non



party people, such as Gavril, who do not matter.<sup>37</sup> Even to the latter she is prepared to invoke nomenclature and reintegrate herself into her role in the institution if she feels at risk. “Nous ne sommes pas des sentimentaux. Le devoir d’abord...N’allez pas croire que l’on m’attendrit parce que je suis une femme” / “We are not sentimentalists. Duty first. Do not let them believe that I can be moved because I am a woman”(VC, 436). Her ostentatious attention to duty, refusal to side with minorities in meetings, and repeating such phrases as “Vous servirez le parti” / “You will serve the party!” all point to a person who subsumes her person into the *idem* of the Chekist (VC, 438). Ricoeur’s term applies to her condition. She does not want to show any individuality that might compromise her institutional role.<sup>38</sup> While Zvéréva does not reduce herself completely to a stereotype, Serge has created a striking contrast to Kirk, who refuses institutional sameness and who has an individualistic approach to all things. Ossipov’s “lone rider” remark points to someone who makes no effort to accept a social identification.

Between Kirk’s position and Zvéréva’s is Ossipov’s message of a more reasonable apparatchik’s discourse that incorporates both the institution’s discourse and his own ideals. His musings on organization and its superiority, not to mention his sacrifice of Arkadi may seem close to Zvéréva’s view, but they are tempered by some remnant of enjoying life and a faith in the goodness that the revolution will bring. Despite problems, he sees the revolution and party as helping people. The discourse of Bolshevism and the Cheka may be one of hard necessity now, but it does promise a better future. This later point is a key construct that enables someone like Ossipov to do what he does. In his view, both party and Cheka are tools and his utopia is still far off, while for

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<sup>37</sup> Ricoeur, *Soi-même comme un autre*, 140.

<sup>38</sup> Ricoeur, 140-141.

Zvéréva, utopia is already here. The state and institutional discourses are constructs they both serve and “necessity” underlies both, but Zvéréva has submitted her identity to the Cheka’s *idem* more thoroughly than Ossipov.

Ossipov seems to regard Zvéréva as nothing more than a comrade, but his conversations with Kirk indicate a closer relationship. The fact that Kirk can wake up Ossipov in the middle of the night to scold the whole board over the Arkadi decision suggests some friendship, not to mention trust. Zvéréva, by contrast, would lock Kirk up in a minute, and she actually fantasizes about the day in which she will interrogate him, but Ossipov listens and tries his best to convince Kirk of the rightness of the party. In this debate, Ossipov is the key figure of the novel. For Serge, the only justification for the Bolshevik dictatorship is the current objective hardship that Russia faces and the promise of a better future. Ossipov is the picture of this belief. He is a true apparatchik who puts the state and institution first, yet is still human and dreaming of better days. But he is not the only person with this viewpoint. There is a rival group that despises both the Bolsheviks and the White Guards. Despite the difference in ideology and the fact that the Bolsheviks persecute this group, it shows the same dynamic that exists among the Chekists.

The Cheka is not alone in invoking harsh necessity as a construct.<sup>39</sup> In the middle of the novel, Serge introduces another character, Goldin. Like Kirk, he is an idealist, but unlike Kirk he categorically refuses to work for the Cheka or the Bolsheviks. Goldin is a member of the Left Socialist Revolutionaries, a faction of the old Socialist-Revolutionary

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<sup>39</sup> Serge’s use of the Chekist characters is interesting. He confesses in his memoirs that he thought that the creation of the Cheka was a mistake on the part of the Bolsheviks. See, Serge, *Mémoires d’un révolutionnaire*, 567. Perhaps he saw in that dread organization a better platform for the discourse of necessity?

party.<sup>40</sup> Serge introduces Goldin along with the rest of this clandestine group, who meet secretly in a former dentists' office, now dubbed "Club Le Droit du travail" / "The Right of Labor Club". This is another institution of revolution and an enemy of the Bolsheviks. Serge describes Goldin's journey to Petrograd in glowing and almost harrowing, if not heroic language: "Il avait dormi dans la paille vermineuse des wagons à bestiaux parmi les fuyards typhiques...Il rapportait une balle logée dans sa chair, au fond de la poitrine, contre la colonne vertébrale, expressément pour faire l'admiration de chirurgiens ("ah, que vous avez la vie dure!")" / "He had slept in the vermin-infested straw of cattle cars among typhoid-ridden refugees...He brought back a bullet lodged in his flesh, behind the chest, against the spinal column, expressly to bring out the admiration of the surgeons (ah, what a hard life you have!)" (*VC*, 376-377). He is clearly a sympathetic character, earnest in his beliefs and willing to take great risks. A natural leader among the group, he gets nothing but scorn from the true head of the Left Socialist Revolutionaries in Petrograd. Fanny is an apparatchik, who bears many signs of similar struggle to Goldin, but unlike him, she is suspicious, careful, and not nearly so sure of herself, though she conceals this well. She combines attributes of both Ossipov and Zvéréva. She is secretive, but not corrupt and prefers to work for revolution via an institution. She has nothing but contempt for Goldin, thinking that he was "trop avide d'exploit, pas assez dévoué au parti pour se donner aux tâches obscures et rester à son rang. Aventurier" / "too eager for an exploit, not devoted enough to the party to give himself to mundane jobs and remain in his rank. An Adventurer" (*VC*, 377). The mention of "rank" and "jobs" points to the same

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<sup>40</sup> The Socialist-Revolutionary, or SR, party was founded in 1901 and was the main rival of the Marxists Social-Democrats, which included the Bolsheviks. Their platform revolved around peasant socialism, in opposition to the industrial proletariat and acts of terror aimed at individual Tsarist ministers. Its main leader was Viktor Chernov. Serge was never part of this group.

concern for nomenclature that Zvéréva demonstrated. Even among dissidents the apparatchik's discourse is present. Characters like Kirk and Goldin prefer to use their own individual discourse of the revolution, against the collective revolutionary thought of their respective institutions. It is ironic that as Fanny thinks about rules, organization, and place, Goldin is declaiming against Bolshevik rule, "Les arrivistes et les fonctionnaires éliminant les enthousiastes" / "The recent arrivals and the functionaries eliminating the enthusiasts" (*VC*, 377). Serge seems to be saying that many institutions have their ideal and realistic elements and that the latter tend to win due to the external pressures, which require subordination by the apparatchiks to the institution's discourse.

In *Ville Conquise*, Serge recognizes clearly the limit of ideology in motivating hungry people. The Left Socialist Revolutionary meeting concerned the discontent of workers at the Wahl factory in Petrograd. The arguments center on whether or not to strike against the Bolshevik administration. Goldin's speech convinces the group, and even Fanny agrees that Goldin is the best one to send to the workers to stir them to action. The Cheka spokesman, Antonov, fears this. He knows that Goldin's speech will electrify hungry workers. However, he must allow Goldin to speak or risk a riot. In the end, he defeats Goldin by offering the workers several train cars full of provisions that were brought in at the last minute. The workers completely switch sides, so the expected strike never happens (*VC*, 388-390). Much like Kirk, Goldin's individual romantic discourse of revolution fails; an institutional response succeeds. The Chekists, representing the state, could not defeat the rhetoric, but they could offer food, a material answer to the worker's immediate problem, namely famine, and neutralize potential

unrest in the process. Thus, they maintain the state's legitimacy and right to control, as well as their own institutional expertise.

The character and experience of Goldin reveal, in a negative fashion, Serge's concept of the apparatchik's discourse. By moving outside the Bolshevik party to a rival socialist group, Serge demonstrates the dynamic seen earlier in the Cheka. In *Ville Conquise*, a novel about the inception of the new Soviet state, the apparatchik's discourse is a dialogue between individual romantic discourses and that of an institution. In Serge's novel extreme political views are dangerous. Ossipov is a key character, holding to the organization and its plan, but cushioning this with his own humanity. He uses the apparatchik's discourse, but he is in touch with reality.

Ryjik, another Chekist, also embodies a positive exhibition of Serge's fictional take on the apparatchik's discourse. More importantly, Ryjik, like Zvéréva, will reappear in later Serge novels, including *S'il est minuit dans le siècle* and *L'affaire Toulaév*. Ryjik combines many elements of the three earlier mentioned Chekists. He is at heart a romantic, like Kirk, but also like Ossipov, holds to his institutional duty and furthermore, like Zvéréva, suppresses his individuality, only this is done to reinforce his devotion to duty and not for some private gain. Ryjik is, however, a true believer in the revolution and his ties to the state and its institutions, including the Cheka is weak. Thus he appears in the other two novels in this study as a dissenter. In *Ville Conquise*, Ryjik appears mainly at the beginning and towards the end of the novel. His life frames the work and gives Serge an opportunity to state clearly his ideal. Ryjik is another Chekist, but he is often given repugnant duties. He combines the apparatchik's discourse with his own personal discourse. Towards the end of the novel, for example, he is put in charge of a

prison, which ironically was where he himself was an inmate in 1914. Ryjik journeys from dissent to authority and back to dissent again. As a former prisoner, Ryjik is lenient with his charges. One of the inmates, for example, is Arkadi, Ryjik's former Cheka colleague, now disgraced. Despite this, Ryjik is kind to him and offers to help him see his companion, Olga, the White agent Danilov's sister and Arkadi's lover. Despite this and other acts of kindness, when ordered to do so, Ryjik organizes the efforts to *nettoyer* / "clean out" the cells of the counter-revolutionaries with grenades, though he does let the common criminals flee the prison at the last moment. Ryjik does not like the apparatchik's discourse. He compares his duties with the heavy loads he had to carry once while a prisoner in Siberia. Afterwards, he telephones his superior urgently requesting a transfer, but he gets a stiff refusal with an order to remain at his post (*VC*, 476-477).

Such disappointments do not prevent Ryjik from doing his duty for the revolution. He is adept at suppressing his romantic self for the *idem* of a Chekist and a model revolutionary. Early in the novel, for example, he is writing poetry and is very much attracted to the woman Xenia, yet he shows no affection. When Xenia shows him some of her own revolutionary verses, he merely responds with mechanical precision, "Je n'aime pas les formules romantiques. Des phrases. Tout est beaucoup plus simple: impérialisme, guerre des classes, dictature, conscience prolétarienne..." / "I do not like set romantic phrases, sentences. It's all much too simple: imperialism, class warfare, dictatorship, proletarian consciousness" (*VC*, 347). One could say he protests too much; he clearly fancies the woman, yet he uses an apparatchik's discourse laced with revolutionary jargon to create some distance, though not for the same reasons as Zvéréva

did with Gavril. He suppresses his romantic side with a force much like Zvéreva's own, as revealed in her remark to Kirk, "Vous servirez le parti" / "You will serve the party". Ryjik, however, believes in revolution and fears that his attraction to Xenia will distract him from the revolution. Zvéreva, on the other hand, believes in the Cheka and the party. She is a perfect institutional character. Using such catchwords does not betray a mechanical adherence by Ryjik to an organization, but rather the gesture of suppressing a part of him that would ordinarily respond to Xenia's poetry. Ryjik, in the interests of the revolution, allows only that part of his *ipse*, his individual personality, which corresponds with the dictates of the Bolsheviks and the Cheka, his *idem*.<sup>41</sup> The rest is circumscribed and kept submerged. Thus Ryjik, like Zvéreva and Ossipov, but unlike Kirk, demonstrates in his life the ideal expressed by an apparatchik's discourse that subordinates itself to the discourse of the state and institution. This means making the party and its aims and goals central to one's life. The contrast is Kirk, who makes his own views paramount over the organization. Among the other Chekists, the degree of subordination varies. In the end, for Serge the problem is simple; how do you square your principles with your institution? This becomes more problematic when the institution is asking, "Which side are you on?"

#### *S'IL EST MINUIT DANS LE SIÈCLE*: NECESSITY VERSUS UNREALITY

Another one of Serge's characters, Mikhaïl Ivanovitch Kostrov, understands the question well. This key character from the next novel under discussion, *S'il est minuit dans le siècle* (1939), demonstrates not only the role of "le dévouement au parti" / "devotion to the party", but prevalence of chaos and dis-information in the discourse of the apparatchik. Unlike *Ville Conquise*, this novel is set in the heyday of Stalinism. It

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<sup>41</sup> Paul Ricoeur, 143.

explores the relationship between the internees and their keepers in the burgeoning gulag system. Set in the imaginary town of Tchernaya, the Cheka here have given way to the G.P.U., or State Political Administration, and the difference is striking.<sup>42</sup> The Cheka was an “extraordinary” commission dealing with a state of emergency. The G.P.U. is a permanent institution that regulates politics. A city under siege has given way to a frozen town that is home to a handful of internees, who are not White Guards, or SR terrorists, but in fact members or former members of the Communist party. They are not avowed enemies of the state, but rather its black sheep. The state’s discourse appears more desperate; it now constricts its meaning further to exclude even some of its faithful and in the process expands the scope of its own *idem*. In a similar fashion, while in *Ville Conquise* the Cheka aimed at maintaining the state’s power under difficult circumstances using the mantle of necessity as its main construct, the G.P.U. now strives to fulfill the state’s discourse and achieve more ideological control over society. This institution must go through great effort to eradicate dissent, not merely through elimination, but through conversion of the dissident. As state and institution become more desperate, the apparatchik’s discourse of the G.P.U.’s functionaries becomes more contorted and grotesque, moving further from reality as the state tries to push aside all forms of individual conscience.

Also unlike *Ville Conquise*, Serge wrote *S’il est minuit dans le siècle* after being deported from the U.S.S.R. Now in France, he could write more at leisure, though he was still pressured to earn a living and had to endure animosity from both the right and the

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<sup>42</sup> The GPU stood for Gosudarstvennoe Politicheskoe Upravlenie, or State Political Administration. It was formed in 1922 after the disbanding of the older Cheka. It was divided into departments including State Security, Militia, Civic Registration, and Collective Labor camps and Settlements, which is GULAG in the Russian acronym.



left. The novel has longer chapters (*Ville Conquise* had twenty, this novel has only five), and a more cohesive plot centered on the character of Kostrov. While he does not dominate the plot and in fact does not appear in two of the chapters, he is a key to understanding the changes in the apparatchik's discourse that distinguish it from the way it was depicted in the first novel.

Kostrov is a professor of history. At the beginning of the novel he is giving a lecture on the French Revolution. In the course of the lecture, he talks of "Thermidor", the month in the revolutionary calendar during which Robespierre was overthrown along with the Terror. Critics in the Russian Communist party picked up this important event in the French Revolution, using it to attack the seeming rightward drift of the party on the question of the peasantry, industrialization, party democracy, and so on.<sup>43</sup> "Thermidor" is just one piece of jargon from the discourse of those apparatchiks opposed to the state. Unless one was familiar with the French Revolution and the current history of Soviet Russia, such a term might not make much sense. But the state is aware of its significance. Informants in his class pick up on these comments and bring them to the attention of the G.P.U., who arrest Kostrov and put him in prison. For seven weeks, the Kostrov is kept in what one of his cellmates terms "Chaos".<sup>44</sup> The cells are filled with inmates, one of whom blurts out that he has been charged with espionage but that he is innocent. Another inmate, known as "L'Ancien" / "the Elder" responds, "D'quoi on t'accuse, ça n'nous r'garde pas. J'dirais même que ça n'te regarde pas toi-même. Le pouvoir sait c'qu'y fait quand i nous fout en prison" / "Of what you are accused, this is not our affair. I would

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<sup>43</sup> See Trotsky, 86-94. See also Walter Daum, *The Life & Death of Stalinism: A Resurrection of Marxist Theory*, (New York: Socialist Voice Publishing Co., 1990), 142.

<sup>44</sup> Victor Serge, *S'il est minuit dans le siècle*, in *Les Révolutionnaires*, (Paris, Éditions du Seuil, 1967, 500 (hereafter cited in text as SMS). All translations are mine.

even say that it is not even your affair. Those in power know what they do when they throw us into prison” (*SMS*, 501). The mix of uncertainty and certainty is characteristic of the G.P.U.’s discourse in this novel, and it clearly creates frustration for the characters as evidenced by the Elder’s exasperated response, especially his distortion of the French in the phrase “D’quoi on t’accuse...” Even when Kostrov is taken for his first interrogation, his interrogator is quite polite, even offering cigarettes, and accuses him of nothing. Being arrested and put in prison certainly promises something bad, and indeed in another cell block “Chaos 18” most of the inmates are executed within months (*SMS*, 503). Furthermore, Kostrov and many others know that they are opponents, from varying perspectives, of the regime, but still do not know exactly why they are being charged, or with what evidence. Some are not charged at all; others are charged with something that has nothing to do with their opposition.

After the formalities, the interrogator and Kostrov begin to converse. Serge sums up the scene, “Les deux hommes attablés face à face et fumant parurent jouer un jeu compliqué au moyen de phrases à double sens mêlant la menace voilée à l’objurgation pateline; le ton passait de paternel à l’officiel.” / “The two men seated face to face across a table, smoking, seemed to play a complicated game in which ordinary sentences take on double meanings, with veiled threats mixing with wheedling entreaties; the tone passed from paternal to official” (*SMS*, 506). Throughout the quote, Serge describes the mixing of discourses. The interrogator switches between the apparatchik’s discourse with one of friendship and camaraderie. In *Ville Conquise*, Zvéreva and Ryjik demonstrate the use of the institutional discourse, via nomenclature and jargon to create distance, but the G.P.U. apparatchiks appear to be uses asymmetric speaking roles. Serge continues to reinforce

this imagery. He describes another conversation. Although the interrogator again alternates between discourses. The interrogator asks the questions and offers advice, but does not accuse Kostrov of any crime. He merely goes on politely about how Kostrov should "...scrutât lui-même sa conscience..." / "examine his own conscience himself" (*SMS*, 506). When Kostrov shows some reluctance, he then turns sharply into an official tone complete with threats, "Enfin, ce sera comme vous voudrez...Excusez-moi, j'ai peu de temps" / "Very well, it will be as you wish...Excuse me, I have little time" (*SMS*, 506). Throughout, the interrogator maintains the initiative, he asks all the questions, switches his discourse, and cuts off the conversation with no warning. Kostrov is left confused, frustrated and in the end he explodes and rages about the "ce vilain jeu" / "this nasty game" and complains about the prison conditions (*SMS*, 506). He starts even to compare them with Fascist prisons when the interrogator cuts him off: "... voilà une comparaison malheureuse; elle sent son contre-révolutionnaire d'une lieue" / "ah, an unfortunate comparison; it smells counter-revolutionary from far away" (*SMS*, 506-507). This causes Kostrov to stop, flustered and exhausted. The interrogator calms him and actually apologizes for the bad conditions, making excuses. He then concludes the interview and has him transferred to a new, single cell. Regardless of Kostrov's statements, the interrogator maintains an asymmetric speaking role by alternating the discourse between that of the apparatchik, complete with threats, and a friendly one that offers help.

By this stage, the apparatchik's discourse becomes not an excuse for harsh necessity (*Ville Conquise*), but a form of deception to control dissidents and neutralize their criticisms. The entire interview is a complete fiction. The interrogator wants to

know where Kostrov stands in relation to the party. Is he with them or not? But he does not say this openly and hides behind oblique statements about searching one's conscience and so forth. Why does he not come out and ask directly? Furthermore, why does he shift the discourse from kindly to official, or switch between outrage and apology over Kostrov's complaint about the prison? Lastly, why is Kostrov never charged with anything?

The use of asymmetric speaking roles and the switching of discourses is the main formula of interrogation in the novel. The G.P.U. use it to subvert Kostrov's will to transform him. Kostrov's criticisms are the discourse of his individual self, his *ipse*. He is an intellectual who studies the state and its discourse without regard for party or any other institution. He must be reduced to the *idem* of a loyal party member, a supporter of the state. This reinforces the state's discourse, but the interrogator, nevertheless, does not come out and say this. To demand of Kostrov, "Are you with us or against us?" puts the state in the spotlight, subject to analysis and criticism and gives Kostrov the initiative. Instead the interrogator asks him to examine his conscience. This puts the pressure on Kostrov and leaves no question to the suitability of the party. The changes in mood and lack of a clear charge add to the interrogator's leverage. Kostrov is in prison, separated from family and friends and with such uncertainty cannot trust his old instincts. He is an oppositionist to the regime, but the interrogator is being kind. He is also curt and pressing for time, giving Kostrov less of a chance to think things through. Not only must Kostrov accept the state in a nominal sense, but he must learn to depend on it to think for him. This is his education, and the prison is a reform school of sorts. The prison cuts him off from outside reality; he is in a sea of vague denunciations mixed with acts of kindness

and in that the helping hand of the interrogator extends forth. The reduction is in process to make Kostrov a loyal man.

This process continues. The authorities keep up the pressure. Kostrov has a heart condition, but medical treatment is inadequate; he is only given three pills. He also loses the cell that had a view of the sky; instead his new accommodation's window shows only a wall of stone. By the time of the second interview, Kostrov is in worse shape physically and emotionally. This time another interrogator is present, a major. Like the previous one, he starts with a friendly discourse and then slips into a more official semi-hostile one. He assures Kostrov that his wife and child are fine and adds that he is clearly ill and should not be in prison. But, unlike the previous interrogator, he comes to the point: "Vous n'êtes pas tout à fait un ennemi. Vous n'êtes pas tout à fait avec nous" / "You are not quite an enemy. You are not quite with us" (*SMS*, 514). This is the main formula of the new apparatchik's discourse of the party; those not following the directives of the Central Committee, the state, cannot be loyal to the Soviet Union and the revolution. What follows is a slow methodical barrage of accusations in which the major details all of Kostrov's crimes against the regime. Even here, however, the interrogator cannot be completely straight with his prisoner. After first remarking on blanks Kostrov left on the document of his original surrender to the Central Committee in 1928, he proceeds to accuse the man of spying because of his statements about the effect of collectivization in Uzbekistan. Apparently Kostrov was quite critical of the process and this opinion is wrong, but rather than saying that, the major turns it into *l'espionnage intérieur* / "internal espionage" (*SMS* 514). The major continues to mount the accusations, which include imprudent jokes Kostrov made about party leaders, his

contact with a known member of the Trotskyist group, and of course, most recently, his statements on the French Revolution: “Vous enseignez. Votre cours sur la révolution française, si on l’analysait, page à page, révélerait une si insidieuse propagande de contre-révolution que vous ne sortiriez plus jamais- oui, jamais- des camps de concentration”/ “You teach. Your course on the French Revolution, if one analyzed it, page by page, it would reveal such insidious counter-revolutionary propaganda that you would never- yes, never, leave the concentration camps” (*SMS*, 515). The formula in this apparatchik’s discourse reveals its dualism. All of Kostrov’s actions are taken as attacks against the regime. Loyalty and dissent are absolute; there is no room for a “loyal opposition”. An *ipse* that does not match the party’s *idem* is now not possible. Kostrov must choose: drop his dissent and become loyal to the state, or keep his identity and be sent away forever.

Kostrov does not refute his accuser but still considers the whole business to be so much rubbish. The interrogator continues to stress the need for submission and when Kostrov resists, he changes mood again, feigning anger and adding that only sincere repentance can save him. Tortured by physical deprivation and now the pointed accusations of the GPU and still fearful over the eventual fate of his wife and child, Kostrov surrenders. As he did in 1928, he writes out his capitulation, which mostly extols the Central Committee of the Communist party, especially its justice and wisdom, and disavows his own errors born of both a petit-bourgeois spirit and counter-revolutionary influence. What is perhaps most important in this scene is Kostrov’s meeting with another inmate, Sacha, who holds high the virtues of capitulation. For Sacha, the revolution was as a beached whale and would stay one for the next two decades. In the meantime, why not use one’s expertise for the good of the state. Staying in prison

accomplishes nothing for yourself or anyone else (SMS, 519-520). Sacha is using the apparatchik's discourse. Thus ends the first chapter of *S'il est minuit dans le siècle*. Kostrov surrenders that part of his self that disagrees with the Central Committee and makes him a traitor in its eyes, rather than a simple dissident. The statements made by Sacha seem to point to some sort of compromise with the party and the apparatchik's discourse. Perhaps that part of the *ipse* can work under the regime and express its individuality: "Aller en prison ne servirait à rien. Qu'on nous laisse au moins construire des usines...devenons des techniciens. Si la révolution peut renaître un jour, c'est sur une base technique régénérée, avec un nouveau prolétariat" / "Going to prison serves nothing. Let them at least allow us to build factories...let us become technicians. If the revolution can be reborn one day, it will be on a regenerated technical basis, with a new proletariat" (SMS, 519).

Sacha's ideas may seem far fetched and perhaps just to brighten Kostrov's spirit as he writes out his surrender, but *S'il est minuit dans le siècle* does try to show how avowed dissidents try to preserve themselves within the state's discourse, moving between its physical means of coercion and the discourse. Throughout the interrogation, the state is presented as the only community and way to it is through capitulation. If this is so, he is in for a surprise, and this makes a lie of Sacha's boasting. Following Kostrov's surrender, we are introduced to his eventual destination, Tchernaya, a desolate town that now primarily serves as a place of deportation for the regime's enemies, whether they have surrendered or not. Kostrov is going to a place with sunlight and open air, but he is still in a prison. More important, this prison contains another community than that of the party, and the members of this community are also Communists.

In the town of Tchernaya, Serge introduces us to five other dissidents who have been deported, Avelii, a college student, Rodion, a truck driver, Elkin, an ex-soldier, Varvara, a worker in the fish co-op, and lastly Ryjik, the former Chekist from *Ville Conquise*. Serge describes their condition, “séparés et réunis, prodigieusement libres et misérablement captifs, chacun suivant le chemin de sa foi, un assez rude chemin. Quatre hommes, une femme, cinq périls pour le régime, cinq dossiers...” / “separated and reunited, prodigiously free and miserably captive, each following the path of his/her own faith, a rough enough path. Four men, one woman, five dangers to the regime. Five dossiers” (*SMS*, 528). The contradiction expressed by Serge is the contradiction of the apparatchik’s discourse in this novel and that of the dissident. Here are five people who are enemies of the regime, by its own standards, and are thus deported to a small backwater where they can be kept under surveillance. Yet they are not imprisoned, have access to sky and fresh air and can even meet with one another in secret, forming an informal committee of five. Each is a committed Communist, yet critic of the current regime. Each still clings to his or her individual person, as the dominant expression of themselves, yet they share sameness as oppositionists. Not only have they, unlike Kostrov, not surrendered to the Central Committee, but also they have formed their own secret institution of revolution in defiance of the state. Serge gives us little samples of their interactions. In one scene Elkin makes fun of Ryjik, who on the spot had composed a verse about the Iénissei River, and suggests he apply for a job with the Pastoral Poet’s Division of the Union of Soviet Writers. Ryjik’s caustic reply, “Fous-moi, le paix” / “Give me peace” is just as indicative of Serge’s own view of literature in Stalin’s time as it is of Ryjik’s chagrin. Serge characterized most literature in the U.S.S.R. as being done



by “writers in uniform”. His own decision to write in French and have his works published in France may in part stem from this state of Soviet literature.<sup>45</sup> Later there is a charming scene of Rodion, a rather bashful, young, yet intelligent man having tea with the careworn, veteran revolutionary Varvara (*SMS* 547-548). This group breaks the party’s monopoly on community, expressed though the vehicle of the party’s apparatchik’s discourse, which creates a forced community by suppressing the *ipse* of one’s identity in favor of the acquired identification of party membership, another *idem*. They help one another, dispute with each other and can even joke at each other’s expense.

At the same time, this is not just a group of close friends banding together against an outside enemy. They are a miniature of the state and function like any bureaucratic institution. Their own discourse is an apparatchik’s discourse and they are apparatchiks as much as they are idealistic revolutionaries. After his teasing of Ryjik, Elkin turns to Varvara, “Je passe à l’ordre du jour. Rapport sur l’isolateur de Verknéouralsk, question agraire, le front unique en Allemagne. Vous avez la parole, Varvara” / “I turn now to today’s agenda. Report on the Verkhne-Uralsk Isolator, the agrarian question, and the united front in Germany. You have the floor, Varvara” (*SMS*, 536). Elkin’s statements denote asymmetric speaking rights. Varvara is given the right to make the general report. She proceeds to report on the struggles of other deportees in other isolators, especially a hunger strike involving both anarchists and Left Communists, the label this committee applies to itself. Her report includes figures on the numbers of dissidents in various locations along with trends and projections about the future stability and policies of the bureaucracy versus the conscious resistance of the proletarian vanguard. She laces her

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<sup>45</sup> (*SMS*, 535), See Serge, *Mémoires d’un révolutionnaire*, 719-721.

report with jargon analogous to the G.P.U., utilizing such phrases as “la dictature bonapartiste” / “the Bonapartist dictatorship”, or “la bureaucratie dirigeante” / “the ruling bureaucracy”, and “le secteur communiste non organisé, les bien-pensants suspects qui ne comprennent rien à ce qui leur arrive et qui continuent les pires platitudes...” / “the sector of unorganized Communists, the orthodox party members under suspicion who do not comprehend what is coming and who continue their pious platitudes” (SMS, 536). Present in these phrases are the same kind of phrases seen earlier in this novel. For example, to label the ruling regime as “Bonapartist” implies some sort of coup d’état in the manner of both Napoleon I and III. Comparing nineteenth century French politics with Soviet politics in the post Lenin period is not very illuminating, nor would it make much sense to someone not familiar with both French and Russian history. Stalin was neither a great conqueror nor a political adventurer. Stalin was an Old Guard Bolshevik who generally had most of the party and politburo aligned with him. To call the regime “Bonapartist” makes as much sense as calling Kostrov’s inquiries into collectivization in Uzbekistan espionage. Likewise, to call the bureaucracy “ruling” misses the point, as the “bureaucracy” is but the name of the institutions of power in the hands of the state, the party. The remark is aimed at Stalin, who, as Secretary General, then exercised the most influence and power over the party’s machinery and that of the new state. But the rule by bureaucratic decree from the party’s central organs predates Stalin’s rise by many years, especially if one considers the decisions by the tenth party conference (1921), which forbade factions within the party. Varvara and her comrades use jargon as part of their own discourse, to not only explain their view of the revolution and its fate, but also to deny the state the legitimacy of its control. The Soviet state is not an honest expression of

the society, but an irresponsible clique of criminal pencil pushers. Likewise, those who follow the line are idiots who do not realize what is going on. This formula, like Kostrov's espionage, explains little to any outsiders about the situation, but it provides the five with their own discourse to oppose that of the state and its institutions. It allows the dissidents to turn tables on the apparatchiks in charge and create their own dualism to keep up their struggle, all the more important given the odds of survival, let alone success.

Apparently others, however, see amid Varvara's phrase mongering and correlation of statistics the very specter of the party's apparatchik's discourse. Elkin cuts her off in mid-sentence, railing over the use of figures to demonstrate what they already know: "La révolution révèle un visage faux qui n'est plus le sien. Elle se réfute, se nie, nous abat, nous tue. Tu le vois; mais peux-tu le croire?" / "The revolution reveals a false face, which is no more its own. It refutes itself, negates itself, slaughters us, and kills us. You see it; but are you able to believe it?" (*SMS*, 537) He not only attacks the key aspiration of his group (renewal of the revolution) here, but, more importantly, Varvara's construct of the situation. The revolution kills the dissidents, not some maverick bureaucracy. As if to emphasize the point and in the process deconstruct Varvara's platform altogether, he adds: "Je demande que l'on pèse la thèse et antithèse; que chaque mot soit médité" / "I demand that you weigh the thesis and anti-thesis; that you meditate on each word" (*SMS*, 537). This request by Elkin is the opposite of the apparatchik's discourse as presented in this novel. To study every single word of any statement prevents the obfuscation upon which the discourse relies. Varvara's statements cannot explain truly complex phenomena, such as the course of the Russian revolution in the

post Lenin period, by subsuming an argument into a catchphrase, “Bonapartist dictatorship” for example, that has usually the most tenuous of connections with reality. It is easier to remember than a full argument and needs no explanation and in turn provides none. It is mostly independent of any reality. Elkin’s statement demands the reverse of this process.

Elkin himself even uses the apparatchik’s discourse in his next line; after attacking Varvara’s mysteries, he brings out some of his own, “Prenez garde à ne point méconnaître la dictature du prolétariat, si elle est malade, si elle perd la tête, si elle est inique.” / “Take care not to underestimate the dictatorship of the proletariat, if it is sick, if it loses its head, if it is evil” (SMS, 537). This almost mystical conjuring of the power of the state that brings instant response from Ryjik. Taking full measure of Elkin and his statements he tells him, “Défie-toi de toi-même, camarade. Tes illusions, s’expliquent bien, mais tu te grises de mots. Sommes-nous des Enragés, des Egaux ou des proscrits de Prairial?” / “Watch yourself comrade. Your illusions explain themselves well, but you are drunk on words. Are we the Enraged, Equals or the outlaws of Prairial?”(SMS, 537) After using the direct approach, using the key word, “illusions”, Ryjik proceeds to mock Elkin by parading more jargon from the French revolution and asking him to choose a term for the group. The romantic appeal of using the terms and monikers of previous revolutions was strong, as seen in both Varvara and Kostrov’s case, and thus lends itself to their apparatchik’s discourse. They are institutional badges, providing a discourse of legitimacy. They are also historical analogies that merely provide another short circuit to reasoning.

The meeting ends abruptly after this exchange. There is no denying that both Varvara and Elkin indulged in their own variation of the apparatchik's discourse, using jargon and formula. Serge has created between this group and the state and its institutions a binary opposition in which both are distinct yet resemble each other.<sup>46</sup> Despite this, one cannot deny that Varvara's report did include hard numbers and appears to examine the current political trend in a vaguely scientific manner. When we turn to the apparatchik, who has been placed in charge of these dissidents, we see difference in degree if not in kind. The new commissar in charge of the dissidents of Tchernaya, comrade Fédossenko, shows a complete reduction of a man by the G.P.U.'s apparatchik's discourse. Serge uses mechanical language to describe this man, who seems to resemble a human, but he isn't one. Fédossenko has no "soul" or "mind"; he is merely a being. Serge reiterates over and over, in different ways, that this man does not think and is a machine, right down to the character's mechanical use of such Marxist terms as "historical consciousness" (*SMS*, 562). The repetition of jargon alone suggests not only the manner of education of Fédossenko, but also the content. This is a man of limited intellect stuffed with ideas from the party's apparatchik's discourse, which have been learned by rote, and who now is put in charge of the political rehabilitation of six political dissidents. Five dissidents were already here when he arrived and Kostrov was coming to join them.

The arrival of Fédossenko certainly will test the resolve of the dissident. He is not only unthinking; he is brutal. He is, in fact, in rehabilitation himself. He was overseeing the building of the new Baltic-White Sea Canal, which involved the work of over 175,000 convicts, undergoing a rehabilitation of their own. Fédossenko abused his position when he raped a young woman convict. The woman was able to make a

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<sup>46</sup> Marshall, 137.

complaint and have him removed. He lacked the subtlety of say, Zvéreva, who also abused her position, but also displayed enough institutional expertise to cause Ossipov to dismiss any accusation against her made by Kirk. Ironically Zvéreva and Fédossenko, the two apparatchiks in Serge's novels most devoted to institution and state, are both maladjusted sexually. Both do not have true relationships. They have suppressed their own *ipse* and resolve their frustration via deviant sexual behavior, whether masturbation or rape. Serge saw a connection between "power hierarchies" like the Soviet bureaucracy and the use of sex as power over individuals.<sup>47</sup> Serge also seems to be saying that the extreme suppression of the self leads to an inability to have a proper relationship with another.

Fédossenko even extends his brutality to the written word as well. While supervising Tchernaya, he also studies, by correspondence, from the Security Department. His readings include both professional studies in police and security work, including a book on investigative methods in the United States, and official party works on the struggle against "Trotskyism" and such. All this literature conforms to his role as an apparatchik policeman. "Cette science réduite en paragraphes, alinéas, formules résumées, avec memento en vingt lignes pour chaque leçon et questions à se poser soi-même (voir la réponse à la dernière page du fascicule)..." / "This science reduced to paragraphs, indentions, formulas, résumés, with twenty line summaries for each lesson and questions to ask yourself on your own (see the correct response on the last page of the booklet)" (*SMS*, 569). Again, Serge reminds us of the limited "mechanical" intelligence of this character. He cannot learn more than simple formula and jargon that can be repeated. He cannot think in any higher fashion. Thus his studies are of little use

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<sup>47</sup> Marshall, 138.

for the deportees here. Fédossenko begins his police work by opening their mail to get into their minds. When it comes to analyzing a postcard written by Ryjik, including looking at the writing with a magnifying glass, Fédossenko does not even understand it. Given Ryjik's poetic sensibilities, it is no wonder that the commissar cannot grasp *l'esprit subtil* / "the subtle spirit" of Ryjik's note. This, however, only angers Fédossenko, "Eh, nom de Dieu de psychologie, pensait Fédossenko, je m'en vais tout de même vous faire baver, moi..." / "God damn psychology, thought Fedossenko, all the same I am going to put you through the mill myself..." (SMS, 569) The remark not only suggests brutality but also a perceived inferiority and determination to prove himself after his earlier dismissal. Such attitudes, like the aforementioned sexuality seem part and parcel with Serge's more extreme apparatchiks. Zvéréva held similar attitudes toward Kirk, who mocked her discourse with his constant questioning. Both Fédossenko and Zvéréva adhere to a rigid formula of the apparatchik's discourse that precludes the display of an individual discourse before others in the institution. Ricoeur speaks of "acquired identifications". These are a set of characteristics or dispositions by which one identifies with some pre-existing identity, usually not only already recognized by society, but also a way in which society recognizes itself.<sup>48</sup> Thus there is a powerful pull on people to conform regardless of their habits in life. Unfortunately, the state's discourse has constricted its notion of loyalty. As it excludes more and more of society, those that adhere to its discourse will find a smaller and smaller community.

In Serge's novel, the apparatchik's discourse upholds not only the legitimacy of the ruling power, but also a formula of conduct in order to show loyalty to that power. Thus the apparatchik's discourse in effect establishes its own "acquired identifications",

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<sup>48</sup> Ricoeur, 146.

by which the state recognize its own and how its own recognize each other. The conduct of the society defined by this discourse becomes all-important, and naturally, opposition to the discourse itself, dissidence, which opposes the discourse by pointing out its error, is the worst form of conduct, the highest sin. As we have seen with Ossipov, for Serge, the apparatchik's discourse need not be completely removed from reality. The state and G.P.U.'s discourse in *S'il est minuit dans le siècle* are different. They are further removed from logic or reason. This can lead to a distortion of the self. Serge gives another example of this in *S'il est minuit dans le siècle* with the single scene he devotes to Stalin himself.

Stalin appears after Serge has introduced the dissidents of Tchernaya and the arrival of both Fédéossenko and Kostrov. He is in the Kremlin having a discussion with the other key men in the Politburo. Serge's characterization of the man makes him out to be both a functionary and outlaw all in one: "...le gros diplomate qui avait été un révolutionnaire hardi, versé dans la théorie et capable, pour sauver les bank-notes du parti, d'aventurer son cou trop court jusque sous une potence impériale..." / "the large diplomat who had been a hardy revolutionary, versed in theory and capable, for saving the party's bank-notes, of risking his short neck under the imperial gallows" (*SMS*, 599). Stalin indeed had a hard revolutionary career, having initially worked as an agitator among the oil workers in Baku, he was a capable theorist and did oversee the robbery of a number of banks to finance the Bolsheviks before the revolution. Serge's description, however, suggests degeneration. Like Kirk, Stalin had once been an outlaw, though of a more violent type, but now was "le gros diplomate". Serge also compares him earlier to a



diamond merchant in Antwerp or a Rothschild banker.<sup>49</sup> Thus Stalin appears to be like Fédossenko or Zvéréva. He was once a hardened and intelligent revolutionary who is now obsessed with state power. Moreover, the words “gros diplomate” suggest someone who desires to keep peace and prevent conflict, not out of altruism, but to preserve the status quo and keep the profits coming. The ramification of this designation, in light of the apparatchik’s discourse, would bode ill for the dissidents of Tchernaya.

In his discussion, Stalin talks of a party conference coming up. Fearing agitation from both rightist and leftist dissidents to the party line, Stalin has one order for Heinrich Grigoiévitch Yagoda, his head of the G.P.U., “Bouclez, hein bouclez! Et informez-moi de tout” / “Lock them up, eh lock them up! And inform me of everything” (*SMS*, 600). Stalin wants no disruption of the conference, which will feature issues and resolutions of interest to both factions. It must be “unanime dans toutes ses manifestations” / “unanimous in all demonstrations” and no surprises. (*SMS*, 601) This order and fear seems incredible when applied to leftist dissidents, like those in Tchernaya who are under constant surveillance and harassment, but Stalin has his reasons: “Soyons matérialistes. Le plus grand péril n’est point celui que l’on voit, c’est celui que l’on ne saurait déceler parce qu’il n’existe pas encore dans les faits: l’analyse le révèle latent au sein des masses” / “Let us be materialists. The greatest danger is not those things one sees, it is those that cannot yet be revealed because it does not yet exist in the facts: analysis reveals it latent among the masses” (*SMS*, 602). For Stalin, the greatest threat is a potential, which seems unreachable, as it does not yet have any visible reality. But if that is so, is

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<sup>49</sup> Victor Serge, *S’il est minuit dans le siècle*, 598-599. Note that Kirk’s criminal activity in the U.S. amounted to vagrancy and not armed robbery. See also *Ville Conquise*, 437. Serge’s villains tend to commit real crimes that injure others. Fédossenko’s rape is an example. Thus we see the real criminals as wardens over the innocents.

not the arresting of dissidents a strike at that potential, a potential with a visible reality in the form of the dissidents scattered across the breadth of Russia in gulags? Stalin continues by invoking Marx and Engels' *The Holy Family*, especially the discussion on the essence of the proletariat. Stalin takes Marx's description of the proletariat's innate drive to oppose the bourgeoisie and to abolish private property and its own existence as a class, which of course results in an opposite drive by the latter to sustain itself, and applies it to the current political situation.<sup>50</sup> If the leftist elements, such as the dissidents in deportation, are allowed to express their discourse, no matter how weak they are, it will call forth an opposite, rightist discourse, who will demand breaking up of the communes and restoration of private plots for the peasants. "*Dia-lek-ti-ka*, cher camarade. L'affirmation appelle la négation une nouvelle négation qui est à son tour une nouvelle affirmation puisqu'elle est la négation de la négation" / "Dia-lec-tic, dear comrade. Affirmation calls forth negation and negation in its turn a new affirmation which then is the negation of the negation" (SMS, 602). Stalin reduces the struggle between the various ideologies in the Russian Communist Party to a simple formula, complete with jargon, which takes no account of the social meaning of these positions, nor their relevance nor the pertinent fact that most of the opposition is in some form of detention. His discourse does not really explain the situation, but provides reasons and motivation for his order to Yagoda. This does not, however, explain why Serge's Stalin would want to harass further and detain a seemingly broken group of dissidents?

The explanation lies further in the narrative, where we see evidence that Stalin may be a believer of his own theoretical constructs and thus not the swindler implied earlier. By use of the state's discourse and his own reading of Marx, Stalin comes to

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<sup>50</sup> Karl Marx and Frederick Engels, *The Holy Family*, 35-36.

conclusions that do not necessarily conform to other modes of logic or reasoning. Serge makes his state of mind most clear: “Et songez que le chef des peuples socialistes chemine sur une terre prête à se fendre sous ses pas en abîmes; que son œil exercé à sonder les possibles voit partout grandir des hydres...” / “And think that the chief of the Socialist people is walking on ground ready to open itself into an abyss under his feet; that his eye practiced at probing sees hydras springing up everywhere....” (*SMS*, 602) Stalin has clearly bought into the state’s discourse of reducing everyone to either supporters or opponents of the Central Committee. We see here a figure that stands alone against the enemy. Such heroic posturing already possesses a sense of loneliness. But it only gets worse: “Songez que ceux qui feignent d’être ses plus proches camarades épient ses moindres mouvements, mais que, scrutant, au-delà même des intentions réelles des hommes... le Chef pressent tout à coup dans le plus sûr de ses compagnons des traîtes en puissance” / “Understand that those who pretend to be his closest comrades also spy on his slightest moves, and that, the Chief is searching beyond the real intentions of men...the Chief suspects that in the most loyal of his companions, there are potential traitors” (*SMS*, 602). Stalin has no one to rely upon except himself. The worse enemies are the ones around him who can spy upon him. This alienation is similar to that of both Fédossenko and Zvéreva, two individuals also cut off from basic human contact and unable to see anyone else except as a potential threat or gain. Stalin’s manner of explaining his understanding to the Politburo gives the sense of a master who alone knows what to do, the others being mere ciphers: “Et tout repose sur lui, vivante clef de voûte de l’édifice” / “And all rests on him, the living keystone of the edifice” (*SMS*, 602). Thus, Serge shows us a Stalin whose own theoretical knowledge supports his acceptance

of the party's apparatchik's discourse, which in turn provides the logic for his course of action. The man is trapped in a vicious circle.

This picture does not agree with the image of the *gros diplomate* / fat diplomat described earlier, yet the same could be said of Fédossenko and Zvéreva. All three individuals have embraced an apparatchik's discourse as essential to their lives and so enforce the dictates of that discourse to a fault. It seems to make them more formidable as all the hard decisions have been made and they can respond with a preset formula. This, however, also means that they have an almost instinctive hatred of any form of dissent and tend to view themselves as solitary fighters against it. And lastly, they have also abused their positions of authority in their own private interest and show no remorse of any kind for their actions. Thus, Serge shows us the result of this extreme form of the apparatchik's discourse on the human soul. As it breaks up true human relationships in the name of a false community, the adherents of the discourse themselves lose any sense of connection with other human beings. The lack of remorse and resort to extreme measures would indicate a criminal-like mindset, one wholly dysfunctional in a social sense. But, the discourse is not just an excuse to allow persons to take advantage of others; Stalin and company are not merely gangsters. They are victims of the state's discourse, which in attempting to better the world, merely simplified it for the apparatchiks and gave them equally simple means of creating it. This results not only in an abiding faith, but also intolerance for those without it and a justification for taking advantage, as the true keepers of the discourse are so embattled.

## *L'AFFAIRE TOULAÉV*: THE DESTRUCTION OF THE APPARATCHIK

Such embattled figures seem very vulnerable. The apparatchik's discourse must appear constant and yet be flexible. You must deny what you see and rely on the state's discourse, coupled with institutional assistance. In *L'Affaire Toulaév*, which Serge wrote in his final place of exile, Mexico, he uses both the collage effect of *Ville Conquise* and the more cohesive plotting of *S'il est minuit dans le siècle* to illustrate the downfall of "haut-commissaire à la Défense intérieure" / "high commissar for internal security" Erchov. This downfall follows the shooting of a top party official, a member of the Central Committee, Toulaév. Erchov, as the chief security official in the N.K.V.D. (People's Commissariat for Internal Affairs), the *glaive de la dictature* / "sword of the dictatorship", a man who oversees over 3000 dossiers all involving capital punishment, will have to bear the responsibility of finding a culprit for the Central Committee to condemn, even if that culprit should be himself.<sup>51</sup>

The real culprit in this murder case is Kostia, a young worker, tormented by hunger and walking alone on a cold night. He shoots Toulaév in a moment of anger and recognition, "Toulaév? Du Comité central? Celui des déportations en masse de la région de Vorogène? Celui de l'épuration des universités?" / "Toulaév? Of the Central Committee? The one responsible for the mass deportations from the Vorogen region? The one responsible for the university purges?" (*AT*, 683). Only seconds after this recognition comes the explosion from his pistol. The killing was political, performed by a solitary individual, and most importantly, not witnessed by anyone. This noxious combination

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<sup>51</sup> Victor Serge, *L'affaire Toulaév*, in *Les Révolutionnaires*, (Paris, Éditions du Sueil, 1967), 692 (hereafter cited in text as *AT*). Translations mine. The N.K.V.D. was the larger umbrella organization, which housed the G.P.U. In 1934 the latter was abolished and its functions transferred to the new "All-Union N.K.V.D.". Erchov probably directed one of the new departments from this reorganization, the G.U.G.B. or "Main Administration of State Security."

ensures that the state will suspect some sort of plot. Toulaév was a highly placed apparatchik himself; his death automatically has political implications, regardless of Kostia's own motivation. Toulaév willingly belongs to the party that governs the state. Attacking him is an attack on the party, which is an attack on the state and since all such attacks on party members are political, the idea of a single non-political shooter falls by the wayside. As we saw in *S'il est minuit dans le siècle*, Serge portrayed Stalin as seeing himself constantly in battle with snakes coming up from the ground. The state has enemies everywhere disputing its discourse of legitimacy of control, and so any attack must be from an enemy. This unfortunately includes not only dissidents, but fellow apparatchiks as well. Serge's Stalin sees his worst potential enemies among his closest advisors. These are the ones who are close and can spy. How else could the shooter have been directed to the place where he could kill Toulaév without being seen? It does not matter that Toulaév was on his way to see his mistress, the wife of an absent friend, and thus his necessary discretion made him vulnerable and unprotected. The party has been attacked; the attacker has not been found; someone may have simply blundered, but in the newest formula of the apparatchik's discourse, a mistake equals treason.

Making mistakes and then being accused of treason becomes the main problem for Erchov. It also shows us how the discourse of the state and its institutions has moved from necessity to unreality. Already within three days of the investigation, there are sixty-seven arrests. Suspicion was first cast on Toulaév's secretary, as she was the mistress of a non-party student, and then on the murdered man's chauffeur. For sixty hours afterward, this poor wretch is subjected to the same question hundreds of times over by relays of interrogators who shout, "Répondez! Après avoir tiré, qu'avez-vous

fait?” / “Answer! After you fired, what did you do?” (AT, 686). They keep him from sleeping and use everything from coffee to brandy to cigarettes to keep him from collapsing from sheer exhaustion, not just from staying awake for so long, but from continuing with all the strength he can muster to deny any wrongdoing. In Ricoeur’s understanding, the chauffeur is maintaining his self, his *ipse*, by keeping to his story, which he knows to be the truth. It is a variation of “keeping one’s word”, which Ricoeur uses as an example of permanence of the self over time.<sup>52</sup> By holding to his self, the chauffeur can reject the formula created by his interrogators. As their repeated question implies, they want him to accept the role of the shooter. In fact they have already set him up as the assassin. They do not ask if he fired the gun, but what he did *after* firing the gun. If the chauffeur were to answer the question, as opposed to his repeated denials, he accepts the interrogators’ formula, that of an assassin and traitor. The tag of traitor/assassin is a formula that is easily recognized and manipulated by the party, and more importantly easily understood by the society at large. The self-identity of an honest chauffeur who acted too discreetly so that his boss could walk to his mistress’ home with no attention drawn is not so easily manipulated to ensure of the state’s legitimacy, nor is it as easily accepted by society as well. Thus we see in this novel an important key in the working of the plot, namely the complete dislocation of information from any permanence. The chauffeur’s repeated denial is an affirmation of truth, not only of his part in Toulaév’s death, but also of his very identity, which the interrogators are trying to change.

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<sup>52</sup> Ricoeur, *Soi-même comme un autre*, 142. See also Mark Muldoon, *On Ricoeur*, (Belmont, Wadsworth, 2002), 88.

More importantly, though the poor wretch may not know it, his resistance to admitting any wrongdoing is already helping to seal the fate of the top security chief in the U.S.S.R., Erchov. The need to get the chauffeur to admit his complicity shows only the need to find a shooter. But a plot consists of more than just the assassin himself. Conspiracy requires a mind behind the act and information that makes the act possible. As stated before, Stalin saw the most evil potential among the ones closest to him, and who better to arrange an assassination than the head of security? Besides, if the head of security could not protect Toulaév from assassination, what good is he? That blame assumes the form of an accusation of treason is an important theme here and a situation of which Erchov already seems to be aware. This partially explains the sixty odd hour interrogation. He himself had kept the chauffeur under interrogation for so long so as to produce results. The failure to get one confession brought Erchov's own superior to see for himself. He sees that his investigation was going nowhere and orders to cease the "useless" interrogation (*AT*, 686). Erchov himself is becoming "useless", and that fact, rather than the investigation, is the real story of this chapter. As a member of an institution, the N.K.V.D., his superiors are calling the legitimacy of his expertise into question. If he cannot produce a confession himself, and so decide the formula of the plot to come, someone else will do it, and the results will not be good for the security chief. As the chapter progresses, it is clear that Erchov, rather than the dead Toulaév, is the focus and this is so because he is destined to become the first suspect in a conspiracy. After he surveys the interrogation of several suspects, Erchov returns to his office only to find a red envelope on his desk, a letter from the Central Committee. Opening it, he reads another order to investigate a certain Matvei Titov, in connection with the Toulaév case.



It seems that this Titov has implicated Erchov's own institution, the Security branch itself, in the murder. More importantly, the only way the Central Committee could have known of this man is because Erchov's own deputy, Gordéev, has reported it, without informing him. Not only has someone implicated Erchov's own institution with the killing, but also Erchov's own deputy is clearly and openly reporting on him to the central authorities. As Serge's other novels show, apparatchiks in the same institution can often have very different discourses.

Gordéev is in fact another Zvéréva. He is an ugly man, corpulent with pomaded hair, "quelque chose de porcine en lui, - avec une insolence servile d'animal domestique trop bien nourri" / "something of a pig in him, - with a servile insolence of a too well nourished domestic animal" (*AT*, 688). He combines scrupulous attention to state and institutional directives with an almost stupid manner with superiors. In fact, like Zvéréva, he is a better apparatchik than the man he serves. Erchov does not see the importance of the Titov affair; perhaps neither does Gordéev himself, but he knows the Politburo's directive and so he focuses his investigation on Titov. He reminds Erchov of the Central Committee's instructions, which state that "...toutes les plaintes, dénonciations, allusions" / "...all complaints, denunciations, even allusions" that they could find were to be submitted to the Politburo (*AT*, 688). Erchov still retains too much understanding of "reality" outside the apparatchiks discourse, hence his dismissal of the Titov affair. Gordéev, however, is the better apparatchik, whatever his motives, as he follows the orders of the state, ridiculous or not. When in irritation, Erchov asks whether he has already interrogated Titov, Gordéev does not respond in kind, as he "trouvait commode de se donner l'air épais" / "found it convenient to look stupid", and instead gives a report

of the interrogation, which was observed by his secretary (*AT*, 688). There are few scenes that so pricelessly portray the difference between clear objective judgment and adhering to a formula, no matter how divorced from reality. Erchov still tries to examine the case from a logical point of view and find the killer. Gordéev, however, has seized upon what is truly important from the party's point of view, "all the complaints". Rather than searching for Toulaév's killer, the party has another goal in mind. As stated above, the killing was an attack against the state; moreover, it makes the state look weak and not in control of things. In order to restore confidence, another formula must be created for the party to master in relation to the killing. This is a plot to assassinate key leaders of the state, which is both clear and easy to see, while being murky and hard to follow all at the same time. The plot becomes the party's apparatchik's discourse in this novel.

Serge replays the above scene again, this time involving Erchov with his superior. By the sixth day of the investigation, Erchov is already feeling pressured to produce a concrete case. After a nervous wait of thirty-five minutes in an antechamber, Erchov enters his chief's office only to be confronted with one question, concerning the plot. Erchov's reply is the last thing the chief wants to hear, as the security head correctly theorizes that the killing of Toulaév was the work of a single person. The chief's response is thick with sarcasm: "Très fort, votre isolé! Supérieurement organisé!" / "Very capable, your single assassin! Very well organized!" (*AT*, 689) Not only does Erchov feel the sarcasm, he also suspects Gordéev of conducting his own investigation with completely different results. The chief's next remark, "Admettons provisoirement votre thèse de l'isolé. Par décision du Bureau politique, l'enquête ne sera pas close tant que les coupables n'auront pas été châtiés" / "Let us provisionally accept your thesis of a single

assassin. By the decision of the Politburo, the case will not be closed until all of the guilty have been punished...” does not make things any better for Erchov and in fact sends him out of his rational mind and into frenzy (*AT*, 689). Erchov grasping at the latter part of the chief’s utterance, and forgetting his single shooter theory in the process, presents several papers detailing the sentences for the first batch of twenty-five suspects, including the aforementioned chauffeur and secretary. Again, Erchov gets nowhere as all the chief can do is complain that the sentences meted out are too lenient considering the nature of the crime. Throughout the entire conversation, Erchov and his chief have no connection. The chief, with no constructive criticism or advice, ridicules everything that Erchov proposes. In fact the chief’s statements basically make no sense. In the previous quotation he opens by “provisionally” accepting Erchov’s theory of a single assassin, but then immediately reiterates the politburo’s decision that the case will not be closed until *les coupables* / “the guilty ones” have been punished. The “provisional” acceptance of Erchov’s theory is apparently forgotten within seconds, and Erchov is never given a chance to prove his theory. Moreover, even Erchov himself seems to forget it as well, and he decides to increase the sentences of the thirty-five suspects.

While Erchov clearly perceives some trouble, especially with Gordéev, he does not see the extent of the truth behind the lack of communication and veils of secrecy that surround him. He feels that the Toulaév case is just the latest piece of bad luck to dog his career as the head of an important institution, High Commissar for Security and that he must prove his expertise again to save himself. He does not know yet that he is already doomed. When he was appointed to the job, and given the mound of 3,000 capital cases to be reviewed, the intention seemed to be that he would moderate the terror and reduce

the number of executions. Stalin himself told Erchov, “On a fusillé des hommes que j’aimais, en qui j’avais confiance, des hommes précieux pour le parti, pour l’Etat!” / “Men whom I loved have been executed, men whom I had trusted, men precious to the party and the State!”, and added that the Politburo cannot review the sentence in every capital case itself (*AT*, 692). Erchov must walk the tightrope, and each day brought new cases with, “les dossiers pullulants, proliférants, débordants, envahissants, refusaient de lâcher la moindre note...” / “the dossiers swarm, proliferate, overwhelm, invade, and refuse to let go of the slightest note” (*AT*, 692). Still Erchov tries bravely to carry out his instructions to make good his predecessor’s “errors” and moderate the terror. He and his staff review ten thousand dossiers of persons who had been arrested. Over six thousand are released and rehabilitated and things seem to look better. But the mound of dossiers never lets up, especially when a new round of dismissals and arrests occurs over a report on the rehabilitations that was leaked to a White Russian newspaper. Seven hundred and fifty new denunciations against recently rehabilitated persons had appeared. Now at least thirty of the rehabilitated were proven, so diverse committees reported, to be guilty in the first place. Then Kostia fired his gun.

Rumors were already spreading the word of Erchov’s apparent incompetence when the Toulaév case broke. Whether he was too hasty, liberal, or just lacked enough expertise in the science of repression, he was not doing his job and losing his legitimacy in the process. Are the rumors concerning Erchov’s failure important? Yes, for this is key in showing that beneath the apparatchik’s discourse, people discuss real concrete reasons for Erchov’s failing at a seemingly impossible task. In other words, below the radar of officialdom, people no longer use the party’s apparatchik’s discourse. Not one of

the rumors suggests conspiracy as a motive for Erchov's failure. It makes no sense and is illogical to say the least, but most important, the apparatchiks can think outside the apparatchik's discourse, admittedly not in the open.

Erchov will be the first to be named as a conspirator in the killing of Toulaév, rather than being demoted for incompetence. Erchov will go from being a major defender of the Soviet state against plots and conspiracies to a major adversary, a wicked adversary, who has always pretended that he is the defender of the Soviet state, while all the time hatching a monstrous plot which has now cost the life of comrade Toulaév. If one can see the absurdity of this, then one might also see just what sort of trouble Erchov was in from the beginning. Every day there was a case of some wrongdoing. Whatever the case, it came to him. Hence there is a flood of dossiers, which never stops. Erchov tries to moderate things, which seemed to be Stalin's intention, but to say someone is innocent whom the state has already pronounced guilty is absurd from the point of view of the apparatchik's discourse. Moreover, Stalin never did actually tell Erchov to moderate things, only that there were too many cases for the Politburo to review and that he (Stalin) had lost many people he cared about in past purges. Again Erchov was using the rational mind of everyday and taking his master's orders far too liberally. Although by no means a dissident, Erchov himself still had known the inside of a prison in the days of the Tsar. Nevertheless, he is not quite enough the apparatchik to appreciate his position until too late. The constant reference to his predecessor and his "mistakes" (only once in the text is the man named) only reinforces the idea that Erchov is an expendable man, like all the other security heads, to provide a scapegoat for the regime when the inevitable crisis occurs (*AT*, 691). So now a confession will be extracted from him so that he can be

reduced to a category and play his new role in plot so that the state can maintain its legitimacy of control.

Erchov's dilemma, "Punish or be damned", is the occupational hazard of all inquisitors, especially his successors. The confession of Erchov is only the beginning of a much larger plot. When he finally comes around, it is a relief to the new Deputy High Commissar for Security, Gordéev. Still, for a time, Erchov's initial failure to confess after his arrest was just one of many problems. Erchov's situation is now theirs. From the time of Erchov's arrest it was now six months. A mere twelve apparatchiks pored over 150 *dossiers sélectionnés* / "select dossiers" concerning the case (*AT*, 799). Two of them, the former Chekists Fleischmann and Zvéreva, both continuing their role from *Ville Conquise*, feel even more at risk than Gordéev. Their status as "Old Bolsheviks" ensured scrutiny of their efforts in the Toulaév case. The example of Erchov was not lost on them. Their zeal, however, would be no more availing in sorting out the case than Erchov's. "L'affaire croissait en tous sens, se rattachant à une foule d'autres instructions, s'y dissolvant, s'y perdant, y resurgissant comme une dangereuse petite flamme bleue sous des décombres calcinés" / "The case criss-crossed in all directions, reattached itself in a pile of other dossiers, mingled with them, disappeared in them, re-emerged like a small dangerous blue flame under burnt ruins" (*AT*, 799). The numerous prisoners were a motley bunch, and though possibly guilty in one sense or another, could not possibly be connected with the Toulaév case. Serge's key point follows this description: "Le bon sens suggérait d'écarter les aveux d'une demi douzaine de détraqués qui relataient comment ils avaient assassiné le grand camarade Toulaév" / "Good sense suggested putting aside the confessions of a half-dozen lunatics, who related how they had assassinated the great

comrade Toulaév” (*AT*, 800). We see repetition again. Common sense suggests freeing people who obviously have no connection to the case, but the party’s new formula of a plot to explain the shooting demands someone play the role of the assassin. Furthermore, someone play the role of the mastermind and so forth. A rather deranged American woman, who openly confesses to killing Toulaév, seems promising. But the woman claims to be a single killer, just as Erchov theorized, not part of any plot. Thus not only is she useless in forming the plot, but an actual hindrance. Her self-control under interrogation astounds both Gordéev and Fleischmann and such a story could wreck quite a few careers. So we have an almost comical scene: “Des psychiâtres, en uniforme observant encore le rite des interrogatoires, s’efforçaient tour à tour, par la suggestion, par l’hypnose, par la psychoanalyse, de la persuader de son innocence.” / “Some psychiatrists in uniform still observing the rite of interrogation, in turn applied suggestion, hypnosis, and psychoanalysis to persuade her of her innocence” (*AT*, 800). Here we see the apparatchik’s discourse in clear operation, as the interrogators must now apply formulas of interrogation and psychiatry on the woman to exculpate her rather than to extract a confession. The issue is control by the state over information; this allows seeming control over events, which in turn helps to support the state’s legitimacy. Thus by concocting a plot to have killed Toulaév and having the “plotters” arrested and sentenced, the party appears strong and able to defend itself and the nation at large. The state and its institutions could not find the real reason for Toulaév’s death and so must create a reason. The clever use of identities allows the party to bolster its formula of a plot. People become raw material as their confessions give seeming truth to a fabrication. Thus when the psychiatrists in uniform are unable to convince the woman of her

innocence, Fleischmann suggests persuading her that she has killed someone, anybody but Toulaév: “Ayez de l’imagination, voyons!” / “Go on use your imagination”, he shouts (*AT*, 800). Between the psychiatrists and the inmates, many of whom are clearly as insane as the American woman, there is only a thin line. The insane inmates are clearly not connected, but it would take a brave man to dismiss them, and neither Fleischmann nor Gordéev is that brave. The psychiatrists are sent back in for further interrogations, and they in turn will go insane themselves (*AT*, 801).

Serge continues his mocking of Soviet justice in the next scene. Gordéev, Fleischmann, and Zvéréva, meet with their superior, *procureur* / “Prosecutor” Ratchevsky, who had just finished an interview with Stalin himself. In a long and rambling address that is equal parts scolding, agitating and command, Ratchevsky sums up the plot formula in terms of its effect and operation. In terms of the former, he is clear, “La conscience du parti se tourne vers nous et sollicite des explications que nous ne pourrions lui fournir qu’aux audiences d’un procès en quelque sorte complémentaire....” / “The conscience of the party turns to us and asks for the explanations that we can only furnish to the audiences of trial in some complementary fashion” (*AT*, 806). The phrase “conscience of the party” is an expression of the state’s discourse. The party guides the Soviet state and its belief in the state and its mission must be maintained or the state’s legitimacy suffers. While some in the party are bought with position and privilege, there should be many who must be convinced in some way related to socialism, in other words “explanations”. The phrase also suggests that the identity of the party as a whole as well as the individual members is at stake. In Ricoeur’s terms, adapted to a mass scale, this means that the apparatchiks accept a ready-made reason for party policy and so in effect



are taking on an identity of the same, rather than pursuing matters heuristically on their own.

Thus, in order to maintain the state's discourse of legitimacy, one of its key institutions, the N.K.V.D. will use its expertise to create another formula, the assassination plot, to sway the consciences of the apparatchiks. Ratchevsky shows a clear link between the plot formula and the main goal of the institutional discourse of the N.K.V.D.. The word "trial" reinforces the notion of a contest, a duality of innocent and guilty or good and evil. The reasons for party policy are all couched in terms of law and breaking that law. Those who differ are simply criminals. Ratchevsky here indicates that the "explanation" looked for by the apparatchiks is not a reason for policy in the sense of its effectiveness or adherence to socialism, but instead that they are looking for the heroes and villains of the current political struggle within the party. Thus perhaps the audience for the "trial" is not the true believers, but the timeservers seeking protection for themselves. The disorientation to which Ratchevsky refers is the fear and uncertainty created by the purges in which key victims were some of the highest placed persons, such as Erchov. After all, if an Erchov has to go, who else is safe?

More important, Ratchevsky uses the word *procès* to refer to his *théorie du complot* / "theory of the plot". Disdaining bourgeois notions of law with its *constatation statique du fait* / "static establishment of fact", he praises the new Soviet law (*AT*, 805). Key to this is an important distinction: "Ce mot est, en droit, susceptible de revêtir une signification restreinte ou extensive..." / "The word is, in law, susceptible to coming back either with restrictive or extensive meaning...." (*AT*, 804) The versatility of the word is key to the method of the apparatchik's discourse in this novel. It is clear from his

remarks about bourgeois law that Soviet law sees the word as being more “extensive”. In fact it is his criticisms of bourgeois law, which bring to light what he admires in Soviet law. Bourgeois law not only depends on static formula, but also on “recherche d’une culpabilité formelle considérée comme effective en vertu de définitions préétablies...” / “research of formal guilt considered as effective in virtue of pre-established definitions....”(AT, 805). The party cannot abide by “pre-established definitions. If it did it would be exposed as faulty and the system would be called into question. The use of the formula of a trial with versatile words allows the apparatchik to not only explain away things, but more importantly to couch them in a format of good versus evil that makes the state look like the defender of socialism and the people.

This *théorie du complot* / “theory of the plot” leads Ratchevsky to declare that no one is above suspicion and this is played out in the arrest and interrogation of many existing party cadres, such as Erchov. The problem with arresting so many party members in good standing, including many in high places, like Erchov, is that it stretches credibility, not only within the party, but also to the world at large. A new order comes to the N.K.V.D. to add, “celui d’un trotskyste influent, ce qui voulait dire authentique, quelle que fût son attitude” / “some influential Trotskyist, which meant authentic, whatever his attitude would be” to the current list of defendants (AT, 835). Such an attitude points to the cynical nature of the apparatchik’s discourse in this novel and further reinforces the notion Serge presented earlier, that most if not all the apparatchiks in charge serve the system for gain and really do not have any belief in the program of socialism. It certainly shows that they seriously do not believe in the guilt of the other defendants. Even more significant is their reasoning on how such a “genuine” Trotskyist

would help them. A genuine dissident who would deny any guilt would look more credible in the eyes of foreigners. Another apparatchik, Popov, adds, “le verdict pourrait tenir compte du doute suscité par les dénégations, cela ferait bon effet...” / “the verdict would take in account the doubt raised by such denials, this would have good effect...” (AT, 835) We see here not only an acute understanding of presentation, but also how much control over people the party really has. The “genuine” Trotskyist, under this scheme, would be allowed to deny any wrongdoing in the Toulaév case. In other words, this one could maintain his self, his *ipse*, even at trial where the *conscience du parti* / “conscience of the party” is protected by the good work of the N.K.V.D. The others, the non-genuine dissidents, who, like Erchov, have surrendered, cannot reclaim their selves. They have been rewritten and their identities in effect stolen to prop up a plot as the discourse explaining the party’s repressive measures. The effect is a vicious circle, from which the party cannot extricate itself without admitting its failure, which also destroys it. The Bolsheviks had destroyed all other expressions of socialism in Russia, clearing the field for total power and total responsibility.

The creation of a plot to kill Toulaév, as we saw, aims at reassuring the cadres of the threat to the party and the party’s ability to manage that threat. In order to make the plot seem more credible, Ratchevsky and the others want to include a “genuine” Trotskyist. Most of the defendants in the Toulaév case are themselves recent apparatchiks of the party thought to be loyal. By selecting a long term and well-known dissident, Ratchevsky hopes to make the threat seem more real. The Trotskyist selected is none other than our former Chekist and later deportee, Ryjik, who by now has been exiled to the hamlet of Dyra, five miserable houses located “à l’extrême limite du monde humain”/

“at the extreme limit of the human world” (AT, 836). Ryjik calls the place *la Côte du Néant* / “the Brink of Nothing” (AT, 836). For years now he has refused to surrender or cooperate and remained in opposition to the state. He now lives in a virtual desert, though one of ice, with practically no company except his jailer, Pakhomov. In maintaining his self, his *ipse*, through constant keeping of his own political faith, Ryjik has become a man with no relation to anyone. Pakhomov is a party man and the others in the village are peasants, true believers in God, relics of Russia’s past. Ryjik has resisted beyond the limit of many. Most other true dissidents were abroad, such as Trotsky himself, or dead. Ryjik in effect has no sameness, *idem*, with anyone. He is not recognized by Russian society, traditional or Communist, “Le déporté Ryjik posait à plusieurs bureaux d’insolubles problèmes” / “the deportee Ryjik posed insoluble problems for many departments” (AT, 834). The man was now a misfit, and when none other than his old Cheka colleague, Zvéréva, summons him back to Moscow, he remains true to himself. Not willing even to discuss things politely, Ryjik hurls insults and invectives at Zvéréva, Gordéev and other apparatchiks present. In the end he spoils their plan to spruce up the manufactured plot by secretly starving himself to death in prison. In short, Ryjik takes the next final logical and most extreme step in his attempt to maintain his self-identity against the all-powerful party.

It may seem absurd to throw away one’s life, but Ryjik too has his own discourse, which like the apparatchik’s discourse of his tormentors is derived from the same revolutionary experience. When he tells his N.K.V.D. captors that he waits for the day when “la balle du prolétariat”/ “the proletarian bullet” will find their heads, he reveals his belief in an eventual true socialist revolution which will overturn the rule of

the Stalinists (*AT*, 858). He is expressing hope in a construct that a true revolution will eventually come. This construct is part of his dissident's discourse. It helps Ryjik that he knows his captors personally, telling Zvéréva, “Regardez-vous dans un miroir, ce soir, je suis sûr que vous vomirez.”/ “Look at yourself in the mirror this evening; I am sure you will vomit” (*AT*, 857). This gives him an advantage in confronting his captors. In the end, however, his decision to kill himself and thus disrupt their plans is ultimately informed by his own discourse, which like theirs is based on the same revolution. Ryjik and Zvéréva operate with the same origin of discourse, but now are going in two different directions. They have both given their lives, after a fashion, to their own discourses.

Ratchevsky's “théorie du complot” / “theory of the plot” and the attempt to co-opt Ryjik as a defendant, concludes our analysis of Serge's novels as examples of the apparatchik's discourse. As stated earlier, the characters in the novels are crucial to understanding Serge's literary explanation of the discourse. Their decisions and the reasons for making those decisions are the mechanisms that we can see. Serge allows us to intrude on the private lives and thoughts of his characters, and so their motivations are never in doubt or ambiguous. Clearly there is a sea change between *Ville Conquise* and *S'il est minuit dans le siècle*. In the former novel, we encountered a range of discourses among the Chekists in Petrograd, ranging from Zvéréva's self-serving yet efficient work to Kirk's doomed solitary vote to save the career and life of his fellow Chekist, the corrupt and treasonous Arkadi. Each of the Chekists have his or her own discourse for service and their overall efforts are given an ideological cover from Ossipov, in which the harsh reality of the circumstances justify not only hardness and inequality of the party, but also the recruitment of any person they can get. Perceived necessity is the main

formula of the apparatchik's discourse in the novel, but it also accommodates a range of individual attitudes and this includes conscious revolutionary apparatchiks, such as Kirk and Ryjik, who have morals and on occasion act against their own interest for the sake of another. This reality has changed dramatically in *S'il est minuit dans le siècle*. The perceived necessity has grown narrower and more distorted as complete obedience to the state is required to be a good Communist; never mind about other parties on the left, such as the Left SRs who, in *Ville Conquise*, could still meet and even agitate in the factories of Petrograd. In this novel there is a clear demarcation between the dissident Communists, who like the Chekists in *Ville Conquise*, show a range of attitudes and opinions, and the ruling ones. Fédossenko, whom Serge describes in machine-like terms, lacks even Zvéréva's nimble mind, and is a brutal, simplistic man who is outwitted by the more intelligent, and consciously revolutionary dissidents. Stalin does not appear much better, being either a self-deluded paranoid or an extreme manipulator. The situation does not improve in *L'affaire Toulaév*. None of the apparatchiks, including the dead Toulaév, show anything in terms of a revolutionary discourse, let alone decency. Both Toulaév and Erchov, for example, used their positions for sexual advantage. Devotion to the state, regardless of whether it does them any good, is their criterion. True revolutionaries like Ryjik have been driven to the far reaches of the world. Serge is clear. True devotion to the discourse of revolution, which for Serge is an intellectual as well as a moral choice, is the key to whether the apparatchik's discourse serves good or ill ends. In Ricoeur's terminology, Serge's ideal apparatchik's discourse would not attempt to suppress the *ipse*, even of those who oppose the regime; it is a discourse of the greater good as defined

by revolutionary progress, which we see in *Ville Conquise*, where Ossipov was willing to hear Kirk's objections to the Cheka's vote on Arkadi.<sup>53</sup>

#### THE APPARATCHIK'S DISCOURSE IN SERGE'S NON-FICTION

Serge's idea of the apparatchik's discourse becomes even clearer in his other writings, especially his memoirs. What emerges is the party's early form of a repeated formula, which while less grotesque than the Stalinist model, is still violent in scope and is also based on a set of presumptions rather than evidence. In short, Serge, both in his novels and other works, opposes one discourse against another. This is important, as Serge himself was a devoted revolutionary who experienced the Russian revolution and its aftermath first hand. Serge's writings, regardless of genre, inform a personal agenda, reinforced by his obvious literary talents. The novels range in time from the era of revolution to the consolidation of an authoritarian regime in the U.S.S.R. and the decimation of the party responsible for that regime. This theme underlies the situation in Serge's novels and more importantly the characters, explanations and rationalizations of the apparatchik's discourse. As Serge himself participated, albeit marginally, in the history of those events, the novels have a clear autobiographical tone. Indeed, Serge's decision to write literature instead of history or journalism was partially motivated by the effects of the new tyranny on his freedom of expression.<sup>54</sup> The novels, while using fictional characters, still rely on clear historical models, like the ones that pepper the pages of Serge's own autobiography. Serge had a talent for description, especially in combining the physical traits and personal characteristics of a subject. So creating from his own experience was easy, and yet true historical figures do emerge in his texts,

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<sup>53</sup> Paul Ricoeur, 143.

<sup>54</sup> Victor Serge, *Mémoires*, 716.

notably Stalin, Yagoda and other members of the Politburo in *S'il est minuit dans le siècle*. This does add to the historic authenticity of the text and reinforces the realism of the events described. While his Stalin, for example, is fictional, it is still a reasonable portrayal. In fact, Serge's picture is by no means one-sided and reinforces the picture of the degenerating apparatchik we already see in Fédossenko.

Serge takes this one step further by inserting himself directly into the text. In *Ville Conquise*, he appears in one small chapter, meeting with a group of Chekists, including the aforementioned Ryjik (*VC*, 362-371). This is perhaps an allusion to Serge's own recorded role of going to the Cheka, during the Civil War and siege of Petrograd, to intercede for victims of that institution.<sup>55</sup> Such an example is a clear case of Serge's novel reflecting his own experiences. More difficult to determine, perhaps, is the autobiographical background to the characterization of the apparatchik's discourse as expressed through his fictional characters. Serge himself clearly documented his views towards the Bolshevik regime in numerous articles, histories and of course his own autobiography. More importantly, Serge left us many details of his early life and upbringing, which help us to better understand his frame of mind. In Serge's literature, the characterization of the apparatchik's discourse expresses itself mainly through key characters. This is in itself an important clue. Characters like Ossipov or Ryjik make much more sense when one realizes Serge's own stands in the twenties and thirties.

Throughout Serge's journalistic writings during the early Bolshevik era, we read unstinting praise for the new regime. This praise is usually couched in a form of apologia, recognizing the harsh measures of the regime as cruel but necessary in the circumstances.

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<sup>55</sup> See Serge, *Mémoires d'un révolutionnaire*, 626. See also Peter Sedgwick, "The Unhappy Elitist: Victor Serge's Early Bolshevism", *History Workshop* 17 (1984): 151.



In contrast, other socialist movements, especially the anarchists and syndicalists, are derided as being unrealistic and demanding an immediate utopia in the most appalling conditions. He wrote a small book, *Les Anarchistes et l'expérience de la Révolution russe*, for example, in which he castigates his former comrades for not seeing the truths that were so obvious to him. “La révolution est implacable. Implacable par les privations et les épreuves qu'elle impose à tous... Cette notion de la révolution-réalité, dur et implacable labeur, opposée à la révolution-légende...” / “The revolution is implacable. Implacable by the privations and the ordeals the it imposes on all ... This notion of a revolution in reality, hard and implacable labor, opposed to the revolution of legend.”<sup>56</sup> Later in the same passage, Serge even praises violence as long as it is necessary; likewise dictatorship is permissible as long as it serves the revolution. “Qui dit révolution dit violence. Toute violence est dictatoriale. Toute violence impose une volonté en brisant les résistances.” / “Whoever says revolution says violence. All violence is dictatorial. All violence imposes one will breaking those who resist.”<sup>57</sup> He takes a familiar anarchist criticism of the state and turns it on its head: “En tout cela le rôle de l'État est bien net: tuer. Tuer l'ennemi extérieur: faire la guerre – Tuer l'ennemi intérieur: réprimer, condamner, faire la terreur.” / “In all these things, the role of the State is perfectly clear: to kill. To kill the external enemy: by waging war. – To kill the internal enemy: by repression, by condemnation, by terror.”<sup>58</sup> No anarchist would disagree with this, but on the other hand, none would agree with Serge that it serves the cause of revolution in any positive way. Serge writes in a similar vein in other publications of this period. He even

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<sup>56</sup> Victor Serge, *Les Anarchistes et l'expérience de la Révolution russe* in *Mémoires d'un révolutionnaire et autres écrits politiques 1908-1947*, (Paris: Robert Laffont, 2001), 138-139.

<sup>57</sup> Serge, *Les Anarchistes*, 139.

<sup>58</sup> Serge, *Les Anarchistes*, 154.

extols the necessity of the Cheka. In an article entitled, “Le Problème de la repression révolutionnaire” / “The Problem of revolutionary repression”, Serge insists that draconian measures, such as those employed by the Red Army and the Cheka, are necessary. Charity does not work with the revolution’s enemies. Quoting the French revolutionary Danton, Serge asserts that it is necessary to kill all internal enemies of the revolution. In his view, “La Tchéka n’est pas moins indispensable que L’Armée rouge et que le commissariat du Ravitaillement.” / “The Cheka is no less indispensable than the Red Army and the Commissariat of Supply.”<sup>59</sup> As Peter Sedgwick points out, “the writings...from the early Twenties, along with other published work by him that is more widely known, is on the whole most unrevealing of any libertarian impulsion in this anarchist-turned Bolshevik. On the contrary: at this stage what is evident in Serge’s public political alignment is an uncritical retailing of the official legitimations of Bolshevik statism.”<sup>60</sup>

One could easily argue that these writings were meant for public consumption and it is true that Serge often interceded with the Cheka saving many lives. Nevertheless it is also true that even later in life, after the experience with Stalinism, interrogation, deportation, and despite many regrets, including the formation of the Cheka, Serge still believed the Bolsheviks to be essentially right in their policies. Throughout the early Bolshevik period, Serge seemed to waver between his anarchist past and the present circumstances. Often he sided with the Bolsheviks if only because he could see nothing but disaster for the revolution otherwise. Writing about the Bolshevik suppression of the Kronstadt rebels (1921), for example, Serge is sympathetic to the program of the rebels,

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<sup>59</sup> Victor Serge, “Le Problème de la repression révolutionnaire” in *Mémoires d’un révolutionnaire et autres écrits politiques 1908-1947*, (Paris: Robert Laffont, 2001), 272-274.

<sup>60</sup> Sedgwick, 151.

which included the ending of War Communism, ending of party control over the Soviets, ending the terror and other rather moderate measures. Serge even threatened to leave the party, and said so publicly, after he had read various party declarations, which described the Kronstadt rebels as criminals and White Guards. He knew this was false. Serge still had contacts among the syndicalist and anarchist groups, whose views were prominent with the rebels. He also knew that several prominent anarchists, such as Emma Goldman, were trying to arrange a peaceful resolution to the crisis. Despite this sympathy, however, in the end Serge stayed with the party. Again he justified the decision as being realistic, claiming that while the Kronstadt rebels were not White Guards, their success could only aid counter-revolutionary elements. This reminds us of the debate at the Wahl Factory between Goldin and Antonov.<sup>61</sup> We have again the apparatchik's discourse of necessity, built upon the discourse of the new Soviet state as the true representative of socialism. As the country had just emerged from both foreign and civil war, to side with the Kronstadt rebels, would be aiding forces which would disrupt the country further and ensure that any gains from the revolution would be lost.<sup>62</sup>

Serge's comments on Kronstadt lend further credence to his other regrets in his autobiography. The argument based on "realism" was typical of his early writings and is used again, but with the added detail of Serge's own internal struggle. Throughout the memoirs, Serge castigates the Bolsheviks for many things he praised early on, such as the Cheka, Lenin's contradictions, and the political monopoly of the Bolsheviks over and

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<sup>61</sup> See above page 29. Antonov had defeated Goldin's superior rhetoric with the timely arrival of provisions for the striking workers.

<sup>62</sup> Serge, *Mémoires d'un révolutionnaire*, 605. Serge later (1937) restated his support for the suppression of Kronstadt even while criticizing the Bolshevik refusal to negotiate first. See V.I. Lenin and L.D. Trotsky, *Kronstadt*, (New York: Monad Press, 1979), 124-125.

against other leftist groups.<sup>63</sup> This change in heart is important for the discussion of the apparatchik's discourse in Serge's novels. The diversity that we see in the Chekists in *Ville Conquise* does not reappear in the later novels, *S'il est minuit dans le siècle* and *L'affaire Toulaév*. While the apparatchiks of the later novels are given plenty of detail, they all seem more or less converted to the discourse of the Soviet state and the G.P.U./N.K.V.D. with little reservation. Only Fleischmann shows any aspect of regret. In *L'affaire Toulaév*, just before the meeting with Ratchevsky, he is looking out the window of the tall building, watching the people on the streets below, wishing that he too could be just an ordinary young man, following pretty girls around without a care. Instead he feels burdened with yet another case to close (*AT*, 801). The thought may seem frivolous, but shows in a very personal sense what has been lost by someone who has embraced an apparatchik's discourse that is so disconnected from any reality.

This difference in character is matched with a difference in tone. In *Ville Conquise*, we see an apparatchik's discourse founded on hard necessity in a time of siege and civil war. The arguments between Ossipov and Kirk make it clear that the presence of people like Zvéreva does not completely discredit the Bolshevik regime. Moreover, Zvéreva's abuses, such as expropriating the rare flowers, are trivial and despite her toadying manner, she is merely one among many apparatchiks of varying attitude and competence. With the later novels, this disappears, and we see a distorted grotesque regime where the apparatchik's discourse is a continuous retreat from any reality. Likewise, the apparatchiks are of the same ilk. We move from the masturbating cipher, Zvéreva, to a brutal, unthinking rapist, Fédossenko. The corruption seems to increase from novel to novel. In *L'affaire Toulaév*, the apparatchiks are now spying on each other

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<sup>63</sup> Serge, *Mémoires d'un révolutionnaire*, 609-610.

and working at each other's expense. Even the victim, Toulaév, was corrupt. He was shot while visiting his mistress. Erchov's own wife, Vallia, was in effect stolen from a dissident. Meanwhile former apparatchiks who still cling to revolutionary ideals, such as Ryjik, are deported to the Arctic. Serge shows a clear relationship between abandoning the idealist discourse of revolution and the corruption brought on by power. The more corrupt the regime becomes, the more it relies on lies and distortions to cover up its obvious failure to lead people to a new dawn. Corrupted revolutions become worse even than capitalist societies. In short, the commitment of a person to a revolutionary discourse is the best index for judging the apparatchik's discourse.

This morality is not the conventional morality of ordinary bourgeois society. Serge may condemn the formation of the Cheka and the suppression of Kronstadt in retrospect, but at the time, he saw both as brutally necessary to ensure the survival of the revolution. Just as Ryjik had to clean out the cells under his care with grenades, so true and just revolutionaries use violence for the better cause. That Serge could not avoid this conclusion should not be too surprising. As mentioned in the introduction, his own relation had demonstrated such in an earlier epoch of Russian revolutionary history. Nikolai Ivanovich Kibalchich, a relation on Serge's father's side, and a member of the revolutionary terrorist cell, *Narodnaya Volya*, was the manufacturer of the bomb that killed Tsar Alexander II (1881). Other members of his family, such as his father, were also opponents of the Tsarist regime and were forced to emigrate as a result, often under a hail of bullets. Serge himself was the son of his expatriate parents in Brussels (1890). Raised both in poverty and revolutionary aura and prestige, Serge belonged to an elite circle from the beginning. However, poverty had claimed the life of his younger brother,

Raoul, and he only had an informal education. Serge's father, himself a trained academic, refused to put his son in school. Young Serge thrived in a climate that extolled the virtue of a revolutionary past; the pictures of dead revolutionaries hung on the walls of the house. Violence and intolerance for the ruling class was common in such a past, and if Serge needed a present reminder of its importance, his father's battles with *les usuriers* / "the usurers" were sufficient.<sup>64</sup> Unlike the other three writers in this study, Serge was born into a revolutionary discourse with a clear focus.

This revolutionary elitist attitude carried over into Serge's early political activity among anarchist groups in Brussels and Paris before the Great War. He and his closest friend, Raymond Callemin, with whom he had forsaken Fenimore Cooper for Louis Blanc, had left home some time after Serge's thirteenth birthday. This decision followed a brief stint in the *Jeunes Gardes Socialistes*, but the reformism of Belgian socialism did not appeal to Serge. Instead, a pamphlet by the noted Russian anarchist Peter Kropotkin confirmed Serge's decision to follow a more radical and elitist revolutionary career, despite his father's desire to see the boy go into higher education.<sup>65</sup> Anarchism devalued higher education. The lawyer merely invoked the law of the rich; the doctor tended the health of the rich, and the architect built houses for the rich. Such was the attitude of young Serge, and his companion, "petit costaud myope et d'esprit caustique" / "little clever man, shortsighted, and with a caustic spirit."<sup>66</sup> By fifteen, Serge was working for himself. After an initial stint as a typesetter, he started writing his own articles for leftist

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<sup>64</sup> Serge, *Mémoires d'un révolutionnaire*, 501-504. Serge's father was a noted scholar of both anatomy and geology. His education of Serge was haphazard at best. He was mostly immersed in his own studies. Despite this, young Serge read voraciously and often visited libraries and museums when he wasn't scrounging for food in the streets of Brussels.

<sup>65</sup> Serge, *Mémoires d'un révolutionnaire*, 507.

<sup>66</sup> Serge, *Mémoires d'un révolutionnaire*, 508.

newspapers, including *Le Communiste* and *La Révolte!* His first article, “l’Expérience Communiste” was published in 1908; soon after he left for Paris (1909) with both Callemain and his lover, Rirette Maîtrejean. In Paris they joined the anarchist group founded by Albert Libertad, Serge being a contributor to the group’s paper, *L’Anarchie*.

The decision to join Libertad’s group seems at first odd and natural at the same time. Libertad’s version of anarchism was quite apolitical and discarded the notion of classes. Individualism, vegetarianism, and lyricism merged to form a philosophy for the best of mankind. Mass revolution was a dead end. The discourse was quite elitist, dismissing the mass of humanity as being unfit for the lifestyle of true anarchists.<sup>67</sup> As Serge himself wrote, “Ne pas attendre de révolution. Les prometteurs de révolutions sont des farceurs comme les autres. Faire sa révolution soi-même. Etre des hommes libres, vivre en camaraderie...” / “Do not wait for revolution. Those who promise revolutions are jokers as are the others. Make your revolution yourself. Be free men, live in camaraderie...”<sup>68</sup> This philosophy disregards actions among the masses and disregards the class struggle of both classic anarchism and Marxism completely. Nevertheless, despite adhering to this group, Serge still visited other expatriate Russian revolutionaries, regardless of their views. This is the start of an important trend in Serge’s life. No matter what his views were at any given time, Serge was never too sectarian to seek out others in the revolutionary left and indeed beyond that. He had an open mind that coexisted uncomfortably with sometimes radical and authoritarian views. He continued to work on the group’s paper, becoming editor with Rirette Maîtrejean in 1911. Libertad had died in 1908. He continued the founder’s line in his journalism, attacking the Marxian notion of

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<sup>67</sup> See Sedgwick, 153.

<sup>68</sup> Serge, quoted by Jean Maitron, *Histoire du mouvement anarchiste en France (1880-1914)*, (Paris, Société Universitaire D’Éditions et De Libraire, 1951), 394.

the nobility of labor and even challenging the effectiveness of syndicalism, another divergent form of anarchism. Such was Serge's rather idyllic notion of anarchism, when he first heard of a young man named Jules Bonnot, the founder of so-called "illegalism".

Bonnot appeared in 1911. Bonnot had made the papers with his sensational killing of a certain "Joseph l'Italien" on the road between Lyons and Paris. Bonnot's own anarchism was an extension of Libertad's, but exaggerated to violent extremes in exercising personal liberty.<sup>69</sup> While many in the group continued to live by non-violence and vegetarianism, many others were attracted to the idea of waging direct war on exploiters. For Bonnot living according to Libertad's philosophy did not prevent you from being exploited in society like all the others. Direct action against exploiting institutions, such as banks, was necessary for truly free persons. "Nous ne voulons être ni exploités ni exploités." / "We want to be neither the exploiters nor the exploited."<sup>70</sup> Bonnot had transformed a relatively peaceful form of individualist anarchism into a violent war waged by a handful of militants against the institutions of the bourgeois state.

Serge opposed this philosophy from the beginning, but his opposition was complicated by his friend Callemin, who supported Bonnot. Earlier in life he had no liking for violence, but this changed when he joined Bonnot.<sup>71</sup> He soon became a principal member of this group, participating in many of its crimes.<sup>72</sup> When Serge personally told Callemin of his disapproval of the "illegalist" method, Callemin's response was quick and cold, "Si tu ne veux pas disparaître, garde-toi de nous juger...Qu'est-ce que tu veux! Tu me gênes je te supprime." "If you do not want to

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<sup>69</sup> Maitron, 397.

<sup>70</sup> Frédéric Delacourt, *L'Affaire Bande à Bonnot*, (Paris, Éditions De Vecchi S.A., 2000), 74.

<sup>71</sup> Maitron, 397.

<sup>72</sup> Delacourt, 47.



disappear, take care in what you say about us... What is it that you want! You thwart me and I will put you down.” Serge did not back down, labeling Callemin and his associates as both *cinglés* / “insane” and *perdus* / “lost”.<sup>73</sup> Despite his private opposition, Serge defended Bonnot’s group in the pages of *L’Anarchie*.<sup>74</sup> Bonnot was eventually killed in a firefight with police. The rest of the group was rounded up and Serge found himself also arrested and taken to trial, though he managed to have Maîtrejean cleared of any wrongdoing. During the trial, Serge positioned himself as a sort of third party, distinct from the “guilty” ones who actually did the killing, but still as befits an anarchist, opposed to the legal proceedings. Despite such posturing he was found guilty, though unlike the others he drew only a five-year sentence to solitary confinement. Callemin and the others were guillotined.<sup>75</sup> Serge much later in life tried to commemorate these men in a novel, *Les Hommes Perdus*, which unfortunately was one of the many papers confiscated from him during his final departure from the Soviet Union (1935).

The affair of the Bonnot gang enlightens us on the presentation of the apparatchik’s discourse in Serge’s novels. The revolution, with its ideology of promise of a better future, must come first, and Serge will give the party, or any party, and its discourse his public support as long it at least seems to support the revolution. Nevertheless, Serge retains the right to critique, if only in private. His response to the Kronstadt rebellion (1921) best illustrates this position. Serge withheld open criticism of the party since he still believed it to have the best chance of revolution in Russia. Later, after the triumph of Stalin and the need to understand just where the Russian revolution went wrong, Serge wrote openly about his position on Kronstadt, trying to find the

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<sup>73</sup> Serge, *Mémoires d’une révolutionnaire*, 528.

<sup>74</sup> Sedgwick, 152.

<sup>75</sup> Serge, *Mémoires d’une révolutionnaire*, 531-535.

origins of Stalinism. As with his criticisms of the Bonnot gang, his comments drew much scorn from Trotsky and his Fourth International.<sup>76</sup> Serge always maintained his right to speak his mind, while at the same time concerned to present a united front to the outside world. Thus we see how the apparatchik's discourse functioned in Serge's mind. Properly used, it preserves the image of a true revolutionary organization, but it does not falsify relations within the revolutionary camp. This seems to be the important crux for Serge. He was for cross-sectarian discourse, even alliance for the greater good of revolution, while maintaining the line against counter-revolution. In the end, for Serge, the apparatchik's discourse is a tool, which when used properly, allows the apparatchik to inspire the masses to greater effort for the greater good. Unfortunately, unscrupulous persons who see the revolution as a way of bettering their own station, use the apparatchik's discourse to promote themselves and put others down, especially the true believers in revolution. This comes across clearly in *Ville Conquise*, where we see conscientious persons working even in the Cheka, and where even their rhetoric needed backing such as the arrival of food to calm tempers at the Wahl factory. In *S'il est minuit dans le siècle* and *L'affaire Toulaév*, there is no such positive backing of the discourse, merely repression, all to assure both the Soviet people and even the world at large of the rightness of comrade Stalin, the legitimacy of the state's discourse. Serge saw the party's apparatchik's discourse as the justification for present horrors in the hope of future promise. This promise was destroyed by the rise of the Stalinist state and the destruction of the Old Bolsheviks, and the party's discourse became corrupted and the tool for selfish persons. Dissenters, however, using the same constructs from a shared revolutionary tradition, could oppose the party's discourse with an apparatchik's discourse of their own.

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<sup>76</sup> Lenin, *Kronstadt*, 124-141.

As is evident with the deportees in *S'il est minuit dans le siècle* and the later life of Ryjik, such a discourse, although based on formulas is important to resisting the state's own discourse.

### **CHAPTER 3: AMMIANUS MARCELLINUS: THE DISCOURSE AS A DESTROYER**

The extant books (14-31) of the history of Ammianus Marcellinus provide a challenge to researching the apparatchik's discourse. On the surface, the history appears to be an autobiographical, yet moralistic, literary work, centering on the figure of the emperor Julian (361-363), which distinguishes between good emperors and bad emperors, good officials and bad officials, in order to provide *exempla* for the reader, a guide for good behavior. Ammianus, however, was himself an apparatchik with specific prejudices. Moreover, despite the autobiographical nature of his work, he did write it thirty years after the events he describes. He was not a revolutionary or freethinker as was Serge, but he had his own discourse of history and personality. The work is in part a literary history of his times, but it is also an example of a discourse from an ex-apparatchik against the regime of a previous emperor.

Despite belonging to many political groups, Victor Serge never deviated from the revolutionary humanistic discourse that was his birthright. Thus, throughout his many books one can trace a line that forms the crux of every work, specifically the relation between revolution, society and the individual. He saw the apparatchik's discourse as just one tool of coercion among many. Through his novels and histories, Serge was trying to find the proper balance in the discourse of revolution, alternating between authoritarian and libertarian visions. Ammianus Marcellinus did not have these concerns. Politics for him was more personal. Moreover, historical writing in his day was already quite rhetorical and literary. Despite the strong autobiographical element in the work, Ammianus still wrote his history along the lines of previous historians, notably Tacitus and Sallust. Ammianus' narrator, for example, protests that the text is based on fact with

no deceit and then tells us in the next breath that it will almost reach the domain of the panegyric.<sup>77</sup> What seems like hyperbole is in fact a statement of Ammianus' method. Ammianus' narrator is telling the truth as he sees it. It is not the whole truth and he may adorn or obscure facts with effusive rhetoric. He may change the order of events in his narration and report gossip and hearsay as truth, but he was not a liar. His discourse is that of a former military officer from a privileged background writing about stirring times. Ammianus' text could not help but be partisan. A superficial reading would reveal this. More important is the method of Ammianus' discourse and its relation to the apparatchik's discourse.

Ammianus' text contains characterizations that have a strong element of duality. This contrasts with Serge's novels, which examine a revolution and its people. Serge's literary work focuses on a community of individuals and the effect of their totality on the structures around them. The result is a blending of varying shades, with no dominating voice in the text. Ammianus's text gives more contrast as individuals are placed in opposition to each other, forming distinct categories of good and evil. The effect of one man or one group on events often seems exaggerated out of proportion. Serge described people, juxtaposed them and through that process tried to dissect regimes and societies; Ammianus creates contrasts of good and evil, using his powers of description. Serge's texts could sometimes delineate between the individual and social aspects of an individual in his text; such does not happen often in Ammianus' history. One exception to this, his portrayal of Julian, only reinforces the rule. Ammianus, however, was no fool. He knew clearly the difference between one's perceived identity and the truth behind it.

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<sup>77</sup> Ammianus Marcellinus, *Rerum Gestarum Libri Qui Supersunt Volume 1* (henceforth referred in text as *R.G.*), (Leipzig: BSB B.G. Teubner Verlagsgesellschaft, 1978), 16, 1, 3. Translations mine.

He describes himself with the phrase, “miles quondam et Graecus” / “a former soldier and Greek” (*R.G.* 31, 16, 9). The term *Graecus* refers less to ethnicity than to education and culture, and in fact few of such erudition and background ever contemplated, let alone took advantage of, a military career. The civilian bureaucracy and higher education drew most men of higher learning and station. The use of *quondam* lessens his role as a soldier by putting it firmly in the past, in order to reinforce his identity to his readers as a literary man. This clever phrasing is Ammianus’ own way of stating that his history is more of a work of art, despite its autobiographical nature, which comes from his role as a soldier. It identifies him with his hero, Julian, also man of letters and war. Ammianus was a staff officer in the suite of the general Ursicinus, who himself was, according to Ammianus, constantly under persecution from an imperial court, which had recently emerged from a civil war.

#### INTRODUCTION: TRIAL AT CHALCEDON

A change of emperor is common in Roman history, whether by violence or by peaceful accession. But as the year 361 drew to a close a more extraordinary thing occurred. A rebellion brought forth a challenge to the throne, and another civil war seemed at hand when Constantius II (337-361), emperor for nearly 35 years, suddenly died in a fever as he prepared to battle the usurper, his younger cousin Julian. On his deathbed, Constantius named Julian as his successor (*R.G.* 21, 15, 2). Rome seemed to have been spared civil war and with Constantius’ dying declaration, a smooth peaceful transfer of power seemed possible. Soon, however, after Julian had arrived in Constantinople, a series of trials of key persons in Constantius’ government began, across the Bosphorus at Chalcedon. A board of six men, four generals and two functionaries, in

the presence of senior and junior officers of the elite *Joviani* and *Herculiani* regiments, tried twelve defendants, all members of the civilian bureaucracy. Of those twelve, five were deported, five were executed, one was released, and one was condemned in absentia. As a purge this may not seem significant, especially when compared to those in Serge's text, but when placed in the context of the period itself, it has important ramifications for Ammianus' text.

At the time of the Chalcedon trial, it had been over forty years since Constantine I (305 –337), founder of the dynasty, had separated the civilian and military chains of the government, creating two lines of authority united in the person of the emperor, but it had been only ten years since the rebellion of Magnentius. In 351, Magnentius, an officer of the *Joviani*, overthrew and murdered Constantius' younger brother, Constans, gaining control over the western portion of the empire in the process. Constantius, ruling in the east, was forced to march west, for reasons of state as well as family, against Magnentius. It is in the aftermath of this bloody civil war, from which Constantius emerged victorious, that Ammianus' narrative begins (353). In the ten years that separate Magnentius' from Julian's rebellion, we read in Ammianus of a corrupt misgovernment that specialized in persecuting innocent servants of the state, while allowing warfare between rival institutions to go unchecked. This is the discourse of the early part of the history. The most significant victims of this oppression were high-ranking generals in the military establishment, including Ursicinus, not to mention members of the imperial family, Julian and his older half-brother, Gallus, who also held military commands. Appropriately, most of the significant villains, besides Constantius himself, were members of the civilian bureaucracy at court. At least, that is what Ammianus would have us believe.

## URSICINUS AND GALLUS: THE HERO AND THE MONSTER

In the early books of the history, Ammianus appears as a *protector domesticus*, a staff officer, of the general Ursicinus. Even when Ammianus does not announce his presence in the text, we must assume that when Ursicinus appears in the text, Ammianus is there too, or close enough to later receive information on what happened. Thus any information on any event where Ursicinus is a participant would have the general himself as the chief source. This is important to remember, for Ursicinus is a key figure in the early books of Ammianus, in that he is involved in the destruction of two key individuals deemed a threat to Constantius, his cousin Gallus, Caesar and regent of the East, and the general Silvanus, who defected to Constantius in the recent civil war. Despite his service to the emperor, Ammianus' text most often portrays his commander as a victim of court intrigue. He is constantly accused of treason and other sundry charges, yet despite this abuse, never in the text do we find that Ursicinus ever *convicted* of anything. This is a second dominating formula of the early part of the text and a key element of the ex-apparatchik Ammianus' discourse.

Ursicinus first appears in the text, when he is summoned, from his post at Nisibis on the eastern frontier to Antioch, in Syria, to serve as a judge in trials for treason arranged by the Caesar Gallus (*R.G.* 14, 9, 1). The decision is unusual. Ursicinus was *Magister Equitum Per Orientas* / "Master of the Horse in the East", the senior general in the eastern provinces and therefore not in the civilian side of the government. Ursicinus was reluctant to go, the text says, because he was "bellicosus sane milesque semper et militum ductor, sed forensibus iurgiis longe discretus, qui metu sui discriminis anxius, cum accusatores quaesitoresque subditivos sibi consociatos, ex isdem foveis cerneret



emergentes...” / “He was in fact a warrior, having always been a soldier and a leader of soldiers, but far removed from the wranglings of the forum; and so worried by fear of the danger which threatened him, seeing the corrupt lawyers and judges with whom he was associated all coming forth from the same holes....” (*R.G.* 14, 9, 1). E. A. Thompson sees nothing but a lack of appreciation, not to mention Ammianus’ prejudice, in his evaluation of Ursicinus’ attitude. He thinks the summons from Gallus to be “an honour” that would ensure “impartiality”.<sup>78</sup> Perhaps, Ursicinus was showing his concern for nomenclature. His title and position would technically exclude him from judging in a civilian court, but Gallus’ order could not be ignored. The text, however, ignores this point. Instead there is the strong characterization in the text. Ursicinus’ presence in the text always results in the use of formulas to contrast the general and those around him. First there is the contrast of the one against the many. The one is described with positive adjectives, the many with negative, creating an instant dichotomy. Ammianus’ text shows no differentiation within a character. Instead, it uses familiar, almost bland, adjectives for the positive commentary, and more outrageous ones for the bad. To use *bellicosus* / “warlike, brave” with *miles* / “soldier” is not very radical and one tends to accept it as a given, but to compare lawyers with animals from a pit is more outlandish and tends more to capture the attention of the reader. Out of this dichotomy, Ammianus creates identities, reducing one to a single good man and the others to beasts who threaten the good man. There is no *ipse* in either, just the formula. The text does not tell why Ursicinus, as a general, is summoned to act as a judge and why the other judges there are so wicked or what they did to deserve such a description. Ammianus’ text omits much information and gives us a

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<sup>78</sup> E. A. Thompson, *The Historical Work of Ammianus Marcellinus*, (Cambridge: At The University Press, 1947), 43.

hero and his villains. Serge's texts use such dichotomies: Kirk and Zvéréva or Ryjik and Zvéréva and Gordéev. There is in these comparisons, however, often had a third or fourth character, such as Ossipov to show a plurality of opinions. Serge also uses animal attributes, describing Gordéev's face as being pig-like for example, but his characters are far more individual and possess internal lives. None of Ammianus' villains approach the level of detail in a Zvéréva, who privately pines for a lover, while publicly acting as the model apparatchik. Despite being ugly, cruel, and conformist, she is, also a human being and an object of pity. Ammianus's text never allows its villains such detail.

Meanwhile, Ursicinus has been at Antioch playing the role of judge. This is just an inference, because the text tells us nothing of what Ursicinus did at the trial; instead it relates another episode. Apparently Ursicinus decides that association with Gallus' trials is not safe, and so he informs on him. Ammianus writes: "quae clam palamue agitabantur occultis Constantium litteris edocebat, implorans subsidia, quorum metu tumor notissimus Caesaris exhalaret." / "what troubles were going on at court both publicly and secretly he informed Constantius by letters, begging for assistance, the fear of which would deflate the most notorious pride of the Caesar (Gallus)" (R.G. 14, 9, 1). Ursicinus is trying to protect himself. He begs for some form of help, in order to restrain Gallus. Ammianus' narrator sees the problem with the general's actions: "Sed cautela nimia in peiores haeserat plagas...aemulis consarcinantibus insidias graves apud Constantium..." / "But such excessive cautions had only brought him into a worse mess...for rivals had prepared serious plots at Constantius' court..." (R.G. 14, 9, 1). He is not, however, specific. *Cautela* / "cautions" could refer to Ursicinus writing letters as well as his participation in the trials without protest. It would seem that by writing such letters

Ursicinus could remove the stigma of being at the trials. The mention of plots at court is also vague, but it is important to note that the text's concern is purely practical. How do Ursicinus' actions appear at court? The text clearly shows the difference between the *ipse* and *idem*. Ursicinus, by writing letters, is trying to protect himself by avoiding being lumped with the other participants of the trial. Ammianus' narrator does not impugn the general's character, though one might ask if Ursicinus found the trials to be wrong, why he participated at all, instead of just going along and informing the emperor in secret. The history is silent about Ursicinus' participation at the trials except his attempts to exculpate himself from any perceived wrongdoing. There is no information to corroborate the earlier remark about the general as a "sound and brave soldier".

The text is silent about Ursicinus' role at the trials. Nor is there a record that he protested at the sentencing of the unfortunate defendants.<sup>79</sup> In Ammianus's discourse, Ursicinus is simply a brave and sound soldier, except that he can be underhanded in order to protect himself. This brevity of information is compounded by the fact that Ammianus' history is our only major source of information on the general. The text does not distinguish among the other judges, but does lump them together as a mass against the lone hero. The word *subdivitos* / "counterfeit" in particular reinforces the contrast. The narrator vilifies the actions of the judges, which is what Ursicinus fears will be done with his actions at Constantius' court. Although Ursicinus is unfamiliar with the legal procedures, Ammianus describes the trial itself in great detail. Ursicinus takes his seat with the other judges, "...adhibitibus aliis iam, quae essent agenda, praedoctis et assistebant hinc inde notarii..." / "now having been employed as a judge (Ursicinus) with the others, who were to be guided, and court functionaries were assisting here and there with

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<sup>79</sup> Thompson, 43.

prepared instructions....” (R.G. 14, 9, 3) The narrator says the judges are corrupt, having been told how to rule, but he does not include Ursicinus in that category. This is suspicious. The prepared instructions remind one of the plot created in *L'affaire Toulaév*. When one person, Ryjik, refuses to cooperate by surrendering to the party, it causes major problems in creating a credible formula to explain Toulaév’s shooting. It would seem that Ursicinus might have caused his own troubles, by protesting or refusing to cooperate in what the narrator labels a legal farce. Instead, from this point on, the general vanishes. Meanwhile the text becomes shrill over the cruel cross-examination and torture of allegedly innocent persons, Ursicinus is not merely silent, but completely absent in the text. What conclusion can we draw from this? It is possible that Ursicinus protested to Gallus about the proceedings, but Ammianus’ narrator never shies from reporting the heroic deeds of the general and the fact that no other information appears suggests that he played along and made no protest and took careful notes. The question is whether these notes played a part later in Gallus’ destruction?

Gallus is Ursicinus in reverse. Whereas Ursicinus seems to vanish beneath an absence of words, the real Gallus disappears behind an excess of rhetoric. Ammianus’ history starts with Gallus. In the very first passage, he outlines his basic theme regarding the Caesar.<sup>80</sup> This discourse connects three formulas, but together they form a logical causation, reducing the Caesar to monster. Gallus, “qui ex squalore imo miseriarum, in aetatis adultae primitiis, ad principale culmen insperato saltu provectus” / “who out of the

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<sup>80</sup> In the Later Roman Empire, the title of Caesar (junior-emperor) was usually given to a subordinate member of the imperial family. That person sometimes ruled over a part of the empire with the aid of officials chosen by the Augustus (senior emperor). Gallus was made Caesar by Constantius in 351 and given responsibility for the eastern half of the empire while Constantius was in the West campaigning against the usurper Magnentius. That war was concluded in 353. The extant portion of Ammianus’ history starts in the latter half of the same year. Gallus was a cousin to Constantius and the half-brother of Julian.

most miserable squalor, at the beginning of his adult years, was advanced in an unexpected leap to the highest position”, was promoted too far and high from his proper station, owing all his fortune to his kinship with the emperor (*R.G.* 14, 1, 1). The text uses contrast well here; *squalore* / “squalor” opposes *ad principale culmen* / “to the highest position” and when combined with the phrase *insperato saltu provector* / “advanced in an unexpected leap” gives the impression not only of one coming too far too fast, but also that of a jumper, an athlete and thus likely a young man. The narrator contrasts the change in fortune with the young man’s age. He has reduced Gallus with a commonplace that the young have no wisdom for ruling. The Caesar becomes an *idem* of an inexperienced young man promoted too far and fast, in a society that revered age. The author reinforces this in the next point with the phrase, “*ultra terminus potestatis delatae procurrens*” / “proceeding beyond the limits of power granted” (*R.G.* 14, 1, 1). The use of the present participle *procurrens* / “proceeding” shows a constant action, in this case, transgression against authority. Gallus crosses lines and often. This is simply an extension of the first formula as youth is of course prone to folly. Lastly Ammianus writes: “*asperitate nimia cuncta foedabat*” / “was defiling everything with his unlimited harshness” (*R.G.* 14, 1, 1). The sweeping phrase continues the picture above, especially the use of *asperitate* / “harshness”, another possible attribute of a young man. All these factors form a link. Due to his unseemly promotion, Gallus, a young man, becomes arrogant and crosses too many lines and thus creates disorder in the East with his own temper.

From the analysis of the text, the nature of Ammianus’ discourse becomes clear. The formulas that reduce Gallus are parts of an apparatchik’s discourse. Ammianus may

have been writing thirty years after the fact, but his text operates from an interaction between an institutional and state discourse. The opposition to Gallus came from Ursicinus, representing the institution of the army in the region. He did not want to serve in Gallus' trials. The text states that this lack of desire was because Ursicinus feared being associated with corrupt judges. This may be true, but more importantly, there was a clear demarcation between the military and civilian halves of the state.<sup>81</sup> Gallus was violating this demarcation and showing a disregard for nomenclature in institutions. By serving at the trials, so was Ursicinus. Later, Ursicinus will face repercussions because of his involvement with Gallus. So Ammianus reduces Gallus to a monster to place the blame for the general's misfortunes on his shoulders. Constantine I had separated the administration from the army in large part to reduce the threat of rebellion. Gallus' summons was thus working against the discourse of both the state and its institutions. Despite these concerns, there is no *specific* reason, given in the text above, for Gallus being unsuitable for rule. Indeed, the entire passage is mostly rhetoric with a minimum of fact. In contrast to Ursicinus, Gallus's character is given the maximum of color, but again we do not see Gallus *per se*, but a villain constructed in Ammianus' text that explains little or nothing about the character of the Caesar. Ammianus cites no specific fact beyond that of Gallus being promoted young and on account of family.

Scholars have long detected a bias against the Caesar in the text. Thompson cites Ammianus' own background as the key factor. As a member of the Antiochene upper classes, who seem to have been a constant target of Gallus' policies, Ammianus could be expected to have a hostile view of the Caesar. His tyranny affected the members of

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<sup>81</sup> Aside from a few exceptions, the military and civilian chains were effectively separated in the later part of Constantine I's reign. See Jones, 101.

Ammianus' class and this makes the two enemies. More importantly, Thompson notes the diversity of opinion concerning Gallus among ancient historians, Christian, pagan, heterodox and orthodox, which makes Ammianus' rather one sided account more suspect. Most important than these is the testimony of Julian, who would know his half-brother better than anyone else.<sup>82</sup> R.C. Blockley, on the other hand, sees Ammianus' picture of Gallus as a crafted literary foil for Julian. While not discounting prejudice in the account, Blockley stresses the desire of Ammianus to cast Gallus in the mode of earlier tyrants, such as Domitian. He cites three of four vices used to describe Gallus as being traditional to tyrants: anger, cruelty and greed. "Gallus is a type, static and timeless and firmly within the ancient tradition. Wholly evil, his character undergoes no change, merely a clearer revelation of wickedness..."<sup>83</sup> Thus Gallus serves a dramatic function as the half-brother of Julian and like him a Caesar; he fails because of his vice, while Julian succeeds because of virtue. Blockley is in fact detailing Ammianus' apparatchik's discourse at work. Regardless of the political and institutional motivations for opposing Gallus, Ammianus' discourse simply reduces Gallus to a literary type. Ammianus' text strips him of his *ipse* and places him in a category well known to the small literary world of his day. The unfitness of Gallus becomes a necessary precondition for the arrival of Julian, especially in light of the latter's own troubles in Antioch.

Gallus and Ursicinus form a pair, a literary contrast of darkness and light that itself is a cover for responsibility. The relation between Gallus and Ursicinus at the trials should be the main narrative. Instead the text uses a "tight dramatic structure" in

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<sup>82</sup> See Thompson, 56-57. See also Julian, *Letter to the Senate and People of Athens* 272B. Apparently Julian did not think his half-brother was fit to rule, but he saw the problems of his reign coming from Constantius' jealousy.

<sup>83</sup> R.C. Blockley, *Ammianus Marcellinus: A Study of his Historiography and Political Thought*, (Bruxelles: Latomus, 1975), 28.

presenting Gallus, using visual elements rather than straight narration.<sup>84</sup> He even labels Gallus a victim of hubris and nemesis (*R.G.*, 14, 11, 25-26). Hence, there are many images of an evil ruler, but any facts behind the discourse are missing. Ammianus' text is much more direct and emphatic. It reduces Gallus to a literary type of tyrant and presents Ursicinus with little fanfare. The history is putting a question mark over Constantius' regime and covering the general's role in that regime.

Serge's novels also put question marks on the regime of the Soviet Union, but they do it in a much more nuanced way. Serge's method of presentation underlines the evolution of the apparatchik's discourse. When presenting Zvéréva for the first time, in *Ville Conquise*, for example, Serge's text not only allowed readers to see the characters' actions, but also allows them to speak for themselves and to hear what others think. The text may tell readers that Zvéréva likes to make appearances, but this is supported with her ostentatious phone call to her chief for Gavril. In short, Serge's texts present flawed but complete characters. Ammianus' characters and their discourse are flat.

Gallus also has trouble from the civilian apparatchiks. Ammianus' text introduces a key official around the Caesar, Thalassius, the Praetorian Prefect for the East. As Prefect, Thalassius was not only the senior administrator for the East, but also the official conduit of information between Gallus' court and that of Constantius in the West. In effect, Thalassius was to watch the Caesar, advise him and report anything necessary to the Augustus.<sup>85</sup> Ammianus also mentions that he should have tried to moderate the Caesar's behavior, as have officials in the past. Thalassius, however,

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<sup>84</sup> Blockley, 25.

<sup>85</sup> See J.F. Drinkwater, "The 'Pagan Underground', Constantius II's 'Secret Service' and the Survival and Ururpation of Julian the Apostate." *Studies in Latin Literature and Roman History* 3, (Bruxelles: Latomus, 1983), 361 for information on the Praetorian Prefects and their duties regarding information and supervision.



“considerans incitationem eius ad multorum augeri discrimina non maturitate vel consiliis mitigabat...” / “although regarding the crises of his increasing anger to many, he did not mitigate it by mature advice....” (R.G. 14, 1, 10) The narrator speaks of Gallus as some sort of raging bull, which Thalassius should have contained. But being *arrogantis* / “arrogant” he instead, exacerbates the situation. Furthermore he reports on Gallus to Constantius openly, while at the same time, exaggerating Gallus’ actions. The result is predictable; Gallus becomes more savage in his anger (R.G. 14, 1, 10). The text uses the *efferatus*, a word usually describing only non-Romans, such as barbarians. Gallus marks the exception, which reinforces his illegitimacy in being a Caesar.<sup>86</sup> Thus there are two individuals, Ursicinus and Thalassius, who cannot get along with Gallus. The text, however, did not give the specifics of Ursicinus’ dealings with the Caesar. In the meantime, Thalassius dies some time after this introduction, after having poisoned Constantius’ mind against Gallus (R.G. 14, 7, 9). Constantius sends another official to replace Thalassius, Domitianus. Constantius’ instructions are clear, “ut cum in Syriam venerit, Gallum quem crebro acciverat, ad Italiam properare *blande* hortaretur et *verecunde*.” / “that when he comes to Syria, with modest and pleasing address he was to persuade Gallus, whom Constantius had summoned often, to come to Italy” (R.G. 14, 7, 9). The italicized words indicate the manner in which Domitianus was to approach and talk with the Caesar. But acting in a manner similar to Thalassius, he does not even report to Gallus when he arrives in Syria, but delays, plotting against the Caesar and making false reports to Constantius. It would seem as if nothing changed between Thalassius and Domitianus.

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<sup>86</sup> On “efferatus” see Robin Seager, *Ammianus Marcellinus: Seven Studies in His Language and Thought*, (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 1986), 56.

Ammianus' text does not view either Thalassius or Domitianus with approval. In contrast to Ursicinus, the two prefects appear as acting in manner inconsistent with their office (*R.G.* 14, 1, 10: 14, 7, 10). This points to the apparatusik 's discourse in Ammianus' text. Gallus is a victim of their defamation, though there is no given reason. The fact that both prefects acted towards Gallus in the same fashion points to the same kind of institutional disturbance behind the behavior of both Ursicinus and the prefects. This does not exonerate any bad behavior on part of the Caesar, but the fact that Ammianus, no friend of Gallus, should include these details speaks something towards their truth. These details were not, however, included solely out of respect for Gallus or to be a good historian. Thirty years after Thalassius and Domitianus, Ammianus' text was also defaming Gallus. The text shows two officials who do not act properly. It also shows a general not acting properly. Gallus, however, becomes the target of Ammianus' discourse. Later, for example, when Gallus tries to go see Domitianus, the latter orders the Caesar to leave immediately or have the supplies to his palace cut off. Gallus naturally is offended and later orders Domitianus' arrest (*R.G.* 14, 7, 11-12). This further underscores Gallus' unfitness to be Caesar. If Gallus, however, is such a misfit, and if officials sent from court are also sabotaging his own efforts, where is Ammianus' text ultimately assigning the blame?

As a ruler, Gallus had many crises in his reign (351-354); the most critical occurred in early 354, when shortages and famine came to the city of Antioch. Such events were apparently common, occurring again during Julian's stay (362) in the city. This is significant as it helps to understand the thinking behind Ammianus' discourse. Ammianus opens the passage with another general account of Gallus' lawlessness and his

offenses against all good men, of all classes (*R.G.* 14, 7, 1). Then comes the most startling passage, “Denique Antiochensis ordinis vertices sub uno elogio iussit occidi, ideo efferatus, quod ei celerari vilitatem intempestivam urgenti, cum impenderet inopia, gravius rationabili responderunt; et perissent ad unum, ni comes orientis tunc Honoratus fixa constantia restitisset” / “At last he (Gallus) ordered the death of the leading members of the Antiochene senate under one decree, due to his savagery, because after having urgently revealed his ill-timed decree (to fix prices on commodities), when the scarcity was impending, they (the senate leaders) more seriously opposed the decree, and they would have perished everyone had not the Count of the East Honoratus inflexibly refused to carry it out” (*R.G.* 14, 7, 2). This passage illustrates another formula of Ammianus’ discourse. The passage actually starts with Gallus’ order to execute the leaders of the Antiochene senate.<sup>87</sup> Rather than describe the events of the crisis in a chronological fashion, Ammianus starts with the climax, which both directs his readers’ attention and of course prejudices them against Gallus. The passage uses the words *intempestivam* / “untimely”, *efferatus* / “savage”, and *urgent* / “urging” to describe the Caesar. The picture is of inexperience running rampant. By contrast, the senate leaders respond to his urging in a manner *gravius* / “more seriously”, which indicates their assumed age and experience, a perfect contrast with Gallus. The use of black and white contrast is a common formula in Ammianus’ text. The real issue of scarcity and the views of the senate and Caesar on how to solve the problem are obscured. The problem becomes Gallus himself, an explanation made easier to accept by leading off with his order of

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<sup>87</sup> The senate of Antioch was composed of the “curialies”. These were the wealthiest men and as the civic leaders responsible for overseeing public works, games and tax collection in cooperation with the provincial governors.

execution. Ammianus, however, does not trust alone in black and white contrast. He uses other formulas to blacken Gallus' character.

The text interrupts this narration of Gallus versus the senate to discuss Gallus' love of the games or in Ammianus' language, *ludicris cruentis* / "bloody spectacles" (*R.G.* 14, 7, 3). A great many people regardless of station or gender shared Gallus' love of games. In Ammianus' text, however, it becomes the sign of a twisted individual, "et in circo sex vel septem aliquotiens deditus certaminibus, pugilum vicissim se concidentium, perfusorumque sanguine specie, ut lucratus ingentia, laetabatur" / "...and at the games he was fascinated watching up to six or seven matches, especially the sight of fighters alternatively cutting each other up and poring over the bloody spectacle as if he had financially gained, he was satisfied" (*R.G.* 14, 7, 3). Ammianus's discourse further reduces Gallus. Because he loves the games, he is a cruel man, by proxy. The image of a man watching the games with such excitement and then relaxing in satisfaction has a sexual connotation, though Ammianus never accuses Gallus of any sexual misdeeds. Serge had used sexual maladjustment as a trait in his more evil characters, but in his characters this is just one trait among many. Ammianus's text, by contrast, continually harps on Gallus' savage intemperate nature. It is obvious that it is trying to make Gallus seem worse than he was.<sup>88</sup> But the picture is an obvious complement to the earlier passage on the execution order. Gallus is a violent and emotional man. Moreover, he is violent by proxy. Throughout the history of Gallus, there are never any details of the Caesar's military campaigns, which, according to other sources, were many.<sup>89</sup> The picture that emerges is of a man who is just as incapable of fighting as he is of ruling, and

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<sup>88</sup> Thompson, 63.

<sup>89</sup> Thompson, 57-58

so he lives vicariously at the games. By extension, his execution order on the senate leaders appears as a vicarious thrill, delivered by a savage who hurts good Romans rather than campaigning against Rome's enemies.

The text further interrupts the narrative with another incident. A *mulier vilis* / "a worthless woman" gains admittance into Gallus' court and reveals a plot on the life of the Caesar by some common soldiers. Ammianus' narrator does not deny the existence of a plot, but instead of revealing more about it, goes on to describe how Constantia, Gallus' wife, rejoiced in her husband's safety and rewarded the woman (*R.G.* 14, 7, 4). The manner of reward is interesting. The woman was placed in a carriage, sent out of the palace and into the streets of Antioch, "ut his illecebris alios quoque ad indicanda proliceret paria vel maiora" / "so that by these rewards, others out there might also offer evidence of similar or more serious crimes" (*R.G.* 14, 7, 4). This episode appears in a fashion similar to the formula of the execution order. There is no contrast as in the latter, but there is too much focus on one aspect out of proportion to the whole story. The actual plot is ignored. Instead the history focuses on Constantia's use of the woman as advertising for an information network. Whether or not it is true cannot be determined, but it again shows that Ammianus is less interested in giving a history of the Caesar than in constantly portraying him as a monster. If Constantia was recruiting informants, what makes this worthy of condemnation, given that conspiracies against her husband were real? Ammianus does not deny that the plot was genuine. The implications of this plot, however, are not important to Ammianus, except to show further examples of tyranny.

After having diverted his readers through two unrelated episodes, Ammianus' narrator finally returns to the conclusion of the famine narrative, which only continues in

the same vein as above. Gallus was preparing to go on campaign when the common people of Antioch come beseeching him, “inediae dispelleret metum, quae per multas difficilisque causas affore iam sperabatur...” / “to dispel the fear of want, which due to many causes and difficulties it was now hoped he would address” (*R.G.* 14, 7, 5). The passage is curious. The people want him to remove the fear of the famine, which apparently was already present. Thompson sees in this class loyalty between Gallus and lower orders, and this accounts for Ammianus’ hostility since he was a member of the Antiochene elite. Blockley disputes the notion, seeing Gallus as having no special concern for the poor and as simply not understanding his role as Caesar.<sup>90</sup> Blockley’s view agrees with the notion that Ammianus’ history is an apparatchik’s discourse that attacks Gallus for crossing institutional lines, but it does not exclude a social prejudice as well. The dispute over the Caesar’s motives only points out the fact that Ammianus’ Gallus is not subtle enough to be concerned either for the people or about his proper role as Caesar. First, he was going on campaign while a famine was looming over the city. When confronted with the crisis by the throngs of people, Gallus responds as he always did. Ammianus is clear, “non ut mos est principibus, quorum diffusa potestas localibus subinde medetur aerumnis, disponi quicquam statuit, vel ex provinciis alimenta transferri conterminis...” / “not as was custom for emperors, whose extended power can often alleviate a local problem, he made no order for the distribution or transference of grain from the provinces” (*R.G.* 14, 7, 5). The word *mos* is instructive and key to understanding the import of this passage; it means that Gallus did not act in the established practice of princes, that he was not guided by hallowed custom. This merely reinforces the established formula about transgressions against boundaries and reckless

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<sup>90</sup> Thompson, 66-67. Blockley, 18-19.

orders. The suggestion to transfer grain is curious. Gallus was only a Caesar, not an Augustus with full powers. Moreover the Praetorian Prefects, the officials most concerned with provisioning, were often hamstringing Gallus rather than helping him. The passage is also curious in that his half-brother Julian, when he was emperor, tried this very strategy when he was in Antioch. Julian had no more success than Gallus. He had tried other measures, such as price-fixing, but unlike Gallus, Julian merely threatened the senate leaders of Antioch with imprisonment. He did not issue death warrants.<sup>91</sup>

This time Gallus too does not issue death warrants, “sed consularem Syriae Theophilum prope adstantem, ultima metuenti multitudini dedit, id assidue replicando, quod invito rectore, nullus egere poterit victu” / “but to the multitude which was in fear of the direst necessity, he (Gallus) delivered up Theophilus, consular governor of Syria, who was standing nearby, constantly repeating the statement that no one could lack food if the governor did not wish it” (*R.G.* 14, 7, 5). Given the public nature of this event, we cannot dismiss it as mere rumor. Gallus appears to be fault finding and his action does nothing to calm the situation. Instead a riot ensues. Did the provocations by Thalassius and Domitianus turn Gallus against the entire administration? This is the first direct evidence in the text of Gallus crossing institutional lines. Ammianus’ narrator describes it vividly: “Auxerunt haec vulgi sordidioris audaciam; et cum ingravesceret penuria commeatum, famis et furoris impulse, Eubuli cuiusdam inter suos clari domum ambitiosam ignibus subditis inflammavit...” / “These words aided the audacity of the sordid mob and as the shortage of provisions grew more serious, driven by hunger and fury, it (the mob) set fire to the grand house of Eubulus, noted among his own...” (*R.G.* 14, 7, 6). The text uses the singular third person form *inflammavit*. The mob is a single

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<sup>91</sup> *R.G.* 22, 11, 14. See also Thompson 61-62.

entity, or at least is acting as such. This corporate identity contrasts with the name of Eubulus, the man, whose home the mob burned. Eubulus is mentioned as being noted or famous “among his own.” Ammianus’ narrator is pointing directly at the class character of the crisis over the shortages, but he neatly sidesteps this in the first part of the quote. It is Gallus, or more specifically his words, which aided the mob and set it in motion. The audacity of the crowd sounds similar to the descriptions of Gallus and his overstepping of authority. They are an extension of the Caesar, motivated by rage along with hunger. The descriptions of Gallus’ passion for the games and his reaction resemble his description of the mob’s mood. It also does not think, but is guided by emotion and bodily needs. It is interesting to contrast this situation to a similar one in *Ville Conquise*. The attempted strike at the Wahl Factory was also settled with satisfaction of bodily needs, namely the workers’ need for more food. Serge, however, does not denigrate the workers for this. It is the SR Goldin who appears in a bad light having only rhetoric, while the less well spoken Antonov can answer the worker’s legitimate needs with trucks laden with food. Serge’s text stressed the importance and legitimacy of material needs. Ammianus does not, and this gives credence to Thompson’s argument of class bias being behind Ammianus’ text.

The crowd is unthinking and turn their anger to Theophilus himself, “rectoremque ut sibi iudicio imperali addictum, calcibus incessens et pugnīs, conculcans seminecem laniatu miserando discerpsit” / “and the governor, as if given up by imperial order, beating him with fists and heels, having finished off the half-dead man, the mob tore him to pieces” (*R.G.* 14, 7, 6). Ammianus’ description of the people’s assault is vile, but Gallus is the culprit. The key phrase *imperiali addictum* / “imperial order” points to



him and of course refers to Gallus' earlier remark. This death is just another one of Gallus' executions, as was, for example, Clematius. The brutality of the crowd is simply that of Gallus writ large. Gallus is the problem. He embodies Ammianus' apparatchik's discourse, representing what went wrong in the east during those years (351-354). The text uses a number of simple formulas to reduce the Caesar to a stereotype and thus deflect blame from anyone else in the region.

Julian, when he became emperor himself, struggled with the senate of Antioch. In his satire, *Misopogon*, Julian details very clearly the manipulations of the Antiochene leaders. In Julian's time there was initially more abundance, but still inflated prices. Julian tried to persuade the leaders to address the matter, but their stonewalling led Julian to attempt price-fixing, as Gallus did earlier. When a shortage of grain did occur, Julian, imported supplies from other regions and paid for them from his own treasury, according to the principles of behavior for a prince set out in Ammianus' text.. He set the price far below the normal market value, but did not regulate the sale. Thus the rich men of the city simply bought up as much as they could, and tried to sell it at inflated prices to the famished in the surrounding countryside.<sup>92</sup> To all this Julian merely threatened imprisonment. To Ammianus, Julian's efforts were nothing, but the courting of cheap popularity (*R.G.* 22, 14, 1). Despite this criticism, the implication here is clear. Gallus' harsh treatment, while certainly not the best solution to the crisis, certainly had some provocation on the part of the Antiochene leaders, something that Ammianus omits. Ammianus treats the leaders of Antioch as he treats Ursicinus; he practically ignores them focusing most of his attention on Gallus.

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<sup>92</sup> Julian, *Misopogon*, translated by Wilmer Cave Wright, in *The Works of the Emperor Julian*, (London: William Heinemann LTD, 1969), 368D-370C.

Ammianus concludes the description of the riot and the death of Theophilus with an epilogue, the trial and acquittal of the former general Serenianus. Again the text uses contrast. We have had an “innocent” murdered by mob action inspired by the Caesar. Now we will see the guilty go free. Ammianus’ narrator does not like Serenianus and ridicules him. Concerning his trial he says flatly, “pulsatae maiestatis imperii reus iure postulatus ac lege, incertum qua potuit suffragatione absolui...” / “he was a defendant charged under the laws of treason to the emperor and brought before the law he was able to get an acquittal by uncertain means...” (*R.G.* 14, 7, 7). The narrator is sure of his guilt and equally sure how he escaped conviction. The word “uncertain” is just an oblique reference to Gallus, reinforced by the final remark to the twofold evil: Theophilus’ death and Serenianus’ acquittal. (*R.G.* 14, 7, 8) For the narrator, this was a reversal of justice, although he does mention one piece of evidence that should have ensured Serenianus’ conviction. He also notes that practically none protested at this miscarriage of justice.<sup>93</sup> Although neither Gallus nor Constantia are mentioned in the passage, the text is clearly implicating them in these acts, especially by mentioning Serenianus alongside Theophilus.

Serge’s characterizations are strikingly multi-faceted when compared with Ammianus’ one-sided representations. It is true that Serge was writing novels, while Ammianus was writing a history. It is also true that Gallus did have some negative traits that even his half-brother noted. Nevertheless, Gallus is portrayed in a completely negative way. Gallus is a monster. This is unrealistic and not historical. Despite being fictional, Serge’s characters are well rounded and realistic. Erchov, for example, may

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<sup>93</sup> Ammianus mentions a cap that Serenianus wore. It was rumored to be enchanted. Supposedly Serenianus sent the cap with a friend to a prophetic shrine to find out if he should be the next emperor, something Ammianus alleges he secretly desired (*R.G.* 14, 7, 7).

have abused his position as a High Commissar for Security, but the manner in which he is stripped of position, imprisoned, broken, and then seduced into signing a confession to the most ridiculous of crimes makes him a tragic figure. Serge's text shows pity even for those who were political enemies. Furthermore, Serge's characters were based on real life examples he had experienced. Ammianus' narrative lacks this realism and instead of a coherent narrative depicting the reign of Gallus and detailing actual instances of institutional conflict between the Caesar and his officials, instead there are a series of vignettes that have little in common except to paint Gallus in the worst light, perverting justice and turning things upside down. Gallus' true personality, his *ipse*, is unreachable in the text. Instead the text presents a familiar figure of ancient literature, the depraved tyrant, Gallus' *idem*. This is very far from Serge, whose characterizations do not follow the traditional hero/villain mould. Zvéréva may be villainous in *Ville Conquise*, but she does crack the Danilov case and save the careers of all her fellow Chekists. Ossipov is even more ambiguous, agreeing with the arrest of Arkadi, despite his friendship with the man. Serge's characters tend to have a shading Ammianus' lack. Gallus, unlike Zvéréva, can do nothing right. All he touches turns bad. His edicts and reactions to the Antiochene senate make the problem of the famine even worse. Even when he is not engaged in obvious attempts at tyranny he is a vile monster, watching six or seven games in a row, reveling in the bloodshed. Such characterizations are standard formulas in Ammianus' text. Gallus becomes the explanation for the disorder in the East in years 351-354.

## URSICINUS AND THE COURT: ONE AGAINST MANY

Constantius' court surpasses Gallus' villainy, primarily for singling out Ursicinus for destruction. According to Ammianus' text, enemies at Constantius' court plot against the general on a regular basis. As usual, our historian tells us little about Ursicinus himself in these episodes. The general appears as a whitewashed slate that seems to draw the animus of evil courtiers for no better reason than simple jealousy. These scenes display a form of asymmetrical speaking rights. Ursicinus never utters a word in the text. All the speaking is by the courtiers as a group. The picture is of one man against the court as a monolithic institution. Coupled with the repetition of rhetorical formulas, the text reduces both the general and his critics. For example, Constantius, having decided to remove Gallus from his position, debated with his council about the best ways of achieving this end. Two men, Eusebius, the *Praepositus Sacri Cubiculi*, the overseer of the emperor's domestic staff and a eunuch, and Arbitio, *Magister Equitum in Praesenti*, the senior general in the military establishment, and a future judge at Chalcedon, whom Ammianus calls *versabilium adulatorum* / "a group of fickle flatterers" however, strongly oppose this plan.<sup>94</sup> They argue that if Gallus is removed that, "Ursicinum in oriente perniciose relinquendum, si nullus esset qui prohiberet altiora meditaturum" / "To leave Ursicinus in the East would be ruinous, if there is no one to check the development of his plans" (*R.G.* 14, 11, 2). The text ignores the fact that Ursicinus sat as a judge for Gallus' trials and reported secretly on Caesar. What the text identifies as jealousy may in fact be an invocation of nomenclature. Like Gallus, Ursicinus had crossed institutional lines and

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<sup>94</sup> The *Praepositus Sacri Cubiculi* was in charge of the imperial household. The holder of this office was usually a eunuch and at times could hold great power at court due to his constant access to the emperor. His staff included domestic personnel, ushers and other eunuchs. For more information see A.H.M. Jones, *The Later Roman Empire 284-602: A Social, Economic, and Administrative Survey*, (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1964), 367.

was thus suspected of harboring ambitions. The text ignores this thread and instead turns to the eunuchs at court.

Ammianus's text starts a new thread, where his apparatchik's discourse tries to appear as a dissident's discourse. It employs the same formulas, but they are designed to vindicate an allegedly oppressed man and call to justice his tormentors and the tyrant that rules them. As with the Gallus narrative, Ammianus paints a black and white picture creating a new contrast in the process. Ammianus' text should be quoted in full:

Isdemque residui regii accessere spadones, quorum ea tempestate plus habendi cupiditas ultra mortalem modum adolescebat, inter ministeria uitae secretioris per arcanos susurros nutrimenta fictis criminibus subserentes; qui ponderibus invidiae gravioris virum fortissimum oprimebant, subolescere imperio adultos eius filios mussitantes, decore corporum fauorabiles et aetate, per multiplicem armaturae scientiam, agilitatemque membrorum, inter cotidiana proludia exercitus, consulto consilio cognitos..." / "And likewise assent (to Eusebius and Arbitio's objection against Ursicinus) was given by the remaining royal eunuchs, whose inordinate greed at that time was growing beyond mortal bounds, for in their private ministry to the emperor's person they had opportunity for supporting criminal fictions via mysterious whispers, which jealousies of such heavy weight crushed so brave a man, they also muttered about the general's grown sons, who were popular due to their age, good looks, their many-sided knowledge of arms, and their fit bodies, among daily military exercises was thought (by the eunuchs) to be part of a considered plan..." (R.G. 14, 11, 3).

Ammianus' text has several interesting points. First, it starts by reporting that the other eunuchs were supporting the objections of Eusebius and Arbitio. Then the text immediately moves off this issue and whatever merits it may have, and sets up a formula to prejudice his readers against the court. The formula is a dichotomy between the court eunuchs and Ursicinus. The history depicts the eunuchs as corrupt and "inhuman" in their greed. The narrator uses extreme phrases that really explain nothing since he does not explain what normal greed is in contrast to abnormal greed. In the next line, however, the

narrator finally gets to the main point: that they use their proximity to the emperor to encourage injustice for profit. This is a cause and effect succinctly stated and easy to believe. The text is attacking the court's institutions. Again there are hints of institutional warfare. As a regional general coming to court, Ursicinus may have resented the influence of the eunuchs, thus incurring their enmity. The text does not say but instead gives us more contrast. The words of this passage "mysterious", "hidden", "fiction", and "criminal" all have an air of darkness. The eunuchs at court, and by extension Eusebius and Arbitio, are extremely greedy and so motivated will use their power for injustice. Of course this is easier to believe because the principal villains are eunuchs. Ammianus is well known for his dislike of them.<sup>95</sup> The fact that in his entire history he singles out praise for one, Eutherius, Julian's *Praepositus*, only reinforces that point (*R.G.* 16, 7, 4-10). Nevertheless, the depiction above goes beyond mere prejudice. Here is another example of the use of contrast. Whereas the evil Gallus was contrasted to the many good senators of Antioch, here the good Ursicinus is contrasted to numerous eunuchs at court.

Turning from the eunuchs to Ursicinus and his sons is as turning from night to day. Ammianus calls Ursicinus "bravest". The eunuchs are corrupt beyond human means; Ursicinus is strong and brave beyond human means. He is portrayed as one man against an army of many, who "crush" him. Always alone at court, Ursicinus must struggle against the courtiers. We never hear of anyone one supporting him, in spite of the fact that he *never* loses his position to any conspiracy. Meanwhile, in addition to Ursicinus, Ammianus' narrator also describes his two sons. The description is glowing and the traits

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<sup>95</sup> On Eunuchs see Jones, 851-852. Claudian, a contemporary of Ammianus, also dislikes them, although to be fair, his polemic against Eutropius probably had more to do with the fact that he was the enemy of Claudian's patron, Stilicho. See *In Eutropium*, in *Claudian*, trans. by Maurice Platnauer, (London: William Heniemann, 1922), 98-99, 121-122.

are at odds with those of the eunuchs. The boys are “handsome”, “young”, “knowledgeable about many weapons”, and “physically fit or agile”. The sound, wholesome manliness of the description contrasts with the inhuman, alien and ultimately evil nature of the eunuchs who predominate at court. Totally ignoring the empiric fact that the emperor might be expected to worry about leaving a popular general in the East after removing Gallus, Ammianus establishes an alternate reason for the general’s troubles: greedy eunuchs who dominate the court.

The savage Gallus had easily fallen victim to the machinations of corrupt administrators and courtiers, but Ursicinus stands firm against the wave and emerges as a lonely hero facing the Sassanids on the outside of the empire, and greedy, venal eunuchs and courtiers on the inside.<sup>96</sup> This is key comparison. The eunuchs and other courtiers are equated with Rome’s most powerful enemy. The text is denouncing the whole court as an institution and its discourse of suspicion. Thus the logical causation of Ammianus’ discourse continues. Evil only corrupts those already evil. Gallus was constitutionally unfit to rule. Ammianus does not say whether Ursicinus was fit to rule. The general’s ambition is subject only to speculation. But that is not the point. Ammianus’ narrator ignores the reason Eusebius and Arbitio stated for wanting Ursicinus summoned back. Given Magnentius’ rebellion, fear of another ambitious general was not unfounded, especially if Ursicinus was as capable as portrayed. Already, the general had also exposed himself by participating in Gallus’ trials, but Ammianus’ text does not return to this point. The key formulas of Ammianus’ discourse are clear: omitting key information,

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<sup>96</sup> The Sassanids were an Iranian dynasty that ruled Iran and adjoining territories (225-652). They were the major enemy of Rome in the Near East and thus the enemy with which Ursicinus probably had the most experience.

changing the order of information, and the use of contrast. Now the text will bring forth another formula.

After his introduction as a judge at Gallus' trials, Ursicinus became as a source of concern to members of Constantius' court, who feared that Gallus' removal would be the signal for the general to revolt (*R.G.* 14, 11, 1-3). The history ignores this line of reasoning and the whole discourse of institutional warfare and potential civil war. Instead it presents court as being dominated by greed. Constantius had just finished waging a brutal war against a usurper in the west, and thus people at court might be excused in seeing another Magnentius in Ursicinus. Ammianus's history reduces the state and the institution of the court with simple formulas, depriving them of legitimacy in the process, in order to vindicate Ursicinus. This theme is constant throughout the text, especially in book fifteen.

At the beginning of this book, Ammianus' narrator gives his famous statement of intent in writing this part of the history. It is a prologue to a new section, which will focus on Julian.<sup>97</sup> Julian is introduced in the text soon after and book fifteen does close with his dramatic appointment as Caesar. Ursicinus, however, is the true hero here. He is the opposite of Gallus, without flaw, noble and selfless, and these two make a pair, which dominate the early history and essentially set up the arrival of Julian. The remarks of text claiming accuracy and thorough checking of sources are a stock feature of ancient

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<sup>97</sup> See Sir Ronald Syme, *Ammianus and the Historia Augusta*, (Oxford: At the Clarendon Press, 1968), 8. For an opposing view, see Thompson, 35. He argues that Ammianus' appointment as *Protector Domesticus* to Ursicinus occurs in 353 and that this marks the start of a more detailed account.



historiography, and Ammianus' claim as an accurate and fair historian in antiquity is quite high, which speaks volumes about objective reporting in the ancient world.<sup>98</sup>

After Gallus' execution, Ursicinus arrived from Syria and presented himself at the court in Milan. The theme developed earlier continues: "Iamque...sonate periculorum iudicialium tuba, in crimen laesae maiestatis arcessebatur Ursicinus, adulescente magis magisque contra eius salutem livore, omnibus bonis infesto" / "And now...the trumpet of court trials sounded and Ursicinus was arraigned for high treason, since jealousy, the foe of all good men, grew more and more dangerous to his life" (*R.G.* 15, 2, 1). As in the Gallus' narrative, Ammianus' text leads with the result and then gives the cause. Ursicinus has actually been charged with treason. Much like Gallus' execution order, this comes out of nowhere. Then comes the explanation: jealousy of the courtiers. This is a repetition of the earlier theme of inhuman eunuchs. Fear over Ursicinus's possible ambitions is ignored. No doubt there was jealousy of such a high-ranking officer, but other motives are ignored. Ammianus' text is omitting some and exaggerating other information, just as at Gallus' trials. Constantius adds his own unique contribution, "quod suscipiendas defensiones aequas et probabiles, imperatoris aures oclusae..." / "that to the acknowledging of equitable defenses and proofs, the ears of the emperor were closed..." (*R.G.* 15, 2, 2) Constantius, like his eunuchs, has an inhuman flaw, an excessively suspicious nature, rather than inhuman greed, which is easily aroused by courtiers. Constantius' ears may be closed to reasoned balanced arguments, but they are open to "susurris insidiantium clandestinis" / "secret whispers of plotters" (*R.G.* 15, 2, 2).

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<sup>98</sup> Tacitus, Ammianus' model, of course made similar claims in his introduction, "sine ira et studio" / "without anger and attachment" (*Annales*, 1/1).

Constantius appears as a stupid emperor, a prey to his courtiers.<sup>99</sup> The text of Ammianus attacks the discourse of the state by mocking its motives for suspicion. The emperor had just fought a brutal civil war to maintain his discourse of legitimacy. The refusal to present any detail and the persistence in reducing Ursicinus, the courtiers and the emperor point to an apparatchik's discourse that is trying to rewrite the discourse of the state and its chief institution, the court bureaucracy.

For example, Ammianus narrator records a plot hatched between the emperor and a few unnamed accomplices to have Ursicinus seized in the middle of the night, out of the sight of soldiers and killed without trial. The plan would have been carried out had not the emperor changed his mind at the last minute (*R.G.* 15, 2, 5-6). Throughout the text this atmosphere is retained as the lonely Ursicinus faces a mass of treachery at court. Despite its murky nature, Ursicinus' troubles, according to Ammianus, come from three key sources, 1) jealousy of unspecified courtiers, possibly the eunuchs seen earlier, 2) Constantius' suspicious, temperamental nature, which was aggravated by the courtiers, and 3) the rivalry of Arbitio, the senior general at court. Again we have the greed and suspicion of the court contrasted to Ursicinus. The text continues, "Sed contra accidentia vir magnanimous stabat immobilis, ne se proieceret abiectus cavens..." / "But against ruin, the high minded man (Ursicinus) stood immobile, taking care not to portray himself in a cowardly fashion..." (*R.G.* 15, 2, 3). All the words point to a singleness of character, which contrasts with the language used for his enemies, such as Arbitio, for example, who is described as "an underground snake" (*R.G.* 15, 2, 4). Ammianus also uses *exempla* from Rome's past, specifically the tragic general Domitius Corbulo, who also was victimized by Nero in Tacitus' *Annales*. Ammianus spares no effort to portray his

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<sup>99</sup> This is the view of many modern historians. For an example see Jones, 116.

commander as a lone, suffering, selfless servant of a paranoid emperor and his evil, jealous courtiers.

Ammianus' version of Constantius shows just how far his apparatchik's discourse can twist an identity into something quite grotesque. No explanation is given as to why Constantius would be so receptive to the discourse of suspicion or why he would not listen to a reasonable defense. The text simply asserts the fact with lurid description to make the process seem darker, more sinister. Serge's picture of Stalin offers an interesting contrast. Like Constantius, Serge's Stalin has paranoia as a tragic flaw, which causes the decimation of the Bolsheviks and the whole progression of the revolution in Russia. Constantius' paranoia has similar though far less devastating effects. While Ammianus' version of Constantius' paranoia becomes a vehicle for courtiers to exploit, Serge's Stalin, like Fédossenko, is a figure of pity and dread. Ammianus' Constantius, like Gallus, however, has no interior life. He simply reacts to events and helps to intensify the evil of others. Serge's Stalin, like Zvéréva and Fédossenko, on the other hand, shows much more dimension as a character.

Both Thompson and Blockley have questioned why Ammianus' narrator could not see legitimate motives in the court of Constantius, especially where Ursicinus is concerned. A key theme of this passage is how little information is really given. What appears to have been a struggle between a regional general and factions at court reduces to a hero's defense against jealousy and paranoia. It carefully reveals nothing about the general except his bravery under accusation. Like Gallus, he is deprived of his individuality. At this point in the narrative, Ammianus' narrator has demonstrated but two concrete facts about Ursicinus, his popularity in the East, and his participation in

Gallus' trials. This would seem to give the courtiers more credit in their suspicions. How would Ammianus know about a secret imperial meeting in the dead of night? All that is known is that in spite of all the accusations and secret meetings, Ursicinus was not tried, removed or killed after his arrival at court in Milan.<sup>100</sup> The episode is a gripping yarn. That the commander just barely escapes from peril is undercut by the sheer fact that Ursicinus seems to have invulnerability to such plotting throughout the text. Ammianus' text is distorting history and creating melodrama with his commander as the suffering hero. It does not work, however, since the general never falls to a conspiracy. In the process Ursicinus becomes a passive cipher in the narrative to demonstrate the evil of the court. The scene is one-dimensional and clearly masking something more complex and real. The end result tells nothing about the inner-workings at Constantius' court or the true relation between the central court and a regional general like Ursicinus. It is only when a third character comes into the history that Ammianus' discourse changes.

#### SILVANUS: VICTIM OR REBEL?

Gallus and Ursicinus are black and white. Now a more ambivalent figure appears in the text. Silvanus is an important key to understanding Ammianus' discourse. His downfall and death paved the way for Julian's rise as Caesar, but it also puts a significant question mark on the supposed heroism of Ursicinus. The Silvanus episode is neatly divided into two parts: the original conspiracy and its uncovering and Silvanus' subsequent rebellion and its suppression. Few episodes in the history show us this level of detail of the events at court.

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<sup>100</sup> Thompson does not credit Ammianus' report of the secret meeting and decision to kill Ursicinus and believes that Constantius summoned the general to discuss the situation in the East. Blockley, on the other hand, while he also sees the murder plot as hard to believe, still sees the summoning of Ursicinus as being politically motivated. See Thompson, 44. See also R.C. Blockley, "Constantius II and His Generals", *Studies in Latin Literature and Roman History*, 2 (1980): 472-473.

Silvanus was a Frank, and originally in Magnentius' faction. He had deserted at a critical moment in the battle of Mursa (351). As a result, Constantius rewarded him with the post of *Magister Peditum in Praesenti*; he was the second marshall at court, behind Arbitio. Originally attached to the court, Silvanus was given the responsibility of restoring the Gallic provinces, traumatized by both Magnentius' rebellion and repeated raids by German tribes across the Rhine. Arbitio is identified as the one who originally suggested this mission, in order that Silvanus would fail at the difficult task (*R.G.* 15, 5, 2). That Arbitio suggested Silvanus' appointment is credible, given that Ammianus himself was a courtier at the time with his commander, Ursicinus. Using the stock conspiracy motive, the text presents Arbitio as a political general who schemes against his colleagues, Silvanus and Ursicinus. This is not impossible and indeed may be a factor.

The conspiracy against Silvanus seems to originate with a certain Dynamius, an *actuaris sarcinalium*; he oversaw the emperor's pack animals. Dynamius asked Silvanus for letters of recommendation to his friends, "ut quasi familiaris eiusdem esset notissimus" / "so that his supposed relationship (with Silvanus) would be made well known" (*R.G.* 15, 5, 3). Silvanus grants the request suspecting nothing unusual. The history makes no critique of this activity, which must have been common given Silvanus' rank and position. Ammianus himself could hardly critique it given that he himself was the beneficiary of such "help" in his career.<sup>101</sup> Also, Silvanus was apparently a success against the Germans in Gaul, "barbarosque, iam sibi, diffidentes et trepidantes" / "and now against him, the barbarians were diffident and timid" (*R.G.* 15, 5, 4). Thus he would naturally draw many clients. There is no more detail on Silvanus' success other than the vague statement above. Throughout the early part of this episode, the text centers more

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<sup>101</sup> See Crump 6-7. See also Thompson, 42.

on the people at court than about Silvanus. Ammianus was then currently at court and as such may have only had little information on Gaul.

Dynamius' plot consists of taking the letters written for him by Silvanus and changing them so as to incriminate the general. He wiped the contents of the letter off the paper with a sponge, leaving only Silvanus' signature intact. Then he wrote another letter, "alter multum a vero illo dissonans superscribitur textus" / "another differing much from the true one was written over the original text" (*R.G.* 15, 5, 4). Ammianus adds that the new words were *obliquis* / "slanting". Dynamius is deconstructing the loyal general Silvanus with "slanting" words. The result is an unclear, distorted picture of the man that allows for numerous conclusions to be drawn. Given the discourse of suspicion at Constantius' court following Magnentius' revolt, the most obvious conclusion would be some form of treachery. As an individual, Silvanus is lost in this process for a potential traitor. He appears in many ways a precursor to Serge's character Erchov, from *L'affaire Toulaév*. Both display institutional expertise. Silvanus is a good general who restores Gaul; Erchov is a good policeman who correctly saw the killing of Toulaév as a one-man job. Like Silvanus, Erchov does not appear to realize the danger that a treacherous underling can pose. Dynamius can use Silvanus' signature to invent all sorts of tales about him, while Gordeév reports on Erchov to the Central Committee, especially his inattention to the Titov affair. In both cases, the stories created about these men are unclear, slanted, allowing all sorts of conclusions to be drawn.

Why would Dynamius want to libel Silvanus? The answer given is again succinct, "Dynamius inquietus agens, ut versutus et in fallendo exercitatus, fraudem comminiscitur impiam..." / "Dynamius, restless in inactivity, also being experienced in

deception committed an impious fraud . . .” (*R.G.* 15, 5, 4). It seems Dynamius had too much time on his hands and was too crafty and deceitful for his own good. The picture here is of a bad boy indulging in mischief, which seems out of place with an attempt to destroy an important man. Perhaps this is the narrators’ own estimation at work. Perhaps he actually met the man. We do not know, but more is revealed in the next passage. The history makes a list of a cabal of conspirators who are behind Dynamius’ actions. The three men listed include Lampadius, the praetorian prefect at court, Eusebius, the *ex-comes rei privatae*, also known as *Mattyocopus*, and Aedesius, *ex-magistro memoriae*.<sup>102</sup> There are several points to make here. First, Ammianus’ text has changed and is presenting more detail. There is no longer a monolithic court, but factions with named individuals, perhaps because Ursicinus is not a target of suspicion. Second, the presence of the praetorian prefect is significant. If true, it would imply a conspiracy at the highest levels of government. This seems similar to the actions of the prefects who opposed Gallus. On two recorded occasions, the text records Praetorian Prefects making trouble. In the first instance, Gallus was the target. Now it is Silvanus. Third, the text invokes nomenclature again. All the other named conspirators are ex-officials, implying some sort of revenge or perhaps a means of getting back into favor. Fourth, the nickname of the second conspirator Eusebius, *Mattyocopus*, which is Greek for glutton, implies the same kind of selfishness that characterizes other courtiers, such as the eunuchs who accused Ursicinus, though this disparagement is restrained compared to the description of the eunuchs. Lastly, and most important, all the named conspirators are members of the

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<sup>102</sup> The *Comes Rei Privatae* (Count of the Privy Purse), was a treasury official in charge of all the lands belonging to the state. This included collection of rents, sales of crown property and so forth. See Jones, 412. The *Magistro Memoriae* (Master of Records), was one of the legal officials at court. He had legal and administrative duties. See Jones, 504.

civilian bureaucracy. As mentioned earlier, under Constantine, the military and civilian aspects of government were sharply delineated. The praetorian prefect, for example, originally was a commander of the Praetorian Guard in the early principate. Now he was a civilian official, overseeing the areas of justice, information, and finance.<sup>103</sup> The history seems to be downplaying the institutional conflict between the prefects on one hand and the various generals and Gallus, on the other, in favor of the stock conspiracy motive, greed. While this motive may be relevant, there are potentially others. An anomaly in this narrative is Arbitio. He is present at the examination and torture of Gallus' adherents (*R.G.* 15, 3, 1). He is identified as the one who opposed Ursicinus. Ammianus's narrator does not mention Arbitio in the list of conspirators, despite his earlier statement that Arbitio saw Silvanus' very survival as a burden (*R.G.* 15, 5, 2). Given Arbitio's past record, it would seem that he would name him as well, but instead he only mentions Arbitio at the beginning of the narrative and not in specific connection with the plot. Like Dynamius, he employs oblique language. Readers are likely to assume some involvement, even if he is not mentioned in the list.

Dynamius forwards the altered letters to Lampadius, whose office was the clearinghouse for incoming information at court. There is no mention what roles the other conspirators had. He brings the letters to Constantius' private room. Lampadius, "deinde sperans accepturum se a principe praemium, ut pervigilem salutis eius custodem et cautum..." / "then hoping to accept the choicest recompense himself from the emperor, through his ever watchful care and protection of his (the emperor's) safety...." (*R.G.* 15, 5, 5). Aside from the brief character sketch of Dynamius, this is the closest to a stated

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<sup>103</sup> For the development of the Praetorian Prefect, see Jones, 50. See also Jones, 101, on further development of the prefecture and the growing cleavage between the civilian and military chains of authority.



motive given by Ammianus. Again the motive is greed. Lampadius is looking for reward and honor as well. Lampadius and his clique are trying to increase their station by destroying the career and life of Silvanus. One scholar thinks the whole matter was inspired by anti-Frankish sentiment at court.<sup>104</sup> For the moment, the plot succeeds. The letters are read out in the consistory, the emperor's council, and Constantius gives the order to arrest those mentioned in the letters, though Silvanus himself is not mentioned.

A completely new element now enters the story. A commander of one of the regiments of the *Schola Palatina*, the imperial guard that replaced the Praetorians in the reign of Constantine I, a Frank named Malarichus, was outraged by the proceedings, and “colleges adhibitibus strepebat immaniter, circumveniri homines dicatos imperio per factiones et dolos minime debere proclamans...” / “having gathered his fellows he was loudly making a racket, proclaiming that men in service to the empire were being assailed by factions and that such wrong should be stoppe.” (*R.G.* 15, 5, 6). This is an incredible statement. The history again dispenses with the monolithic court and its undifferentiated crowd of flatterers preying on a suspicious emperor. Instead there appears to be an institutional war between the civilian bureaucracy and the military. Malarichus in fact denounces the influence of factions at court. This is the apparatchik's discourse, an interaction between the state's discourse and the institution of the court. Malarichus' denunciation of factions is an attempt to prevent one institution from monopolizing the state's discourse for itself. Despite his denunciation, Malarichus too leads a faction. One faction is trying to destroy Silvanus, according to the text, for personal gain. Another seems made of the Franks at court seeking to protect the general. The first faction is made

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<sup>104</sup> R.I. Frank, *Scholae Palatinae: Palace Guards of the Later Roman Empire*, (Rome: American Academy in Rome, 1969), 64. Franks were apparently the largest ethnic group in that organization during Constantius' reign.

up entirely of civilians, the second faction is of Franks in the *Scholae*, and therefore from the military side. Malarichus asks that he or another Frank, Mallobaudes, also a member of the *Scholae*, be sent to fetch Silvanus and bring him to court. He offers his own relatives as hostages to ensure his return. He closes saying that if an *externus* / “outsider” were sent such a person would only make Silvanus nervous and upset (*R.G.* 15, 5, 7). On the face this seems like an honest attempt to resolve the situation and expose a plot without destroying a man in the process. Given that Silvanus was not plotting, it seems a genuine attempt at reversing the discourse of Dynamius’ faction, by giving the general a chance himself to speak on his own behalf. Notably, Ammianus’ narrator here adds no exposition to the text, except to say that the advice of Malarichus was *utilia* / “useful” and *necessaria* / “necessary” (*R.G.* 15, 5, 8). Malarichus’ advice, however, was rejected. Instead Apodemius, an *agens in rebus*, was sent to recall Silvanus.<sup>105</sup>

After Apodemius’ departure for Gaul, the events at court take an unexpected turn. Dynamius, trying to maintain the credibility of his fraud, forges another letter in both Silvanus and Malarichus’ name and sends it to the tribune of a nearby armory in Cremona in northern Italy, “ut arcanorum conscius monebatur parare propere cuncta” / “as if (he were) a member of the plot and was warned to prepare everything quickly” (*R.G.* 15, 5, 9). The language used, and the fact that the letter was sent to an armory, points to clear intention to make both men look like rebels ready to strike. While it appears vague on the surface, anyone looking for treason would see the “true” import of the letter. This corresponds with the original letter Dynamius wrote and would excite the reputed paranoia of the emperor. Fortunately for Malarichus, the tribune at the armory

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<sup>105</sup> The *Agentes in rebus* (Doers in affairs) were courtiers under the control of the *Magister Officiorum*, (Master of Offices). Due to their role, they became useful as spies and are denounced for such activities by Ammianus. See Jones, 128. See also Drinkwater, “The Pagan Underground...”, 364.

did not understand the letter and so brought it to him for an explanation. This is a demonstration of how Ammianus uses jargon in his text to convey the apparatchik's discourse. The tribune was not looking for treachery. The tribune calls himself *simplicem* / (simple) and *subargrestem* / (boorish), implying a basic rustic sort of man, in other words, one who would read the letter plainly, not looking for hidden meaning (*R.G.* 15, 5, 10). One scholar thinks the tribune to be a Frank himself.<sup>106</sup> He would not understand the language and discourses of the court. Jargon always remains the language of a specific social group, to the exclusion of the larger society. Malarichus understands the letter clearly, since he is most often at court. Ammianus' text here is a statement on perception of the apparatchik's discourse beyond the range of the court.

This description highlights an important difference in the texts of Ammianus and Serge. In the former, the discourse of the state and its institutions affects the court and those who associate with it. These rarely affect the larger community of the empire. The rare exception, such as the riot at Antioch only proves the rule. Almost all the figures in Ammianus' history are from the upper levels of society. Thus, the apparatchik's discourse in Ammianus appears highly personal, revolving around the defense of one man (Ursicinus) and/or the condemnation of one man (Gallus) or an undifferentiated group (court eunuchs). In Serge's text, the apparatchik's discourse affects everyone. The whole society participates in the political situation. Ratchevsky's plot theory spoke of persuading all the party masses and by implication the whole U.S.S.R. that Toulaév had been shot and killed by a counter-revolutionary conspiracy. Within the first three days following the killing, Erchov's men had already arrested sixty-seven people from all walks of life. Similar scenes involving the mass of humanity occur in *Ville Conquise*. In

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<sup>106</sup> Frank, 64.

the novel, the whole city of Petrograd was the scene of events and Serge's text took the reader from one group of people to another, all responding differently to the state of revolution and siege.

After meeting with the tribune from the armory, Malarichus repeats his earlier action. He calls together the Franks of the palace and protests loudly over the plot. The text notes that at that time, the Franks were numerous and influential at court (*R.G.* 15, 5, 11). Malarichus' protest is a counter to Dynamius' letter campaign. Two factions are competing for asymmetrical speaking rights. In other words, they want the last word with the emperor. The Frank's protest is effective in getting Constantius' attention, "hisque cognitio statuit imperator dispicientibus consistorianis et militaribus universis, in negotium perspicaciter inquiri" / "And having learned of these things, the emperor decided on acquainting his officials and generals together for the business of a thorough investigation" (*R.G.* 15, 5, 12). This statement contrasts with the previous statements that the emperor's ears were closed to any just defense, but open to the whispers of plotters (*R.G.* 15, 2, 2). Where it concerns Ursicinus, Constantius is inexorable in pursuing alleged treason, but here he appears more moderate and willing to pursue other lines of investigation, before arriving at a conclusion.<sup>107</sup> Here Constantius is not following Ammianus' discourse but instead is working to expose falsehood.

Before a panel of judges, Florentius, son of Nigrinianus, the acting Master of Offices, examined the letters forged by Dynamius. Scrutinizing the text he perceived a shadow of the previous writing and thus concluded, "priore textu interpolato longe alia quam dictarat Silvanus, ex libidine consarcinatae falsitatis adscripta" / "that the earlier text had been furbished and other things very different from that which Silvanus had

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<sup>107</sup> See also (*R.G.* 14, 5, 5) and (*R.G.* 14, 11, 2-3). Also see Seager, 8.

dictated were written over aimed at creating a patchwork of falsehoods” (*R.G.* 15, 5, 12). It is significant that Florentius uncovers the falsehood. The master of offices was the rival of the praetorian prefects. The former were a creation of Constantine and were considered upstarts by the latter.<sup>108</sup> Close examination of the text shows the reality of the forgery, demonstrating that Silvanus’ text was tampered and new material added. Finding the old writing and contrasting it with the new restores Silvanus’ identity. The *idem* of a traitor, forced on him by Dynamius’ text, is now removed. The apparatchik’s discourse of a plot is revealed and the emperor, after learning of this, orders the examination of the prefect Lampadius and the others in the cabal. Lampadius was acquitted “enixa conspiratione multorum” / “by the united conspiracy of many” (*R.G.* 15, 5, 13). This shows the continued interaction of factions at court, but the use of the word “conspiracy” gives it a sinister ring. Eusebius, on the other hand, confessed under torture, though Ammianus’ narrator does not tell us his punishment. Adesius, who denied any involvement throughout, and Dynamius were also acquitted, as were many others who were involved. The account closes with the ironic note that Dynamius was not only acquitted, but also promoted and made governor of Etruria and Umbria.

The story of Silvanus does not end with the exposure of the conspiracy. Ammianus’ text now describes the fallout and the role of Ursicinus. The scene changes from the court in Milan to Cologne, where Silvanus commanded his armies. Apodemius had been sent to bring the general back to court, and again Ammianus’ apparatchik’s discourse resumes. Apodemius *dissidens a mandatis* / “departed from his instruction” and neither interviewed Silvanus, nor ordered him to go to court, but instead “remansit

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<sup>108</sup> See Lydus, 2.23. He regarded the Master of Offices as an upstart institution that lacked the antiquity of the Praetorian Prefecture.

adscitoque rationali, quasi proscripti iamque necandi magistri peditum clients et servos hostili tumore vexabat” / “he remained behind and acting as if Silvanus were already condemned and ready for execution with the help of a local financial official he harassed the slaves and clients of the general with hostile commotion” (*R.G.* 15, 5, 8). This activity resembles the kind associated with Gallus, who is also described as departing from instructions in a consistent manner. Apodemius is ignoring nomenclature. His position and title do not allow him to act in this manner. It does, nevertheless resemble the actions of another imperial agent, the Praetorian Prefect Domitianus, who treated Gallus in much the same way, refusing to meet and treating him with disrespect. The accuracy of this account is important since the text cites it as one of two key reasons for Silvanus’ later rebellion. Apparently Silvanus’ friends at court kept him informed of the doings there and also identified Apodemius as working for his demise. Moreover, Silvanus feared Constantius, *versabilis principis* / (fickle emperor) (*R.G.* 15, 5, 15). The text returns to the old construct of Constantius the unjust emperor and we have another victim of misgovernment.

Silvanus’ rebellion and acclamation as emperor appears in Ammianus’ text as the last act of a desperate man. He had already decided, it seems, that he was doomed and was prevented from fleeing to the Franks across the Rhine by his tribune Laniogaisus, who assured him that the Franks would either kill him or betray him to Constantius (*R.G.* 15, 5, 16). So Silvanus must act. Ammianus writes; “nihil tutum ex praesentibus ratus, in consilia cogitabatur extrema et sensim cum principiorum verticibus erectius colluctus, isdem magnitudine promissae mercedis accensis, cultu purpureo a draconum et vexillorum insignibus ad tempus abstracto, ad culmen imperiale surrexit” / “having

determined that there was no safety in the present circumstances, he was driven in his deliberations to extreme measures and perceptibly having talked with his principal high ranking officers in a more proud manner, and having greatly excited these same officers with promises of rewards, and as a makeshift having grabbed a purple decoration which adorned the dragon standard and insignias of the cavalry regiments, he assumed imperial power” (*R.G.* 15, 5, 16). On the surface, this account seems quite matter of fact. Silvanus was driven to a course of action and acted upon it, but a careful reading reveals a discourse that condemns the man. Usurpers never have any form of legitimacy, no matter their motivation, in Ammianus’ text. The discourse of the state rests with a reigning emperor and/or the acclamation of the army.<sup>109</sup> Silvanus had neither of these. The text itself, though, gives us clues to Ammianus’ opinion. First, Silvanus was driven to “extreme” measures, something reminiscent of Gallus, another illegitimate ruler who also did not observe boundaries. As part of these extreme measures, Silvanus promised his officers large rewards, no doubt in exchange for their support. The phrase “excited by the promise of rewards” suggests that Silvanus is buying support, and that the throne itself is for sale, a fact which would remind readers of other failed usurpers such as Didius Julianus, who infamously bought the throne in 193 A.D. by promising the highest donative to the Praetorian Guard. Procopius, the other prominent usurper in Ammianus’ text does the same thing (*R.G.* 26, 6, 13-14). Lastly, the need to tear a purple military decoration from its standard to give Silvanus a sign of his new authority reveals a makeshift sort of expedient not befitting a legitimate emperor. In Ammianus’ text, no

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<sup>109</sup> See Seager, 120. Note Ammianus’ accounts of other usurpers, Serenianus (*R.G.* 14, 7, 8) and Procopius (*R.G.* 26, 8). See also Blockley, *Ammianus Marcellinus*, 57 and Pierre-Maire Camus, *Ammien Marcellin: témoin des courants culturels Et religieux A la Fin Du IVe Siècle*, (Paris: Les Belles Lettres, 1967), 111. See also Peter Heather, “Ammianus on Jovian”, from *The Later Roman World and its Historian: Interpreting Ammianus Marcellinus*, Edited by Jan Willem Drijvers, (London: Routledge, 1999), 107.

usurper is properly dressed for the part of emperor.<sup>110</sup> In short, Silvanus is violating the discourse of the Roman state by trying to buy his throne without the consent of army. He has no right to any legitimacy. Thus, despite his earlier praise for Silvanus as a military commander and despite the sympathy for the man as a victim of a court cabal, Ammianus's narrator does not approve of his rebellion, but he does not say this openly. Instead, he frames the event in a bad light, right down to the detail of tearing a purple insignia. Silvanus' usurpation is so slipshod that he did not even have time to mint new coins with his own image to distribute to the troops. He had paid the troops four days prior to the usurpation in coins bearing Constantius' image (*R.G.* 15, 6, 3). More importantly, Ammianus' narrator does not reveal this information till after recounting the story of Silvanus. Instead we learn of this detail in the account of the torture of Silvanus' *domesticus*, Proculus. Again, Ammianus' narrator changes the order of information, dispersing it. But why did he not introduce this fact into the text, until after the revolt was quashed?

No scholar doubts that Silvanus was the victim of an organized conspiracy, but J.F. Drinkwater doubts that Silvanus actually revolted, and a key piece of evidence is the issue of the coins. This is significant to our study, for Silvanus' revolt not only concerns himself, but also the career of Ammianus' commander, Ursicinus. Drinkwater asserts that the lack of any coinage for Silvanus as emperor points to no revolt. Coinage was a critical way for emperors to communicate with their discourse, and paying his soldiers in his own coin would be critical for Silvanus in securing their loyalty, as opposed to just making promises as the text reports (*R.G.* 15, 5, 16). Other usurpers, whose short reigns lasted as long as Silvanus (28 days), such as Nepotianus, have significant coinages. Thus a critical

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<sup>110</sup> Blockley, *Ammianus Marcellinus*, 58.



piece of hard evidence is lacking. Drinkwater also thinks that Silvanus' Frankish background would have prevented him from becoming emperor. "Barbarian" generals usually had to play the role of kingmaker.<sup>111</sup> Another crucial piece of evidence, however, is the role of Ursicinus.

When news arrived at court that Silvanus has revolted, according to Ammianus, Constantius was stunned, as if struck with a thunderbolt. This prompts a midnight meeting of his council, in which, in subdued tones, the name of Ursicinus is mentioned, "Cumque nulli ad eligendum quid agi deberet, mens suppetere posset aut lingua, submissis verbis perstringebatur Ursicini mentio, ut consiliis rei bellicae praestatissimi, frustra gravi iniuria lacesiti..." / "And when no one's mind or tongue could suggest what must be done, until in hushed voices the name of Ursicinus was mentioned as a man outstanding in his knowledge of war, who had been needlessly injured by slander" (*R.G.* 15, 5, 18). The narrator now reverts to the apparatchik's discourse seen earlier. We have another midnight meeting, and similar to the one presented before, it concerns Ursicinus. No one was able to suggest a course of action, only mention Ursicinus. The verb *perstringebatur* / (was mentioned) suggests how hard it was for the courtiers to suggest his name. Again there is a contrast, a lonely capable hero and an incapable, corrupt court. The presentation of a differentiated court with multiple court factions is gone. The narrative tells us nothing new about Ursicinus. He is simply summoned to see Constantius and given the task of deposing Silvanus, though the narrator again reminds us of all the abuse he suffered earlier. The potential rebel has become a hero in the emperor's hour of need.

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<sup>111</sup> J.F. Drinkwater, "Silvanus, Ursicinus and Ammianus: Fact or Fiction?", *Studies in Latin Literature and Roman History* 7. (1994): 574-575.

Ursicinus remains a constant victim. The belated recognition of the general's talents and the decision to send him against Silvanus is only another ploy. The narrator insists that Ursicinus was chosen so that either general would be destroyed. Ammianus' language is curious; one general or another was to be destroyed, either Silvanus or Ursicinus (*R.G.* 15, 5, 19). This was the opinion of the courtiers, but in fact it is really the narrator's own interpretation at work. The text presents Silvanus in an ambivalent manner. It praises him and defends him until he revolts. Thus, he is brave, but a rebel all the same. These two words contradict each other in the moral universe of the text and thus the apparatchik's discourse reveals a new formula, that of a good man who turns to evil out of desperation. Silvanus's revolt, however, is too complex to reconcile in the apparatchik's discourse that Ammianus' narrator uses. The text also mentions that Ursicinus was embittered by the assignment. Ammianus narrator seems bent on defying logic. If Constantius and the courtiers believe Ursicinus to be a rebel at heart, why send him to another open rebel?<sup>112</sup> The descriptions of the manner of these proceedings are at variance with the facts of the situation given. This discrepancy, like the ambivalence concerning Silvanus, points to something more sinister concerning Ursicinus.

Ammianus himself, along with ten other *protectores*, accompanied Ursicinus as he traveled to Cologne (*R.G.* 15, 5, 21-22). According to the plan, the general was to go to Cologne and pretend to be Silvanus' successor as commander in Gaul. Constantius had letters drawn up to that effect. After being received into Silvanus' confidence, Ursicinus was to find some way of ending the revolt. Drinkwater finds the most suspect part of Ammianus' narrative. How could Ursicinus and his party travel to Cologne and hope,

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<sup>112</sup> For conflicting opinions on the military use of Ursicinus to Silvanus, see Thompson, 44. See also Blockley, "Constantius II and his Generals", 474.

according to the plan arranged at court, to feign ignorance of the revolt? If the rebellion had occurred, Silvanus' troops and officials would have secured control over a larger portion of Gaul, including critical military highways, before Ursicinus started his journey. The idea that he could hurry, as Ammianus states, and reach Cologne before news of the rebellion reached Italy makes no sense. This leads Drinkwater to think that no rebellion was going on when Ursicinus finally arrived. Rather, he thinks Ursicinus actually was sent to relieve Silvanus of command of the Gallic army. Constantius was transferring his generals between Gaul and Syria.<sup>113</sup> This makes more sense than the idea of Constantius sending one rebel to destroy another.

The arrival of the party and subsequent resolution of this episode does no credit to either Ammianus or Ursicinus. Ammianus's narrator asserts that when they arrived in Cologne there was already evidence of a great enterprise with great crowds and troops being mustered. Silvanus received Ursicinus and his party in friendship and apparently they had plenty of time to decide on a course of action against the usurpation. Ammianus writes, "*pro statu rei praesentis id aptius videbatur, ut ad imperatoris novelli, per ludibrosa auspicial virium accessu firmandi sensum ac voluntatem dux flexibilis verteretur; quo variis assentandi figmentis in mollies vergente securitate, nihil metuens hostile deciperetur*" / "it seemed in the state of present affairs more fitting our general (Ursicinus) should seem supportive of the upstart's purpose and desire to be strengthened in the growth of his power by deceptive omen; to the end that by means of manifold devices of flattery his feeling security might become more assured, and he might be

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<sup>113</sup> Drinkwater, "Silvanus", 571-572. Drinkwater's theory works well with the idea of Constantius' courtiers fearing to leave Ursicinus in the East due to his popularity. By switching generals, Constantius retains their use, but puts them in unfamiliar territory where it will take time before they develop a reputation there.

caught off guard by something hostile” (*R.G.* 15, 5, 25). The text is chilling and expedient in the extreme. The narrator has nothing but contempt for Silvanus, using the term *novelli* / “upstart”. The plan is to lie and pretend to go along until Silvanus’ guard was down. He does not say what they exactly planned to do at that time, but one does not need an imagination. He is stating that Ursicinus and his party will pretend to be loyal and supportive until Silvanus’ guard is down. He declares that he and his party were enemies of Silvanus. Silvanus himself made it easy for them. He welcomed Ursicinus “ut spectabilis...intimus” / “as a notable intimate friend”, honored him at his table and commiserated with him that they should face such persecution at court despite their sacrifices (*R.G.* 15, 5, 27-28). Given the stated attitude of Ammianus’ narrator, Silvanus appears very naïve to be so trusting to Ursicinus, but it is clear that not only was Ursicinus welcomed, but also taken into Silvanus’ confidence. After the dinner, it was easy. An investigation finds men from a couple of regiments willing to do anything for a bribe. Using unassuming courtiers to meet with the men, Ursicinus managed to win over the two regiments, *Bracchiati et Cornuti*, with ample bribes.<sup>114</sup> On the following day, these soldiers stormed the palace at sunrise, killed the guards, dragged Silvanus from the palace chapel and killed him with repeated sword thrusts (*R.G.* 15, 5, 31).

Ammianus’ narrator closes the Silvanus narrative in the same manner as above. “Ita dux haut exsilium meritorum hoc genere oppetit mortis, metu calumniarum, quibus factione iniquorum irretitus est absens, ut tueri posit salutem, ad praesidia progressus extrema” / “Thus a leader by no means of small merits died, having been

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<sup>114</sup> These two regiments were part of the *Auxilia Palatina*. They were created by Constantine and considered to be elite infantry regiments. Thus their susceptibility to bribes and murder is indicative of the army’s morale and also contradicts Ammianus’ earlier statement about the ardor of Silvanus’ troops and their demand to march against Constantius (*R.G.* 15, 5, 29).

driven by fear of slanders, with which a cabal of enemies had entangled him in his absence, so that he needed to look for help in extreme measures for his defense”; so Ammianus reports after describing Silvanus’ murder (*R.G.* 15, 5, 32). This phrase captures the essence of his attitude toward the alleged emperor: a mixture of respect and hypocrisy. The death of Silvanus was regrettable, for although he was a victim of the court, his rebellion was equally wrong and so Ursicinus was justified in his action, though Ammianus makes no further mention of it. We have here three formulas: the aforementioned evil of the court, the desperation of Silvanus, and the loyalty and craft of Ursicinus. From these three, Ammianus’ narrator creates an apparatchik discourse to explain the course of an important episode in Constantius’ reign. Ursicinus used his expertise to uphold the legitimacy of Constantius’ state discourse by dispatching a rebel who challenged that discourse. In summing up these events, the narrator blames both Silvanus and the court, but he omits the role of his commander and that of others such as Malarchius. By using such phrases as *extrema* and blaming the court, Ammianus’ narrator turns murder into an excusable act. The discourse becomes more twisted when one recalls the argument against a rebellion in the first place. Drinkwater himself is clear that Ammianus manufactured the idea of a revolt, since he could not portray Ursicinus as a hero if he had murdered an innocent man. He argues that Ursicinus was probably sent to Cologne to take Silvanus’ command and to send the latter to court, where Constantius would give him another appointment. When Ursicinus arrived, however, he saw the activities of Apodemius, and perhaps Silvanus did share treasonable thoughts at the dinner table as the text portrays.<sup>115</sup> This is not a fantastic reconstruction, but it is not conclusive either. Some other points, however, should be made. Earlier Ursicinus

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<sup>115</sup> Drinkwater, “Silvanus”, 576.

reported on Gallus' trials in order to protect himself against charges of treason. It is quite possible that a similar incident, though far more deadly, occurred here. So, "the whole incident was then advertised as an actual rebellion put down by Constantius' foresight and Ursicinus' bravery..."<sup>116</sup> Furthermore, if Constantius' regime was so oppressive, and if both Silvanus and Ursicinus were so persecuted despite their noble service, why did Ursicinus not side with the rebel emperor, since he had the better cause? Whether or not Silvanus rebelled is really unimportant. Instead Ursicinus is far more savvy and sophisticated than the narrator would admit. Ursicinus may indeed have enemies at court, but considering what happened to Silvanus, it would seem natural that such a man would have enemies and that they might well be afraid of him. This discourse, however, is not part of Ammianus' apparatchik's discourse.

Another figure, no less than Julian himself, also seemed to think that the rebellion of Silvanus was less than true. In his *Letter to the Senate and People of Athens*, Julian puts the Silvanus affair in the same category as that of Africanus.<sup>117</sup> This incident is recorded by Ammianus. At a dinner party given by the governor of the province of *Pannonia Secunda*, Africanus, idle drunken chatter was taken down by one of the guests, Gaudentius, like Apodemius a member of the *Agentes in Rebus*. The statements were taken to Rufinus, a chief assistant to the praetorian prefect, who uses his position to report the treason directly to Constantius. The results include immediate arrests and condemnations. In the text, Africanus and the others as innocent victims of an

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<sup>116</sup> Drinkwater, "Silvanus", 576.

<sup>117</sup> Julian, *Letter to the Senate and People of Athens*, translated by Wilmer Cave Wright, in *The Works of the Emperor Julian*, (London: William Henieman, 1969), 273D.

overzealous official trying to win the emperor's favor (*R.G.* 15, 3, 7-9).<sup>118</sup> This event is eerily similar to the events at Cologne. Silvanus and Ursicinus had a dinner, in which the former made critical, some might say treasonable, remarks about Constantius' regime. Could Ursicinus have been acting in the manner of Gaudentius, only more directly? While his motivation may have been one of fear, as in the case of Gallus' trials, rather than profit, the effect is the same.

The aftermath only adds further to the story. After Silvanus' death, Ursicinus was now in charge of the Gallic army. News of these events eventually reached court, where Constantius, according to text, became swollen with pride and ascribed the turn of events to good fortune (*R.G.* 15, 5, 35). This is an example of the state's discourse of Constantius. The good fortune supports his legitimacy of control. Ammianus' narrator, however, goes on to attack the emperor's discourse and compare him to Domitian and accuse him of wanting to hamstring such good men at all turns. This is mere setup. Domitian was infamous for his treatment of the general Agricola, Tacitus' father-in-law. Instead of praising Ursicinus' service, Constantius wrote back accusing him of embezzlement of funds from the Gallic treasury, which Ammianus' narrator says no one had touched (*R.G.* 15, 5, 36). To further confuse the matter, he mentions the misdeeds of Remigius, the army auditor sent to investigate the lost funds. What is missing from the account are the results of the investigation and a record of punishment for Ursicinus, who is left in command in Gaul.<sup>119</sup> Most important is the alleged crime itself. Obviously, there was missing money, or else Constantius would not have ordered an audit. The only

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<sup>118</sup> Julian's opinion seems biased. The letter to the Athenians was written after the outbreak of hostilities between himself and Constantius (361). Still the two events are very close in chronology and fit the same pattern: court officials manipulating information from the provinces for selfish advantage.

<sup>119</sup> Thompson, 45.

spending of money recorded are the bribes Ursicinus once paid the soldiers to kill Silvanus. If this is indeed the money that was missing, there are two immediate implications: first, Ursicinus had not informed Constantius of this use of the money, and second, Ursicinus had access to the funds. Having such access supports Drinkwater's contention that Ursicinus was sent to take over Silvanus' command. Ammianus does not mention the source of the bribes, but it seems implausible that Ursicinus and his group could carry the amount of money needed to bribe all the men from two regiments (approximately 1,000 each). If Silvanus had revolted, he would have guarded his own source of money, even if he did honor and receive Ursicinus with kindness. The text does not give us a clear picture it seems, with good reason. The lack of coins for Silvanus, which the narrator does not reveal until after the revolt has ended, the implausibility of traveling to Cologne and feigning ignorance of the revolt, the ambivalent attitude toward the fallen general, Julian's linking of Silvanus' denunciation with that of Africanus and the mystery of the missing money, all point to an apparatchik's discourse which transforms an innocent general into a reluctant rebel. He is necessarily destroyed by the self-sacrificing Ursicinus.

#### URSIKINUS AND JULIAN: AMMIANUS' HEROES IN CONFLICT?

The picture emerging is that of a politically savvy general, who is involved in at least two of the purges that would eventually bring about the trials at Chalcedon. Ammianus' narrator is at pains to portray his commander as a lone sufferer of the attentions of the evil court, but a close reading dispels this discourse. As with the Gallus' narrative, the text does not detail Ursicinus' time in Gaul. The brave commander disappears from the text. The less said the better it seems. Ursicinus presides over disaster



in Gaul, yet we read no account mentioning his name. The text states that “Constantium vero exagitabant assidui nuntii, deploratas iam Gallias indicantes, nullo renitente ad interneccionem barbaris vastantibus universa...” / “indeed Constantius was assiduously disturbed by messages, deploring the current information on the Gauls, which was now completely devastated through the destruction wrought by barbarians with no resistance” (*R.G.* 15, 8, 1). We last saw Ursicinus as the new commander in Gaul, following Silvanus’ death, yet Constantius is receiving reports of the Germanic tribes running around and causing destruction unchecked. Ammianus' own account states that Ursicinus remained in Gaul until after Julian’s arrival (*R.G.* 15, 13, 3). It is interesting to compare this bleak summary with the one the narrator described when Silvanus was general (*R.G.* 15, 5, 4). Again, he removes his commander from the picture and instead uses this bare summary as an introduction to the center of his work, Julian. Reading the text carefully reveals that Ursicinus’ seeming lack of expertise is the direct cause of Constantius elevating Ammianus’ hero to the position once held by Gallus, Caesar.

Ursicinus served in Gaul through Julian’s own first campaign in the region. A new *Magister*, Marcellus, also arrived and would remain behind to serve with Julian after Ursicinus left. In Ammianus’ account of Julian’s first campaign in Gaul, it is noticeable that both Ursicinus and Marcellus seem to vanish. Despite it being his first campaign, Julian does all the work of leading troops and directing them in battle. The narrator mentions Ursicinus only once saying that he was ordered to remain in Gaul until the end of the campaign (*R.G.* 16, 2, 8). He also mentions a meeting at Rheims where the strategy of the coming campaign was worked out. The text mentions no persons at the meeting, just that *variatas...sententias* / “various opinions” where discussed (*R.G.* 16, 2, 9). It

would seem that such a meeting would include Julian, Marcellus and Ursicinus. Despite this, Julian dominates the text thereafter, giving the impression that after battle plans were discussed, the young and inexperienced Julian was left to handle matters, while the senior commanders stayed put in Rheims. The truth of events can be more disentangled with the aid of Julian's memory. Julian states that when Constantius sent him to Gaul, he was to be subordinate to the "generals" stationed there. Julian does not mention names, but the plural can refer to none other than Marcellus and Ursicinus. Julian also states that the two were to watch him in case of any trouble.<sup>120</sup> In short, the generals were to watch for treachery. Thompson is only understating things when he says Julian's account suggests some friction. It is decidedly odd that an inexperienced commander should dominate operations, as Ammianus' history reports. Furthermore, The narrator says nothing of his commander's service in Gaul. For Thompson the only conclusion is that Julian did not get along well with either commander, or Ammianus would not want to describe in any detail how his commander clashed with his hero, hence the vanishing act.<sup>121</sup> It is also interesting that Julian would mention spying as the chief job of the generals. Ursicinus, on his own initiative, had spied on Gallus' trial, made notes and sent them to Constantius. This is very similar to Julian's situation, save that Julian makes it the policy of the court. Did Julian know of Ursicinus' role in spying on his half-brother, or his role in Silvanus' fall? Ammianus' discourse more and more appears to be a covering for a government collaborator, instead of the persecuted servant.

The apparatchik's discourse can ensure that dissidents must disappear, for the good or bad of the state. In *L'affaire Toulaév*, for example, Erchov's name started to

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<sup>120</sup> Julian, *Letter to the Senate and People of Athens*, 278A

<sup>121</sup> Thompson, 45-46.

disappear in the pages of *Pravda*, as it became more obvious that he would not only not catch Toulaév's killer, but would instead become a defendant himself (*AT*, 697). Pictures of government officials were clipped and Erchov slowly faded from the public eye. Now Erchov was in no way a true dissident, unlike Ryjik, but the government would make him one to support their plot. Ursicinus follows in the same path. He was no true dissident, but like Erchov, a lackey for an authoritarian regime. He disappears in Ammianus' text, whenever a discerning eye may get too close to the truth. The text whitewashes the general, blackens the court, and parades a series of formulas as an alternate discourse. The reverse happens to Erchov, who himself is blackened, but only after he disappears as the loyal High Commissar for Security. The vanishing act in his case is but a prelude to a new identity. Ursicinus, by contrast, vanishes behind a wall of platitudes and commonplaces that seem to have little bearing on what we do know about the general.

In order to better understand the career of Ursicinus, we would do well to look at his supposed rival, Arbitio, Constantius' senior marshal at court. Throughout Ammianus' text, Arbitio appears as a conspirator, sometimes working in collusion with Eusebius, the eunuch chamberlain. If Ursicinus becomes, in Ammianus' text, the ultimate outsider, Arbitio is the reverse, the perfect institutional general, a complete apparatchik. Despite rising from the common soldiery he is portrayed as a political general with no real military capability (*R.G.* 16, 6, 1). Being at court, he is constantly aware of the needs of the state's discourse and so alters his discourse and that of his institution, the army. According to Ammianus' text, he has had an oblique role in both Ursicinus' recall and the Silvanus' episode. Despite such activity, he himself was not immune to attack. Ammianus narrator reports, "In comitatu vero Augusti, circumlatrabat Arbetionem

invidia, velut summa mox adepturum, decora cultus imperatorii praestruisse...” / “Indeed in the court of the Augustus (Constantius), envy was howling around Arbitio, as if soon he would ascend to the highest position, having had beforehand amassed to himself the insignia of empire” (*R.G.* 16, 6, 1). Unspecified people at court are making the same claims against Arbitio, which were earlier made against Ursicinus, that of desiring more power and aiming for the throne. Moreover, Ammianus labels the source of the attacks on the general as envy. He goes on to detail the accusations, naming two accusers, Verissimus, a *Comes*, a commanding rank just below that of *Magister*, and Dorus, an ex-surgeon and former centurion. This conspiracy includes elements from both the army and the civilian bureaucracy. The text has nothing complimentary to say about these two and adds that Dorus had made similar accusations against another before (*R.G.* 16, 6, 2). Ammianus’ text makes the resolution dramatic reading:

Cumque res in inquisitionem veniret, necessariisque negotio tentis, obiectorum probatio speratur, tamquam per staturam subito cubiculariis suffragantibus, ut loquebatur pertinax rumor, et vinculis sunt exutae personae quae stringebantur ut consciae, et Dorus evanuit, et Verissimus ilico tacuit, velut aulaeo deposito scenae. / And when the affair came to trial, and everything needed for the business was at hand, a proof of the charges was sought; when suddenly as if by irregular vote, through the efforts of the eunuch chamberlains, as the rumor told, the chains were removed from those who were arrested as accomplices, and Dorus vanished, and Verissimus became silent, like the fallen curtain of a stage (*R.G.* 16, 6, 3).

The use of drama over detail is a common device of the text. There is really one important piece of information here, that there were those at court envious or fearful of Arbitio. This recalls the interplay of factions we saw in the Silvanus episode, but the narrator is trying to present a counter-point to Ursicinus and thus highlight the injustice. He did this earlier in the Gallus narrative, when he contrasts the death of Theophilus to

the mob and the acquittal of Serenianus. This story and the narrative of the Silvanus affair help demonstrate the discourse more clearly. Both Arbitio and Silvanus had factions at court, which protected them. In Arbitio's case, it seems to be the court eunuchs; in Silvanus', it is the Frankish officers in the *Scholae*, who always traveled with the emperor. Both generals faced charges, but were then acquitted. Silvanus, if he did revolt, was not as lucky, but originally he was cleared. Given that Ursicinus also never faces a guilty verdict, we must conclude that he too has his faction at court and that he is not alone. As a high-ranking officer, the notion of him being a lonely hero at court seems ludicrous and becomes perverse considering his roles in both the Gallus and Silvanus affairs.

#### URSICINUS' FALL

Ursicinus was not at the Chalcedon trials, either as a judge or defendant, though it seems that if he had kept his temper in check, he, instead of some relative nobody named Agilo, might have been sitting next to Arbitio at the the tribunal.<sup>122</sup> Ammianus' narrator would never admit such a possibility. The now dead Silvanus had been succeeded as *Magister Peditum in Praesenti* by one Barbatio, the executioner of Gallus, and later enemy of Julian (*R.G.* 14, 11, 19). Barbatio might have remained general, but for his own ambitions. While the narrator again advertises Arbitio's skill at framing charges and destroying careers, he does not discount treason on the part of Barbatio.<sup>123</sup> Barbatio's removal paved the way for Ursicinus, who was promoted in his place shortly thereafter,

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<sup>122</sup> See eds. A.H.M. Jones and J. R. Martindale *Prosopography of the Later Roman Empire*, 3 vols. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1980), 28-29.

<sup>123</sup> See (*R.G.* 18, 3) for the full story. The key event is the delivery of a treasonable letter from Barbatio's wife, Assyria, to her husband, by a maidservant to Arbitio. Ammianus describes the maidservant as having belonged once to one of Silvanus' estates, which then came into Barbatio's possession. Ammianus does not say what prompted the maidservant to deliver the note to Arbitio.

though reading the text you might think this was just a step away from another execution. As usual, Amminaus' narrator gives another tedious recitation of the evil of eunuchs, even going so far as to praise Domitian, for that emperor's legislation against castration in the Roman world (*R.G.* 18, 4, 5). Despite the repetition of formulas, the narrator does again briefly drop his reliance on constructs and instead offers detailed information, albeit biased. After stating that many tried to win the favor of the eunuch chamberlain Eusebius, he then gives the reason for the conflict between the chamberlain and Ursicinus. Ammianus' text makes the issue quite clear that “magistri equitum salutem acriter impugnantis ratione bifaria, quod omnium solus nec opes eius augebat ut ceteri et domo sua non cederet Antiochiae, quam molestissime flagitabat” / “[Eusebius] had two reasons for sharply attacking the welfare of the master of cavalry [Ursicinus] because of all men he alone neither asked for his power as had others nor did he hand over his house in Antioch, which Eusebius was badgering him for in a most irritating way” (*R.G.* 18, 4, 3). This is the closest to detailed information on Ursicinus' situation at court in the pages of Ammianus. Ursicinus refused to ingratiate himself with the eunuch faction, unlike Arbitio, and thus faces their resentment at court. Again there is the faint echo of the institutional struggles seen earlier at court, but then Ammianus's narrator again returns to the stock greed formula. He also ridicules Eusebius by using words like “most irritating” to describe the chamberlain's manner of requesting the house. Ursicinus himself disappears again.

Ammianus' narrator does not continue the story of Ursicinus and Eusebius. Instead he recounts the story of Antoninus, a well-known soldier in the East, who is being unjustly oppressed with debts. He turns to espionage and then defects with his whole

household to the Sassanid Empire. The narrator shows sympathy for this traitor, calling him “exercitatus et prudens” / “a man of experience and wisdom” (*R.G.* 18, 5, 1). Throughout the telling of this tale, the villain is not Antoninus or the Sassanids, but the treasurer, *largitionum comite* / (count of the largesse), a certain Ursulus. Ammianus then contrasts this story of a wholesome man driven to do wrong, with the antics of the court, “Palatina cohors palinodiam in exitium concinens nostrum, invenit tandem amplam nocendi fortissimo viro, auctore et incitatore coetu spadonum...” / “The palace gang chanting together about our end, at last found plenty of means for harming the bravest of men, all at the request and instigation by an army of eunuchs...” (*R.G.* 18, 5, 4). In this atmosphere, Ursicinus is promoted to *Magister Peditum in Praesenti*, the junior marshal at court. This is a repetition of the earlier contrast between the eunuchs and Ursicinus’ sons, only now the contrast is made with Antoninus. The injustice that drove Antoninus to treason, is being compared to that which afflicts Ursicinus at court, but since Ursicinus did not betray his emperor, the man appears even more heroic. The formulas of the text are very atmospheric, creating moods but giving little information. Instead of telling the readers about the decisions made to promote Ursicinus, the narrator uses the standard formula of the greedy eunuchs combined with a tale of injustice and its consequences for the empire. The result is a confused narrative, in which only Ursicinus appears with any credit.

Meanwhile, another official, Sabinianus, *cultus quidem senex* / (a cultured old man) took over Ursicinus’ former post in the East. So while the court conducts its affairs, *quasi per lustra aguntur et scaenam* / (carried out as if in a brothel or on a stage), Antoninus galvanizes the Sassanids to war with Rome. Ammianus compares him to

Maharbal, the Carthaginian general who urged Hannibal to march on Rome immediately after the battle of Cannae (*R.G.* 18, 5, 6). He entertains the Sassanids, we are told, as Odysseus did the Phaeacians, with his information on Rome's defenses and military situation. The text remains locked in a formula that Constantius and the entire court were dominated by eunuchs and thus would lose any future war with Persia. Unlike Thompson, Ammianus' narrator cannot see Ursicinus' promotion as a good thing. He cannot see that being at court on a consistent basis would enable the general to better fend off any plots by Eusebius.<sup>124</sup> Moreover, by cleverly placing the story of Antoninus' treason and interrupting the story of the switching of commands, Ammianus's narrator can show why he compares the government of Constantius to the goings on in brothels. Sabinianus was a non-military cultured man. He is placed in charge of the East, just as Antoninus begins to woo the Sassanid king. As pointed out by other scholars, Constantius, at the time heavily engaged in the north along the Danube, wanted to preserve peace in the East. The appointment of the pacific Sabinianus was in keeping with that objective. It may have been the wrong move in light of Antoninus' treachery, but it is a factor that Ammianus studiously ignores.<sup>125</sup> Throughout the text, Ammianus' narrator manipulates the information, via consistent formulas, which include, the omitting of information, the stressing of one point out of proportion to others, and the interfering with the order of the narrative. This upholds central discourse: Ursicinus as the hero of the Roman state. The text extols one general against the legitimacy of Constantius, his court and his institutions. In short, it personalizes the history of Rome, making it revolve

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<sup>124</sup> Thompson, 48

<sup>125</sup> See Gary Crump, *Ammianus Marcellinus as a Military Historian*, (Wiesbaden: Franz Steiner Verlag GMBH, 1975), 14 -15. Crump tries to balance Ammianus' account and the role of non-political factors.



around Ursicinus, while at the same time, saying virtually nothing about him, except that he is a victim of jealousy at court.

Ursicinus set out for court, with his retinue, including Ammianus to assume his new post, but war broke out between Rome and Persia. Sapor, advised by Antoninus, begins the conflict with a full-scale invasion of Roman Mesopotamia. Ursicinus, meanwhile, receives orders from the emperor en route, “reverti Mesopotamiam, sine apparitione ulla expeditionem curaturi periculosam, ad alium omni potestae translate” / “to return to Mesopotamia without any staff and provide for an expedition against the danger, all the power having been transferred to another” (*R.G.* 18, 6, 5). This awkward command arrangement left the overall campaign in the hands of the inexperienced Sabinianus. Ammianus’ narrator blames him for sabotaging the subsequent campaign, which climaxed in the siege and destruction of the city of Amida. Ammianus witnessed this siege personally, in what is, without doubt, one of the most arresting passages in the work. Sabinianus had been ordered by Constantius not to risk Roman lives on the campaign, and this meant rejecting Ursicinus’ ideas for a more aggressive defense. As the main Roman army was still fighting in the Danube, Rome would have to rely on the walls of the dense network of cities in the region, rather than some confrontation with Sapor’s large army. Again, the narrator of the history, obviously out of loyalty to Ursicinus, twists Sabinianus’ motives. He prefers a defensive strategy, not because of his orders, but because “...clam vero corde altissimo retinens, saepe in comitatu sibi mandatum, ut amplam omnem adipiscendae laudis decessori suo ardenti studio gloriae circumcideret, etiam ex re publica processuram” / “indeed secretly keeping in the deepest recesses of his heart, a mandate dictated often to him at court, that with having obtained all full means,

he (Sabinianus) should diminish his predecessor given his eager desire for praises and glory” (*R.G.* 19, 3, 2). Again, the text ultimately lays the blame on the court, which secretly instructs Sabinianus to act in this fashion.

The narrator could not know what is in Sabinianus’ heart or in any secret dispatches and more likely than not he was telling the truth when he says that Ursicinus was grieving over his subordination (*R.G.* 19, 3, 1). Given the fates of Gallus, Silvanus, and early experiences of Julian, Ursicinus may have been a difficult man to endure. The text cannot hide what appears to be an institutional conflict between the two generals that is settled by the invocation of nomenclature. Ursicinus had not yet received the codicils of his new rank, which outranked Sabinianus. Thus, in the circumstance, he was actually outranked by the inexperienced man. Gallus and Julian as Caesars, too, technically outranked the general. Though Ursicinus may have been ordered by the court to keep a watch on them, he still had to endure their pretensions to power. The fact that Ursicinus actually sat in at Gallus’ trial points to some measure of subordination. They were part of the state’s discourse; he represented only an institutional discourse. Despite the difference in experience, the difference in nomenclature put the general in an inferior position.

The fall and destruction of Amida, which had been enlarged and heavily fortified by Constantius when he was a Caesar, came as a blow to both the Roman army and court. (*R.G.* 18, 9, 1) Naturally such disasters are the cause for fault-finding and blame, and naturally Ursicinus is again facing charges at court, to where he has returned to assume his duties as *Magister Peditum in Praesenti*. The text does not tell us exactly what the charges were, but that “...obtretractores excipiunt, primo disseminantes mordaces susurros, dein propalam ficta crimina subnectentes” / “detractors met him, at first with

whispered slanders, and then openly added false charges” (*R.G.* 20, 2, 1). The only difference this passage has from previous ones describing Ursicinus at court is its brevity. Again we see the innocent man a victim of an unknown number of detractors and their lies and conspiracies. Ammianus’ narrative consistently leaves them vague, making them more sinister and frightening. On the other hand, the appearance of Eusebius, mentioned later in the passage, does lend a slight bit of detail and perhaps some truth behind the account (*R.G.* 20, 2, 3). Ammianus’ narrator has noted the chamberlain’s hatred of Ursicinus before. It is quite possible that Ursicinus did incur the wrath of this powerful person, and thus had a faction at court against him. But as we saw with the Silvanus episode, one faction usually meant others and furthermore, Constantius could be fair minded (*R.G.* 20, 2, 2). A commission of Arbitio and Florentius, the Deputy *Magister Officiorum*, investigated the defeat. According to the text, out of fear of Eusebius, they exculpate Sabinianus, whom Ammianus blames for the loss due to his inaction, “a veritate detorti, inania quaedam, longeque a negotio distantia, scrutabantur” / “having distorted from the truth, certain trivia, and other things far distant from the business were investigated” (*R.G.* 20, 2, 3). The narrator does not specify what this trivia was, but in fact no one seemed to be held responsible for Amida’s fall, neither Sabinianus nor Ursicinus. Ammianus’ narrator does mention this fact, again harping on the seeming injustice of the proceedings. This does not mean that he is necessarily wrong in blaming Sabinianus or suspecting protection of the officer by the chief eunuch, but again despite all the accusations and false charges supposedly made against Ursicinus, nothing happens to him.

Apparently, though, Ursicinus will have none of it. For the first and only time in Ammianus' text, the general is given a speech. Angered by the official investigation and its findings, Ursicinus verbally attacks the emperor himself:

Esti me despicit imperator, negotii tamen ea est magnitudo, ut non nisi iudicio principis nosci posit et vindicari; sciat tamen velut quodam praesagio, quod dum maeret super his quae apud Amidam gesta amendata didicit fide, dumque ad spadonum arbitrium trahitur, defrustrandae Mesopotamiae proximo vere ne ipse quidem cum exercitus robore omni, opitulari poterit praesens. / Although the emperor despises me, nevertheless this business is of such importance that only by the emperor's judgment can this affair be investigated and punishment inflicted; he should know, however, just as if I were prophesying, that while he may grieve over these things concerning the events at Amida, that were reported with prepared statements, and while his authority is being squandered for the eunuchs, indeed not even the emperor himself with the flower of his army can help prevent the dismemberment of Mesopotamia this spring," (R.G. 20, 4, 4).

Ursicinus states that the emperor despises him. This is the first statement that blames Constantius and him alone for all the trouble at court and in the war. Perhaps Ursicinus did think that the emperor hated him. Regardless, the relentless accusations only serve to remind us of Ammianus' own views that Constantius' own policy centered around containing and destroying Ursicinus. Ursicinus cites Constantius on two counts; first, the emperor hates his general, and thus is letting emotion cloud his judgment where proper examination by a prince is necessary. Note the use of words like "iudicio principis" / "judgment of the emperor" is sarcastic and implies that Constantius is neither judging correctly nor acting like a true ruler. Ammianus uses the word *imperator* to describe Constantius, but then uses the word *principis* in connection with *iudico*. *Imperator* is more of a military title, while *principis* is a title used by emperors in an earlier time. Ammianus' text is attacking Constantius' legitimacy? There were similar statements regarding Gallus. Ursicinus also adds a warning that unless Constantius looks clearly at

why Amida fell, and more importantly throws off the rule by eunuchs, then he will certainly lose any future war in the east. This is an extension of the first thought. In short, Constantius' lack of rational judgment and an independent will have severe ramifications for the empire in the arena of foreign policy. The remark about eunuchs is telling, given the consistent prejudice against them and their role at court. Again the narrator reuses two formulae, a fickle emperor and his evil eunuchs, to explain what is wrong in the government of Rome. The literary Ursicinus becomes a mouthpiece for a denunciation of the discourse of the state and its institutions under Constantius.

Although the words are Ammianus', we can be sure that Ursicinus must have been angry and that he did insult the emperor.<sup>126</sup> Upon hearing of Ursicinus' remarks, Constantius ordered the general to go into retirement, and promoted a junior officer, a tribune, the aforementioned Agilo, in his place. The text notes that Agilo received an enormous advance in rank. Furthermore, it repeats Ursicinus' denunciation stating that the emperor was angry beyond all bounds and that he acted again out of impulse and did not examine the matter thoroughly (*R.G.* 20, 2, 5). Again there is only a general account of Constantius' reaction with no detail. The story of Ursicinus ends in a consistent manner, with minimal detail and large and long denunciations, contrasting black and white. It is instructive to think that considering the emperor's notorious temper and paranoia, not to mention the hatred of the eunuchs, Ursicinus still lived with his lands in retirement. As Thompson has noted, Constantius seems to have been very good to Ursicinus over the years, and perhaps was being lenient, without Ammianus recognizing

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<sup>126</sup> See Crump, 16. He believes that the report probably did blame Ursicinus for Amida's fall and that this did lead to intemperate remarks, which caused Constantius to dismiss the general.

it as such.<sup>127</sup> More interesting is Crump's view, that the fall of Amida was a "major blow" as far as the Roman high command was concerned. The army was not above finding scapegoats, as Ursulus was to discover, but being a military man himself, Ursicinus received less punishment than the unfortunate civil servant.<sup>128</sup> At any rate, Ammianus' text is clear. It was Ursicinus' remarks that caused his dismissal, not his performance during the campaign. Ursulus' remarks too cost him, but much more, and Ammianus could not blame his death on Constantius. The point is clear, the presentation of Ursicinus as some unappreciated victim of a paranoid emperor and his clique of eunuchs is false. Perhaps Constantius and Ursicinus did not get along always and had different ideas, but Ammianus' discourse, whatever truth may have inspired it, is simply a series of formulae creating a tale of continuous misgovernment, his apparatchik's discourse.

Following the death of the usurper Magnentius, Constantius moved to put down any future challenges to his reign. Supporting him were various bureaucrats, eunuchs, and generals in shifting cabals and coalitions who hoped to ensure themselves and in the case of some, profit from the fall of others. This purge was largely finished by the time of Julian's appointment as Caesar (355). There are no treason trials in Ammianus' text until after the fall of Amida (359). While Ammianus' narrator would have us believe that these years were dire, filled with corruption at court, while true honest servants of the emperor were hounded to death by Constantius' suspicions and greedy courtiers, it seems clear that Ursicinus himself was an instrumental part of the destruction of at least one of these

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<sup>127</sup> Thompson, 53.

<sup>128</sup> Ursulus was the *Comes Largitionem*, a fiscal official, who made disparaging remarks on the performance of the army, given the money needed to maintain it. He was executed after his conviction at Chalcedon following Julian's accession. Many scholars cite this as proof that the trials were in the interest of the army. See 20,11,5 and 22,3,7 See also Thompson, 73-75.

honest servants, Silvanus, and possibly had a role in the destruction of another not so savory victim of those years, Gallus. He also did not seem to get along well with Ammianus' own hero, Julian. Whatever else may be said of the early surviving books of Ammianus' history, they are certainly a testament to the writer's ability to whitewash his former commander's role in a purge. Ursicinus was no lone hero of fantasy, but seems to have been a sophisticated member of the Roman elite who did what he could to survive the turbulent political atmosphere and prosper, all this being cut short by an apparent temper. This of course is mere speculation as the real Ursicinus, whoever he was, is lost behind the façade erected by his faithful *domesticus*. Ammianus demonstrates the influence of personal attachment, in the writing of history, and further shows the negative impact of his autobiographical style.

It is clear that Ammianus' use of the apparatchik's discourse is very different from that of Serge. Ammianus uses it for personal and polemical reasons. Serge also employs it, but with an attempt to understand better what had happened to the Russian Revolution. Ammianus, on the other hand, was engaging in a literary war to uphold the memory of his cashiered commander. In doing so, his text reduces both Ursicinus and his supposed detractors, creating a black and white situation with little nuance. The exception to this, the Silvanus episode, only proves the rule. Serge used his novels as a means of understanding; Ammianus' history, on the other hand, was trying to hide, hence his use of the discourse for an ostensibly dissident figure. With our next author, this situation

changes by a half. Diderot is also trying to vindicate a man and he largely succeeds without whitewashing his figure, but he too will use the polemical tools of Ammianus.



#### CHAPTER 4: DENIS DIDEROT: THE DISCOURSE AS A RESTORER

Both Ammianus and Diderot looked to Tacitus, but they were not looking at the same aspect of the Roman historian's writings. Ammianus was operating within a firmly entrenched cultural tradition of writing, although he did add some strong autobiographical elements that distinguish his text from that of Tacitus. Ammianus used him as a model for his own text in order to give authority to his discourse, vindicating his old commander in the process. Diderot, on the other hand, was working in an intellectual climate that had already overthrown adherence to past cultural discourses in favor of scientific inquiry and exploring new cultures. Diderot's ideology was that of the Enlightenment and his use and application of Tacitus was not stylistic, but rather for the information his text contained. Both Ammianus and Diderot used Tacitus as a weapon in the battle with their contemporaries. The result of Diderot's work was two texts very similar to each other and separated by only a few years, but each conceived in a totally different mindset. This change has ramifications for our look at his version of the apparatchik's discourse. Diderot was not an apparatchik. The *Essai sur la vie de Sénèque le philosophe sur ses écrits, et sur les règnes de Claude et de Néron*, published in 1778, while ostensibly focusing on the events of the Julio-Claudian period of the early Roman Empire, was really Diderot's attempt to address the ethical and political questions of his day, especially in light of the ongoing American Revolution, which Diderot supported. Diderot was already nearing the end of his life, and repeated failures for political reform in Europe caused him to look both to America and to Rome's ancient past. Anthony Strugnell is quite correct in calling this *Essai* "the systematic treatise on morality" that

Diderot was never able to write.<sup>129</sup> Diderot's critics, however, did not see the work in that fashion, and the hostile reception he received from them combined with the adulation they simultaneously heaped on recently departed Jean-Jacques Rousseau (1778), caused him to issue a second work that expanded on the first. His *Essai sur les règnes de Claude et de Néron et sur les moeurs et les écrits de Sénèque, pour servir d'introduction à la lecture de ce philosophe*, published in 1782, uses Seneca, like the previous work, as a model for ethics in politics, but, as the reversal of names in the title suggests, it also is a polemical work, attacking Seneca's enemies. The focus is expanded from Seneca himself to include the court and his enemies, including the emperors. Diderot uses Tacitus' text, but it was Diderot's own critics, who are of course the real targets of this attack, which reaches a white-hot intensity when Diderot diverts from the theme of Seneca and ancient Rome to attack Rousseau, the hero of his critics, directly. The result as is an intermediate position between Ammianus and Serge. Despite his reverence, Diderot can portray Seneca in an even-handed and detailed fashion, but when he turns to his enemies at court, he uncritically uses Tacitus' denunciations and falls back to a mode of apparatchik's discourse reminiscent of Ammianus' text.

Diderot uses Tacitus as a source, quotes him at length, and even on occasion invokes his name as an authority. Although Diderot was not an apparatchik, having never held a formal position in a state institution, Tacitus was, having served as a provincial governor in Roman Asia. Despite the use of the ancient historian, the logic behind the work is Diderot's own, and even when he is parroting Tacitus' denunciation, Diderot is merely using the ancient historian to buttress his own discourse. Diderot seeks a greater cause for his heroes, but does not extend the scope to his villains. Both texts are not

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<sup>129</sup> Strugnell, 77.

merely antiquarian, but in fact political documents addressing the role of the philosopher in the era of political reform and revolution. While examining Seneca and the courts of Claudius and Nero, Diderot had his eye cocked on both political developments in his own country, Europe at large and the ongoing American Revolution. His espousal of that cause found its way into the first edition and would be one reason for the expanded second. Diderot's Seneca, unlike Ammianus' Ursicinus, is not a flawless idol, but a living discourse to examine and understand. Diderot's text was not trying to create a model to follow, but a life to study. What could he learn from Seneca's mistakes? Serge's novels do the same, but unlike Diderot, they use multiple characters. Both texts were trying to explore the role of ethics in politics in a revolutionary situation. On the other hand, Diderot could not contain his own anger in his writings, especially at his critics and those whom he saw as enemies of reform. Thus his critical attitude does not apply when Diderot looks at the opponents of Seneca at court and thus his text resembles that of Ammianus. Seneca's enemies were not so much Claudius and Nero themselves, but more the women of court and especially *les affranchi* / "the freedmen", advisors introduced by Claudius, for whom Tacitus and Diderot have no good word. More of the apparatchik's discourse appears in the second edition. Thus, this study will focus on the second, although both editions are important. There are substantial differences between the two as they represent a sharpening of the conflict. This would in turn affect Diderot's writing as he becomes more emotional and less detached and analytical.

Seneca was a popular figure among European thinkers in the eighteenth century. In a society riven by wars, religious quarrels and other political disputes, his life of

retirement and contemplation seemed an antidote to such misery.<sup>130</sup> Diderot, however, rejects such a static picture of the philosopher at leisure. In his introduction, the narrator states that he will not show Seneca in isolation, but rather as a gladiator facing his opponent in the arena. His portrayal, which he alternately describes as being an apology, an examination, and an avenging, is to take the appearance of a Van Dyck painting, “la vérité, la force, et la couleur” / “the truth, the strength, and the color”.<sup>131</sup> Van Dyck was famous for his portraits, such as that of Charles I of England, which would show three poses by the subject, a front view and two profiles. This suggests that the narrator will show different sides of Seneca. The gladiator imagery further suggests that he will show Seneca as a man of action rather than of contemplation. The gladiator image also suggests conflict. All this has implications for examining the apparatchik’s discourse. Viewing different sides of Seneca and a presentation of Seneca in action promise an honest analysis free of the formulas of the apparatchik’s discourse. On the other hand, the image of a gladiator and more importantly his faceless opponent, coupled with the narrator’s remark about avenging Seneca, suggest that this will not be a completely detached examination of his life and times. Instead he resorts to formulas of Tacitus when it suits his purpose. First it is necessary to examine the figure of Seneca himself, the man who says to Diderot, “Il y a près de dix-huit siècles que mon nom demeure opprimé sous la calomnie; et je trouve en toi un apologiste!” / “There are nearly eighteen centuries that my name remains under calumny; and I find in you an apologist!” (*Essai*, 283) With such

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<sup>130</sup> John Hope Mason, “Portrait de l’auteur, accompagné d’un fantôme: *l’Essai sur les règnes de Claude et de Néron*” in Peter France and Anthony Strugnell, ed. *Diderot, Les Dernières Années: 1770-1784*, (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1985), 44.

<sup>131</sup> Denis Diderot, *Essai sur les règnes de Claude et de Néron, et sur les Mœurs et les Écrits de Sénèque, pour servir d’introduction à la lecture de ce philosophe*, in *Oeuvres Complètes*, Roger Lewinter, ed. vol 13, (Paris: Le Club Français Du Livre, 1972), 281. (Hereafter cited in text as *Essai*) Given that the 1782 edition of the work contains the entire 1778 version in addition to the expanded sections, we will be referring to the second edition throughout this chapter. Translations mine.

a declaration, it is not difficult to imagine why some critics were hostile to the text. On the other hand, the *Essai sur la vie de Sénèque* demands patience. It is a long text with many ramifications. There is no doubt that Diderot's work has a personal side, but the issues discussed have far more political meaning and nuance.

#### THE LIFE OF SENECA

In his *Lettre sur les Aveugles a l'usage de ceux qui voient*, the author writes that "Mais quand il (a blind man) dit: 'Cela est beau', il ne juge pas, il rapporte seulement le jugement de ceux qui voient..." / "But when he (a blind man) says: 'these are beautiful', he does not judge, he solely reports the judgment of those who see..."<sup>132</sup> Those who cannot see, or more broadly speaking, cannot experience for themselves, cannot judge a situation accurately. They can only repeat the judgments of others and are at best second-hand informants. This idea of Diderot is a direct attack against the apparatchik's discourse, which synthesizes the state's discourse, usually with the aide of formulas. First hand experience works counter to the discourse and adds far more fact and detail. It is often in the details that we distinguish one from another. This concept is the key focus of Diderot's presentation of Seneca's life. The narrator refuses to lump Seneca into a category and makes it clear throughout that he was not a passive philosopher. Diderot's Seneca is a man of action, of life, and of decisions made in specific contexts, and so one cannot judge him by formulas applicable to more sedentary philosophers. Seneca is fully human with all the variation that entails, and the narrator defends him on those very grounds (*Essai*, 315-316). Thus his life becomes not merely a series of anecdotes from which one might derive formulas for living, but a process of living, learning and doing,

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<sup>132</sup> Denis Diderot, *Lettre sur les Aveugles a l'Usage de ceux qui voient*, in *Oeuvres Complètes*, Roger Lewinter, ed. vol 2, (Paris: Le Club Français Du Livre, 1971), 165.

from which the narrator hopes to learn how to be a philosopher in the world. To do this, the text chronicles the entire life of Seneca, as we have it from the ancient literary sources, and starts by describing Seneca's family background. He dwells specifically on the moral and educational qualities of his father, mother and aunt, who had the most influence on his upbringing. An examination of these people gives one a clue as to what kind of man Seneca will be. Both parents combined an old fashioned Roman sense of morality with extensive education. The elder Seneca, of course, was a prolific writer and a public speaker. Seneca's mother, Helvia, had been educated by her father in an austere home in Spain (*Essai* 286-287). These two along with other family members played a key role in Seneca's development. There are also his many teachers, all of which are detailed in the text (*Essai* 294-296). Diderot's Seneca presents all the trademarks of Ricoeur's definition of character, a set of distinctive marks that enable reidentification with the same *idem*.<sup>133</sup> In other words, Seneca's upbringing ensured that he could both fit into his society and be recognized by his contemporaries, and at the same time develops his individuality or *ipse* in a stable manner. For example, nothing it seemed could keep young Seneca from pursuing all sorts of philosophic studies. His philosophic eclecticism could be worrying to his father, who did not approve of all the things Seneca was studying. The contrast between the conservative mould of the parents and Seneca's wide-ranging interests is the kind of detail that attracted Diderot in the first place.<sup>134</sup> Seneca's life did not follow a straight line. The narrator recounts, for example, the time when philosopher Socion persuaded young Seneca to abstain from meat to improve the health. Seneca's father intervened. Worried by his son's adherence to foreign customs, he

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<sup>133</sup> Ricoeur, *Soi-même comme un autre*, 143.

<sup>134</sup> See Strugnell, 82. See also Mason, 44.

eventually persuaded his son to return to a more normal diet (*Essai* 294). Later on Seneca entered state service, largely it seems, to please his mother. Later he quit to become a teacher. It seems he did not like the stress of public work and preferred the more quiet reflective life. This too, however, would end, and later Seneca would re-enter state service as a praetor (*Essai* 298). These details of what seems to be a conflict between Seneca's desire for his own life and his parents' views are just the kind of information that in Ricoeur's thought distinguish the individual from the social man. This is exactly the kind of conflicting detail that we saw only briefly in the work of Ammianus. We see an individual, not some construct of a Stoic saint, nor a perfect Roman man of action, but rather someone not quite sure of his path, pulled one way by his parents and another by his own desires, not to mention the demands of his fragile health (*Essai* 289). Diderot is contrasting the traditional noble Roman upbringing with the son's experiments in alternative lifestyles to give us a complete character with elements of both *ipse* and *idem*.

Diderot's text has a purpose in this exposé on Seneca's early life, family and educational background. Diderot's concern was political and long term. Persons with individual completeness are best in serving the state. This is best achieved by proper social integration brought about by good family and teachers.<sup>135</sup> In his work on Diderot's political thought, Anthony Strugnell argues that this concept is an inversion of the principles from *Lettre sur les Aveugles*, which, he argues, presents personal experience as the ultimate method of discernment. Diderot's essay sought "to make the individual's moral conscience dependent on the degree to which he is able to perceive the external world through his senses..."<sup>136</sup> Certainly by focusing on the role of parents and teachers

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<sup>135</sup> Strugnell, 78.

<sup>136</sup> Strugnell, 17.

Diderot argues for something more than personal experience in guiding one's decisions. While these parents and teachers, however, play a primary role in Seneca's development, they do not work in a vacuum. Seneca himself makes choices, such as experimenting with a vegetarian diet, or withdrawing from the law courts to teach. These were personal experiences of the type cited as primary in the *Lettre sur les Aveugles*. Indeed, his teaching experience led him back to the law courts and state service so preferred by his parents. The *Essai sur la vie de Sénèque*, therefore, is not invalidating Diderot's essay on blindness, but rather updates his thought. Instead of a reliance solely on empiricism, one's experiences must interact with the thoughts and rules of others.

This can be compared with Ricoeur's view of character and the interaction between *ipse* and *idem*. The text is demonstrating a dialectic relationship between Seneca and his guardians that shows the need for both first and second hand experience. Seneca's parents tried to steer him toward decisions that they felt were advantageous for himself and for Rome. This serves the social being, the *idem*, which must exist so that we can relate to society and vice versa. Even his teachers were influential in the creation of the *idem*. The lessons of youth, both from parents and teachers then interact with Seneca's own decisions, his *ipse*, to form a character by establishing good habits, which tend to form lasting traits.<sup>137</sup> Whether Seneca followed the traditional Roman noble career of legal and state service, or pursued a teaching career, like Socion, he was following a path already mapped out and made familiar and acceptable to the society at large. Greek

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<sup>137</sup> Ricoeur cites the studies of Ravaisson, specifically his thesis, *De l'habitude*, in which he examines the role of habit in human behavior. Character traits and their relation to the *ipse* and *idem*, for Ricoeur, are founded on the very habits explored by Ravaisson. "C'est cette sédimentation qui confère au caractère la sorte de permanence dans le temps que j'interprète ici comme recouvrement de l'*ipse* par l'*idem*" / "It is this sedimentation which confers to the character the sort of permanence in time that I interpret here as the overlapping of the *ipse* and the *idem*." *Soi-même comme un autre*, 146.



culture had already been present in Rome for at least three centuries by this point. Seneca, however, maintains his individuality by borrowing from both parents and teachers, moving back and forth between careers and marking out his own path, distinct from those he encountered as a youth, but still familiar and, for the most part, socially acceptable. Seneca combined the roles of Roman noble, philosopher, and writer, not unheard-of, but to a degree that he is still regarded today as a unique man in the ancient world. The textual presentation of Seneca confirms the views in *Lettre sur les Aveugles* on the necessity of personal experience as well as the view on the need for received knowledge. These two correspond with the two sides of man as presented by Ricoeur and show Diderot's work, at this stage, to be a discourse designed to enlighten rather than confuse or mislead.

It is apparent that Diderot, in his version of Seneca, has moved far from perception of character in Ammianus' text. The whitewashed Ursicinus, whom Ammianus covered in platitudes, is clearly a formula by a committed polemicist. Ammianus' characters, except Julian, are totally one-sided and lack the *ipse/idem* dynamic of Diderot's Seneca. Ammianus's text was more of an attack on a state discourse. Diderot's Seneca, however, is also a formula. Like the blind man, Diderot is relying in his text on testimony of others such as Tacitus and Seneca himself. Nevertheless, Diderot's Seneca is based far less on imagination and has more in common with Serge's characters. Both writers use character as a means of exploring politics at a personal level, especially with regards to ethics in revolutionary times, not simply in vindicating a particular person. The description of Seneca's upbringing, with the disagreements with his parents and the changes in career and philosophy, mirror the kinds

of arguments that exist in Serge's novels, such as the debate between Ossipov and Kirk on the new Soviet system and the role of the Cheka. Ossipov, like Seneca's parents, represents the more mature and more practical view of affairs. His friendly treatment of Kirk also is closer to a familial relationship. Seneca's own explorations into alternatives remind us of Kirk's more idealistic view of revolution and his willingness to question the apparatchik's discourse of the Soviet state. In both texts, there is a dialogue, which explores different discourses and their impact on politics. Both writers use their characters to analyze as well as to politicize. Despite this similarity there are differences between the two texts that reflect the different situation of both writers. Diderot, while living in stirring times, wrote the *Essai sur la vie de Sénèque* in solitude and contemplation, in contradiction to the role he assigns Seneca. His active political life, aside from his brief stint at the court of Catherine II, consisted of being a commentator. Serge, on the other hand, was an apparatchik active in many political groups and, as we saw, wrote his first novels while dodging the G.P.U., trying to care for his family, and watching as the Stalinist dictatorship consolidated itself. Diderot supported revolution; Serge lived it. These distinctions in fact point also to an ideological difference between the two men. In the meantime, it is necessary to look more closely at Diderot's Seneca and the implications for Diderot's take on the apparatchik's discourse.

In his *Le Rêve de d'Alembert*, Diderot examines the nature of matter. Whereas the *Essai sur la vie de Sénèque* focuses on the process of living and interacting with others, *Le Rêve de d'Alembert* operates on the simpler level of non-living and animal material. In the first part of the work, for example, Diderot and d'Alembert discuss the nature of marble. Diderot gives a long speech on the transformation of marble into plant material:

Lorsque le bloc de marbre est réduit en poudre impalpable, je mêle cette poudre à de l'humus ou terre végétale. Je le laisse putréfier, un an, deux ans, un siècle. Le temps ne me fait rien. Lorsque le tout s'est transformé en une matière à peu près homogène, en humus savez-vous ce que je fait. / When the block of marble is reduced into impalpable powder, I mix this powder with some humus or vegetable matter. I let it putrefy, one year, two years, a century. Time does not matter. When the whole mass has transformed itself into one substance to something nearly homogeneous, you know that I have made something like humus.<sup>138</sup>

Diderot and d'Alembert continue to discuss the transformation of marble to plant. Julia Simon, who sees in Diderot's thought a precursor to the dialectics of Marx, argues that *Le Rêve de d'Alembert* is Diderot's statement that all is in a state of perpetual flux, breaking off, recombining, making new forms and then breaking apart again.<sup>139</sup> But what does this have to do with Seneca? Seneca's life is not a piece of marble. But many, Diderot would argue, have made Seneca a statue to venerate rather than trying to understand a human being.

Just as *Lettre sur les Aveugles* showed distinctions in perception, which are crucial to Diderot's understanding and presentation of Seneca's early life, *Le Rêve de d'Alembert* offers similar insight into what Diderot finds important about Seneca's adult life and career, especially his role as tutor and minister to Nero. In the introduction, the narrator writes of portraying Seneca like a gladiator facing an opponent in the arena. This form of conflict is a clear analog to the dialectic mentioned by Simon. Just as the interaction of crushed marble and soil eventually combine to make humus, the interactions of Seneca with others, both friendly and hostile, form a dialectic of experience. Seneca's life becomes, in Diderot's text, a process to be studied. From this

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<sup>138</sup> Denis Diderot, *Le Reve de d'Alembert*, in *Oeuvres Complètes*, Roger Lewinter, ed. vol 10, (Paris: Le Club Français Du Livre, 1971), 59.

<sup>139</sup> Julia Simon, *Mass Enlightenment: Critical Studies in Rousseau and Diderot*, (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1995), 106-106.

study, the narrator intends to demonstrate some political lessons that were pertinent in his own time. Like the marble and plant, Seneca's life would be transformed into the *Essai sur la vie de Sénèque* that would have as the most pertinent point, support for the American Revolution.

A marble statue is what the narrator professes to want to destroy in his work. He shows contempt and no patience for retiring philosophers who prefer to spin theories and formulas and refuse to get their hands dirty. He makes a stand against theory without practice, "On instruit par le précepte, on instruit par l'exemple; chacune de ces leçons a son avantage. Heureux celui qui peut nous les présenter toutes deux" / "One instructs by precept, one instructs by example; each of these lessons has its advantage. Happy are those who can present us with both" (*Essai* 330). Such statements appear regularly in the second edition, the *Essai sur les règnes de Claude et de Néron*, often interspersed with the original sections from *Essai sur la vie de Sénèque*. Diderot's earlier presentation of Seneca had turned not only into a defense of Seneca, but also a defense of himself against the sham philosophers, or rather the critics, who attacked Diderot over the *Essai sur la vie de Sénèque*. The most common of these criticisms addressed Seneca's role at court. For example, how could a moral philosopher like Seneca, and by extension his partner Burrhus, serve in a corrupt court under debased despots like Claudius and Nero? These were pointed remarks and Diderot must have felt the criticism most keenly. He himself acted as an advisor to a despot, Catherine II of Russia, in 1775. He was in Russia for only a few months and never achieved the kind of status that Seneca had at Nero's court.

Lurking behind the critics' remarks is the formula of a "philosopher" This means that Seneca was not in his place at Nero's court. Taking the analogy further, what was the

“philosopher” Diderot, an advocate of American Independence, doing serving the Czarina of all the Russias? It is really an argument over a label, that of “philosopher”. This kind of reduction, where a label is used to determine a person’s location or vocation, is the same kind of reduction evident in Serge’s novels. Just as Kostrov was condemned in *S’il est minuit dans le siècle* for using the word “Thermidor” in his lecture on the French Revolution, Diderot faces condemnation for his use of *philosophe* when discussing Seneca. Kostrov was condemned because the Stalinists saw the use of the word as part of a jargon of political criticism. Discussing the French Revolution was tantamount to discussing the Russian, since one was an example of the other and called for comparisons. Kostrov’s lecture was thus an undercover way of attacking the party’s history. Diderot’s critics saw the essay on Seneca and the new use of the word “philosopher” in a similar way. They clearly saw that Diderot’s essay on Seneca was no simple antiquarian study. Diderot’s critics were trying to make the word “philosopher” stand for a man who teaches inflexible virtue and scorn for life, something with which the narrator has no patience, “le philosophe qui donne le précepte sans l’exemple ne remplit que la moitié de sa tâche. Sénèque écrivit, vécut, et mourut comme un sage” / “The philosopher who gives precept without example has only fulfilled half of his task. Seneca wrote, lived, and died as a wise man” (Essai 329). When the critics assailed Seneca’s title as a “philosopher”, it is because his life involved compromise in order to limit the actions of a tyrant. They had a specific model in mind, a better philosopher, a person who, unlike Diderot or Seneca, did not stoop to serve a king, Rousseau.<sup>140</sup>

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<sup>140</sup> See Mason, 57-58. Both Voltaire and Diderot had patrons among the monarchs of Europe, Frederick II and Catherine II respectively. See also Alastair Davidson, “Denis Diderot and the Limits of Reason”, *Diderot Studies* 22 (1986): 44.

Diderot had his limits. He did not like many of the things that Seneca did or wrote, but he does defend him because there was something larger at stake. By contrast, for example, Diderot has no patience for Lucian. He even rails at Tacitus for praising a man who “murdered” his parents. Regardless of the beauty of his verse or his republican convictions, Lucian is a villain.<sup>141</sup> Who would compare Seneca and Lucian? To the question of whether Seneca belonged at Nero’s court, Diderot’s answer is an emphatic no, but even if Nero did not deserve his attention, it was necessary for Seneca to learn this for himself and in his own time (*Essai*, 328). This is a restatement of the philosophy from *Lettre sur les Aveugles*. Primary experience is the best judge of a situation. We also see a reference to the philosophy of *Le Rêve de d’Alembert*, for by involving himself at Nero’s court, Seneca, assisted by Burrhus, gave Rome five good years in Nero’s early reign. Like the marble that is smashed and mixed with dirt to yield a plant, so Seneca’s life was lost, but this blunted Nero’s worst excesses and kept things from deteriorating for the longest time possible (*Essai* 328). Thus, the narrator’s comparison of Seneca to a gladiator is quite apt. Seneca had to struggle and in doing so could not afford to be inflexible. Diderot’s Seneca, though a formula, represents a living person with a full functioning *ipse* and *idem* who is not perfect, but who has much to teach.

The text reinforces this argument by recounting some history. Seneca was in exile before Agrippina, Nero’s mother, recalled him to serve as a tutor to her son, Nero. Seneca had been banished to Corsica earlier in Claudius’ reign, ostensibly over an alleged affair with Julia, one of Agrippina’s sisters. Diderot goes at some length to show that he was not her lover, and that it was the philosopher’s sharp tongue and lack of fear towards then

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<sup>141</sup> Laurence Mall, “Une Autobiographie: L’Essai Sur Les Regnes De Claude Et De Néron De Diderot”, *Diderot Studies* 28 (2000): 114.

empress Messalina and the freedmen who dominated the court that caused them to unite in a conspiracy to drive Seneca away (*Essai* 305). Diderot, however, provides little specific detail instead of general statements making his account seem more suspect. He writes: “Le résultat de ces inquiétudes fut de donner un motif criminel aux fréquentes visites que Sénèque rendait à Julie” / “The result of these agitations was to give a guilty motive to the frequent visits that Seneca made to Julia” (*Essai* 305). This is a good example of demonstration of a Marxian style construct in the text. Seneca’s opponents distort his visits. They in turn reduce him to a formula by lumping him in with usual category of gentlemen callers. Diderot treats Seneca’s enemies in the same manner. In the text, the narrator uses Tacitus to show Messalina and the freedmen as one-dimensional villains, who react to Seneca’s manner by conspiring to have him exiled. Diderot’s text uses formula of the apparatchik’s discourse, especially when it quotes Tacitus. The descriptions are as black and one-sided as the ones in Ammianus’ text. Moreover, the text never states a reason for Seneca’s visit to Julia. It merely reiterates that Seneca was not her lover and that he was a happily married man of 40, wise, prudent, and healthy. He enjoyed the esteem and respect of family and citizens, “...sentiments qu’on n’accorde pas aussi unanimement à un hypocrite de vertu” / “...sentiments that one does not accord unanimously to a hypocrite of virtue” (*Essai* 305). Despite these rather bald assertions, the narrator does not leave anything to chance. Indulging his critics for a moment, he speculates on a Seneca/Julia affair, “Que le philosophe a eu son moment de vanité, son jour de faiblesse” / “That the philosopher had had his moment of vanity, his day of foolishness” (*Essai* 306). In other words, Seneca was human and as such could make mistakes despite his wisdom and experience. Such speculation actually accords better

with Diderot's apology than the earlier statements. The evidence is obviously too thin to assert one way or another whether Seneca was culpable, but if the text is right, it should not matter. Seneca was not a statue, but a human being quite capable of making mistakes.

The recall of Seneca from exile was not a testament to his role as a "philosopher". Claudius' new wife, Agrippina, needed a counterweight to the influence of *les affranchi* / "the freedmen", who were Claudius' principal advisors. She also wanted a tutor for Nero, and who better than a noted philosopher who would have no love or loyalty to Claudius or the freedmen? Diderot is not blind to the backroom sort of deals made to get Seneca to court. He was benefiting from an evil woman's schemes, not only against Claudius, but also his son, Britannicus, as Agrippina hoped to use Seneca's talents to improve Nero's position.<sup>142</sup> But though he is working for evil people, Seneca does not cater to their every whim, for "Un ministre honnête ne gratifiera point un méchant' mais un méchant n'hésitera pas à recevoir les grâces d'un ministre..." / "An honorable minister will not gratify a villain, but a villain will not hesitate to receive the graces of a minister..." (*Essai* 314). For the narrator such an enterprise is hazardous but noble and he admits that he is less demanding a critic under such circumstances. There is no doubt that he goes to great pains to justify Seneca's role at court, and that what he sees as a noble effort, others see as compromise. The narrator admits as much when he writes that "J'ai façon de lire l'histoire" / "I have my own way of reading history" (*Essai* 321). Diderot's apologist stance for Seneca can be compared with Serge's role after he joined the Russian Communist party in 1919. What others saw as the excesses of the Bolshevik regime, Serge would justify as a necessity. Although he claimed the right to criticize the Party and did on a number of occasions, Serge's early publications were uncritically supportive

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<sup>142</sup> Tacitus, *Annalium: Ab Excessu Divi Augusti Libri*, (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1906), 13,8.



of the Bolshevik regime. Of course, Diderot's narrator is not uncritical of Seneca, but it is not enough for him to just admit to reading history differently. Is he creating another statue in place of the one of his critics? How does he justify Seneca's role as an aide to Nero? This was no academic exercise for Diderot, especially after the hostile reception to *Essai sur la vie de Sénèque*. With the American Revolution raging and the French monarchy in financial crisis, Diderot's Seneca, especially in the second essay, becomes a weapon against both his critics and monarchy everywhere.

The narrator clearly tries to impress upon his readers the great responsibility that befell Seneca in holding two roles, that of Nero's tutor and minister. He writes that "Le coeur d'un instituteur vertueux pour son élève est le même que celui d'une père pour son enfant" / "The heart of a virtuous teacher for his pupil is the same as that of a father for his son" (*Essai* 328). This is important for Diderot, especially if the pupil also happens to be an emperor with the destiny of the known world in his hands (*Essai* 328). His way of reading Seneca appears to have an emotional aspect. Diderot himself played advisor at the court of Catherine II, and he saw in his own failure a similarity to Seneca's experience. Furthermore, this statement was another response in the second edition to answer the critics, who not only questioned Seneca's presence at Nero's court but also his role in some of Nero's crimes. In other words why did Seneca demonstrate his responsibility at court by giving his life to enclose and restrain Nero's cruelty and frivolity? (*Essai* 331). For example, Tacitus records Nero's appeal for help from Seneca against Agrippina.<sup>143</sup> At issue was the freedwoman Acte, who was Nero's mistress. Nero loved her, obviously because of the woman's charms, but also because she inspired jealousy and resentment in his mother. Nero was trying to both have his fun and be free

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<sup>143</sup> Tacitus, *Annales*, 13.13.

of Agrippina, and he needed Seneca to make it work. Seneca faced a dilemma. Loyal to his emperor, he was also loyal to Nero's wife, Octavia, a woman of estimable quality (*Essai* 335). As Nero's tutor, stage-managing an affair would not seem to do. As Nero's minister, however, Seneca realized, unlike Agrippina, the necessity of facilitating Nero's relationship with Acte. Nero needed Acte, both because he had lost interest in Octavia and because he was so dissolute he would go out and find pleasure in someone else's bed, possibly a noblewoman's, and potentially causing quite a scandal. It was better to let Nero have his fun with a freedwoman. So Seneca acted to stimulate Nero's desire for Acte, while screening him from both Agrippina and Octavia. These actions do not seem to be those of a philosopher, as Diderot's critics were quick to point out, and the text seems to be mixing an emotional appreciation of Seneca's position with utilitarian arguments. At first glance this would seem uncomfortably close to Ammianus' portrayal of Ursicinus, especially in his role as executer of Silvanus. Ammianus's text attempts to exculpate his commander by playing up the alleged mistreatment of the general, but is Diderot's text doing the same?

Similar events appear often in the narrative, so that Seneca must make the best of Nero's indiscretions. After the affair with Acte, Nero becomes infatuated with Poppaea, the former wife of Rufus Crispinus and later that of Otho, one of Nero's favorites and later a briefly successful contender for the imperial throne. Diderot cannot decide if Otho was indiscreet or simply wanted to share his wife to gain Nero's favor (*Essai* 363). In the end, Poppaea wins Nero, and Otho is packed off to Lusitania in Spain. But what is the position of Seneca to this? He had helped Nero with Acte, in spite of his loyalty to Octavia. Now Nero was no longer merely entertaining himself with a mistress. Poppaea

was no freedwoman, but a Roman noble and became Nero's second wife. Thus the situation Seneca had hoped to avoid in the Acte affair had now occurred. Diderot's text mentions no active role for either Seneca or Burrhus in this affair. Furthermore, he stresses his incredulity over the idea that either would have approved of Octavia's removal. The marriage, however, did offer advantages. Diderot writes, "mais un soupçon dont j'aurai peine à me défendre, c'est qu'ils n'aient ressenti une satisfaction secrète à trouver dans la faveur de Poppée un contrepoids à l'autorité d'Agrippine. Avec tout le mépris possible pour le vice, l'indignation la plus vraie contre le crime, on ne s'en dissimule pas les avantages passagers" / "but a suspicion which will pain me to defend, it is that they [Seneca and Burrhus] did not experience a secret satisfaction in finding in the favor of Poppaea, a counterpoint to the authority of Agrippina. With all possible scorn for vice, the most truthful indignation against the crime, one does not deceive himself about the passing advantages" (*Essai* 362). Again the text condemns the outrage yet sees the advantages to Seneca. The narrator insists very strongly on the immorality of the situation, but his suspicion that Seneca and Burrhus saw advantages in the situation show us again that he is not making a plaster saint for his readers. It also reinforces the gladiator image insofar as the notion of advantages suggests conflict at court. Agrippina was regarded as the greater evil than Nero, and Poppaea would keep Nero busy. This pattern is kept up throughout the narrative. Later, in discussing Nero's murder of his mother, the narrator does not hesitate to call it a crime, but he also points out that Agrippina was an odious woman and her loss was a benefit to Rome. Still he rejects the statements by Cassius Dio that Nero consulted with Seneca about the killing. Tacitus does not include Seneca and Burrhus in the plot, and this, for the narrator, outweighs the

statements of Cassius Dio (*Essai* 378-379). Despite this, many indeed may wonder how a philosopher could work in such a court, where people are disposed of in such a manner. How can Diderot justify this, and what role does this play in the apparatchik's discourse?

The narrator's answer to that question is to render titles meaningless in the circumstances and to see the situation as more complex than at first glance. A title does not confine a person into just one role. If Seneca as Nero's tutor could not help with Acte, then Seneca as Nero's minister would. The key lies in the circumstances, not simply in the title one possesses. "Il y a des circonstances où la conduite du courtisan et du philosophe peuvent être la même; alors le courtisan est sage et le philosophe est prudent; le motif seul distingue leur procédés" / "There are some circumstances where the conduct of a courtier and of a philosopher can be the same; then the courtier is wise and the philosopher prudent; the motive alone distinguishes their procedures" (*Essai* 336). The narrator is not engaging in situational morality. He is demonstrating the proper relationship between Seneca's situation, his character and the objective factors facing him. He did not have the power to order Nero to take back Octavia, nor he could not allow Nero to go off to find his diversions elsewhere and potentially cause trouble (*Essai* 338). Offending Octavia was not right, but Nero was emperor, and his caprices could cause much greater harm. He could not challenge the marriage to Poppaea, but he could try to win Poppaea's favor so as to limit the damage caused by Agrippina. Seneca's titles may change, but his role does not. Whether as a philosopher, a minister, a courtier, or a tutor, Seneca was a moral man who made the best choices available under the circumstances for the good of Rome. This is one of Seneca's lessons, that "La philosophie se ressent plus ou moins des circonstances" / "Philosophy manifests itself

more or less in the circumstances” (*Essai* 336). Seneca did not betray philosophy, for philosophy must deal with real issues and living people. For the narrator, he is a hero and martyr who was not always useful but who held his office at Nero’s court for as long as possible. This is also Diderot’s personal lesson for his readers.<sup>144</sup>

The fact that Seneca’s life becomes a personal lesson should not seem strange. As stated before, the *Essai* is at heart a political tract and Seneca’s life and work are in effect an analog to Diderot’s own. This is important in looking at the apparatchik’s discourse. Diderot’s account, while apologetic, is not a panegyric. The text does not remove Seneca’s individuality, nor shape him into some socially acceptable model. Diderot’s Seneca is quite awkward and difficult to categorize, the very opposite of a simplified formula or construct. Diderot’s Seneca is very different from Ammianus’ Ursicinus. Whereas Diderot’s text provides extensive background information on Seneca, descriptions of his actions and extensive commentary, later expanded to meet the charge of the critics, Ammianus’s text, portrays a plaster saint devoid of any specific personality, save perhaps in the end when Ursicinus verbally attacks the emperor. When Seneca meets his tests in the service of Nero, the text tries to frame the objective conditions and see Seneca’s proper role in it. Ursicinus, by contrast, is simply the hero in all his circumstances. In other words, Ursicinus comes across as a formula of a persecuted hero in Ammianus’ apparatchik’s discourse. The result is a contrast between a complex personality and a simple formula

All the information on Seneca in the text comes from Tacitus, Suetonius, or other ancient sources. His text is not revealing any new information. Instead there is a reconstruction of his life, based on the known facts, that rejects the labels put on Seneca

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<sup>144</sup> Yves Benot, *Diderot, de l’athéisme à l’anticolonialisme*, (Paris: François Maspero, 1970), 41.

over the centuries. The narrator does not venerate Seneca. In fact, he is at times quite critical of him. After Claudius's death and Nero's accession, Seneca composes the funeral speech to be delivered by the new emperor. The speech naturally praises Claudius and commends his reign. Yet Seneca also wrote *The Apocolocyntosis*, a work that mocks Claudius by having the emperor transform himself into a pumpkin. For the narrator this is sheer hypocrisy, for although Seneca wrote the speech to make Nero look good, he did not remind the young emperor that he, too, might be exposed to literary ridicule if he ruled badly (*Essai* 321). The implication behind this criticism is that Seneca did more covering up for Nero than reproving. We may ourselves see hypocrisy in the narrator for objecting to a literary mocking of Claudius, yet approving of Nero's affair with Acte. But he is already aware of the discrepancy. By admitting that "J'ai façon de lire l'histoire" / "I have my way of reading history", he shows that he can examine dishonorable things with great severity, but that this examination fails when looking at noble grand actions. In this instance, the narrator's heart overtakes his intellect. (*Essai* 321) Seneca's efforts were a failure in the end, but they were a noble failure and contain a lesson to be learned. This effort to see Seneca as a human being with lessons to be learned for the present is what makes this part of the *Essai* a negation of the critics' formula of a philosopher. Seneca is not the end of the process, but part of the process itself, towards an understanding of the *philosophe* in politics. Nevertheless, is Diderot using Seneca's life, its successes and failures as a formula of his own in order to deflect the critics?

#### SENECA AND DIDEROT

The narrator sums up his message about Seneca: he did well and muzzled Nero for five years, thus giving Rome some peace (*Essai* 332). As we have seen, it is rather

easy to show that when he discusses Seneca, despite the apologetic tone, he is free from the kind of polemic we saw in Ammianus and does not try to separate Seneca's individuality from his social being. But the narrator trying to tell us, through the life of Seneca, that he too tried his best at reform and at limiting the despots, and thus we should appreciate him for the lessons he has? Is the *Essai sur la vie de Sénèque* an apology for Diderot, rather than Seneca? Laurence Mall notes that the whole presentation of Seneca in the work shows us a philosopher using the example of his life as an opposition to the present.<sup>145</sup> This makes the concept of an apology all the more suspect. Certainly Diderot could be a "dangerous panegyrist" who does take Seneca to task on a number of occasions as we have seen.<sup>146</sup> As we have already noted, Diderot's Seneca is a formula, a construct, though unlike the kind described by Marx. It is based less on imagination and mystery than on fact, albeit second-hand. While Diderot may have an educational rather than a polemical objective in the first essay, is he also acting like the blind man by using Seneca, a man he never knew, as his model?

Diderot picked Seneca of all people, a philosopher statesman who was unheeded and unappreciated by his monarch and this seems too close to Diderot's own situation. The narrator himself admits this. In his introduction he writes that all the great men of antiquity, including people like Seneca or Socrates, are connected through the ages. He goes on to commend Seneca as his counterpart, "Tu (Seneca) aurais été l'organe de la justice de siècles, si j'avais été à ta place et toi à la mienne" / "You (Seneca) would have been the organ of justice of the centuries, as if I had been in your place and you in mine" (*Essai* 283). Later on he says that Seneca would see this work as honoring and praising

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<sup>145</sup> Mall, 115.

<sup>146</sup> Mall, 119.

his works and memory (*Essai* 284). This fantasy takes us more into the realm of Marx's mysterious construct right down to the use of the familiar form "Tu" when addressing Seneca. The implication is a familiarity that does not exist, and the acceptance or rejection of this can radically alter the way one interprets the text. While this may be just a case of "an old man writing about an old man," and while the text does comment on the difficulty of the distance between himself and his subject, it is clear that Seneca's life and work are meant to be a reflection of Diderot's own. We should then look at the substance of this claim (*Essai* 280).

The closest connection between Seneca and Diderot lies in their roles as advisors to monarchs, but whereas Seneca tutored and advised Nero for many years, Diderot's tenure at Catherine's court was just so many months (1775). Catherine II was one of a number of European monarchs bent on reform and giving an ear to the criticisms and ideas of the philosophers. Voltaire, for example, stayed many years in Berlin with Frederick II. But despite their plans for reform, monarchs like Frederick and Catherine were also practical politicians and like Claudius seemed to have little use for the philosophers, when they became too critical. Catherine did not see in Diderot, who was mainly known at that time as the former editor of the *Encyclopédie*, as the savior of Russia. In fact, knowledge that she had a freethinking philosopher at court was such a secret that F.M. Grimm, one of Diderot's closest friends, was unaware of their relationship. Catherine was being cautious in hiding Diderot. Many elements of Russian society did not accept his views, especially archbishop Plato of St. Petersburg.<sup>147</sup> Diderot seemed to not only misunderstand Catherine's intention, but also the nature of Russia itself. Diderot saw in Russia a *tabula rasa* that could be the object of radical social

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<sup>147</sup> Pierre C. Oustinoff, "Notes on Diderot's Fortunes in Russia", *Diderot Studies* 1 (1949): 122.



experimentation. In his notes on Russia, Diderot does refer to economic issues, and mentions some specifics about Russia, but the information is general in nature. Moreover, Diderot seems to ignore issues of climate and geography for the most part. Unlike Montesquieu, Diderot was not as interested in discovering human institutions based on differing places and times, as he was in investigating “biological-sociological factors affecting human personality.”<sup>148</sup> More important, Diderot also misread the Czarina. In 1767 Catherine had called together a “States General of the Russian Empire”, modeled supposedly on the Estates General of France. This legislative commission, which held 203 meetings and was supposed to bring reform to Russia, was dissolved following the outbreak of a war with Ottoman Turkey (1768), and then simply abandoned. Catherine’s own instructions to the commission were clear. She was not yielding power to anyone else; the whole exercise was to increase and solidify her power base.<sup>149</sup> As Diderot was later to remark bitterly, Catherine was a despot in the traditional Russian mould, with an aggressive, expansive foreign policy, which included the obliteration of Poland from the map, and a domestic policy that upheld the status quo to the detriment of the serfs. She also was later a bitter opponent of the French Revolution. Diderot’s chances of being a catalyst for change seem to have been as effective as Seneca’s in restraining Nero. Therein may lay the main connection between the two.

Diderot seems to have been aware early that he would have a difficult time in Russia. His reforms would have deprived the Czarina of much of her power and Diderot could never be too explicit on that point.<sup>150</sup> Diderot wanted to diffuse power by

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<sup>148</sup> Strugnell, 157. See also Denis Diderot, *Observations sur l'instruction de sa Majesté impériale*, in *Oeuvres Complètes*, Roger Lewinter, ed. vol 11, (Paris: Le Club Français Du Livre, 1971).

<sup>149</sup> Strugnell, 159.

<sup>150</sup> Strugnell, 172.

“establishing a firm material and social basis for modern civilization by stimulating technology and encouraging the development of the manufacturing potential of the masses.”<sup>151</sup> This diffusion of power, which would have opened up the society and created a sort of meritocracy, ran directly counter to the style of government practiced by Catherine. The top-down arbitrary monarchy made people used to taking orders rather than seizing the initiative. Catherine was not going to have the “inconvenience in having the nation stronger than the sovereign.”<sup>152</sup> Such rule had been standard in Russia for centuries and the chances of any substantial change were minimal, though Diderot did his best to learn about the country. Despite their best efforts at communication, neither was blind to the fact that they had irreconcilable differences. Diderot left Russia and denounced Catherine. Did the bitterness of this failure inspire Diderot to compare himself and his situation to Seneca?

Unlike Seneca, Diderot did not face death over his disagreements with the despot Catherine. Diderot’s term as advisor to Catherine ended in a matter of months, over issues of ideology, and with no bloodshed. Seneca, on the other hand, tried to educate and restrain an out of control adolescent monarch. The differences between Nero and Catherine act as an inverse mirror to the differences between Seneca and Diderot. Nero was practically a child with little input on the day-to-day affairs of government, and as we saw, Seneca regarded his mother as a greater danger; Catherine by contrast was an experienced monarch and a hardheaded politician and a better counterpart to Agrippina. Seneca was already experienced at state service when he came back from exile to court. Diderot by contrast was a neophyte in politics who, aside from his position as editor of

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<sup>151</sup> Strugnell, 153.

<sup>152</sup> Alastair Davidson, “Denis Diderot and the Limits of Reason”, *Diderot Studies* 22 (1986): 45.

the *Encyclopédie*, had held no position of power or responsibility before traveling to Russia. Even in Russia, his relationship with the Czarina was informal at best. More important is that Seneca and Diderot faced very different problems in their respective roles as advisors. Seneca's clash with Nero generally centered on questions of morals, status, or etiquette. The aforementioned affair with Acte and marriage to Poppaea are good examples. There is some mention of Seneca dealing with legislation. He did advise Nero to repeal Claudius' ruling on fees and rewards for advocates in the legal profession (*Essai* 322). Diderot couches even these issues in moral terms. In Russia, on the other hand, Diderot encounters a problem of information. Diderot was largely ignorant of many of the realities of the country. Catherine often criticized his plans for being impractical, and Diderot admits that he would need more time to study Russia before making plans for serious reform.<sup>153</sup> On the surface then we see Seneca struggling with the character disorders of his monarch, while Diderot struggles with ignorance of Russian realities. Thus it seems that Seneca's life cannot offer a suitable formula for Diderot's discourse. It seems like an attempt by Diderot to redefine himself in a more important way, but we must look closer again at Diderot's own text and see the personal lesson he tries to draw from Seneca.

So far, Diderot's construct of Seneca's life and the courts of Claudius and Nero appear very free of the apparatchik's discourse. Diderot's text does not create a perfect state or institutional discourse in Seneca. While the portrayal of Seneca is a formula, it does not serve to systematize a specific state discourse and relate it to society. The account is also free of any reliance on jargon or nomenclature. The narrator even avoids asymmetrical speaking by allowing the critics to pose their questions in the text.

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<sup>153</sup> Strugnell, 177.

Furthermore unlike Ammianus's text, Diderot's does not whitewash his misdeeds. When Ursicinus murdered Silvanus, Ammianus's text praises him for his service to the state. Diderot's text, by contrast, expresses scorn for Seneca's hypocrisy. The essay scrupulously uses the written evidence. For example, the narrator mentions Cassius Dio's assertion that Seneca was involved in Agrippina's murder. That he discounts it and prefers Tacitus' silence does not indicate a bias, as Dio's view of many figures is uniformly negative.<sup>154</sup> He reports all the information available and makes judgment on the known facts. We cannot fault the presentation of Seneca in and of itself. Diderot, however, was not simply engaging in an antiquarian exercise; the *Essai sur la vie de Sénèque* is a political tract with relevance for Diderot's own time. When he writes about Seneca, Diderot emphasizes both his wisdom and his morals. These two elements form the background to his actions. This is why Diderot detailed Seneca's early life. From his parents came the moral strength and from his teachers came the wisdom and ability to conduct public affairs with prudence. While Seneca does on occasion make mistakes, he does not have a personality disorder or a character flaw that would ensure a repeat of those mistakes. The key to Seneca lies in both his wisdom and his morals; they work together in the man. This is the lesson that Seneca offers and is a challenge that the narrator gives to his readers; "Mettez-vous à la place du philosophe, de l'instituteur et du ministre, et tâchez de vous conduire mieux que lui" / "Put yourself in the place of a philosopher, of a teacher, and of a minister and try to conduct yourself better than him" (*Essai* 329). The narrator does not follow Seneca step by step in what he did and certainly does not praise him without criticism where it is justified. Instead he examines and

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<sup>154</sup> Diderot quotes Crevier, who calls Cassius Dio, "le calomniateur éternel de tous les Romains vertueux" / "the eternal calumniator of all virtuous Romans" (*Essai sur la vie de Sénèque*, 606).

praises Seneca's marriage of morals and wisdom, which are the product of a proper social and individual background. Diderot's Seneca well exemplifies both sides of the human personality as described by Ricoeur. His parents raised him to function in Roman society as befitting a Roman noble, but his teachers gave him the means of expressing his individuality. Thus Seneca was able to function at Nero's court, maintaining his proper role while using his wisdom to arrive at solutions for varied problems.

In his work on Diderot's political theory, Anthony Strugnell cites Seneca as Diderot's example of a model citizen, which Diderot himself calls *l'homme de bien* / "the man of good". Such a man is both prudent and active. In selecting Seneca, Diderot avoided the retiring, contemplative philosopher who does not engage in public affairs. Diderot also avoided genius or innovation. Unlike Plato, Aristotle, Epicurus, or Zeno, Seneca did not found a new school of philosophy and in fact was quite eclectic in his thought. Only "the good man" can put together virtue, will, effort, and intelligence needed for living.<sup>155</sup> Diderot's model citizen is very practical and down to earth, but still virtuous and guided by wisdom. We have already seen this combination described in the text that discusses Seneca's role at court. This combative philosophy does not exempt the philosopher from compromises, nor does it shield him, as the philosopher must engage in public affairs.<sup>156</sup> For Diderot, the "good man" is never useless and must be chassed and brought into government (Essai 330). Even Seneca, who did in fact retire from court, still performed good service even in death. Because of his suicide, none of his family or friends was persecuted after his death. "The good man" performs well in all occasions.

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<sup>155</sup> Strugnell, 78-81

<sup>156</sup> Benot, 41

This does not exclude the possibility of mistakes, but it does exclude the possibility of a Nero.

Diderot wrote a great deal to Catherine about his ideas for Russia, and while he could not see himself as the Seneca of Russia, his frustrations there did have an impact, especially in the *Essai sur les règnes de Claude et de Néron*, although not necessarily in his examination of Seneca. In the end, both he and Seneca failed in trying to make a monarch see their side of things. Earlier we saw that Diderot's problem concerning Russia was in part his ignorance of the country. Catherine certainly saw it that way. Diderot, however, did not entirely agree. He knew that his plans would have sharply reduced the power available to the Czarina. Diderot's plans for a primacy of law were death to a despot. Diderot knew that reasons of state and power had more to play in his failure than simply his inexperience with Russia.<sup>157</sup> Catherine saw absolute rule as necessary for Russia, but for Diderot, as with Seneca's problems, the question becomes essentially a moral one. Catherine was unwilling even to countenance Diderot's plans because they threatened her position. In this equation, the interests of Russia and its people became, for Diderot, entirely secondary. Was Catherine a greedy monarch just like Frederick of Prussia, whom Diderot saw as a sham, rather than a reforming king?<sup>158</sup> Was Diderot wrong on reform and Catherine justified, given Russia's circumstances, that absolutism was the best way to govern the country? Diderot did not agree, and though he could still, after his visit, praise the Czarina for her many good qualities, he also would say, "J'y vois le nom de despote abdiqué, mais la chose conserve; mais le despotisme appelé monarchie...Je ne vois aucune disposition projetée, pour l'affranchissement du

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<sup>157</sup> Davidson, 44-45.

<sup>158</sup> Davidson, 44

corps de la nation” / “I see in her the name of despot abdicated, but the reality remains; but despotism called monarchy...I see no planned arrangements, for the emancipation of the body of the nation.”<sup>159</sup> Diderot sees that Catherine engages in her own apparatus’s discourse. To uphold her discourse of legitimacy, she uses the formula of one name to conceal another. She also uses an institutional discourse, calling meetings with her version of the States General. As Diderot saw it, both he and Seneca faced monarchs who wanted things their own way, regardless of what was good for the country at large. Diderot and Seneca both failed and that failure stands, but monarchy has failed too, and in the end these failures certainly convinced Diderot of the necessity of supporting the American cause. This is the conclusion of the *Essai sur la vie de Sénèque*. Claudius and Nero, however, are not the real villains of either the *Essai sur la vie de Sénèque* nor the *Essai sur les règnes de Claude et de Néron*. Moreover, the problems in both works, unlike those in Russia, do not deal with lack of information or building a new society from the ground up.

The key to understanding Diderot’s Seneca is the marriage of morals and education from a proper family background, which in turn yields proper service for a community. This formula from the life of Seneca bridges the gap between the *ipse* and *idem* and thus removes the need for monarchy. Diderot, by looking to an exemplary member of the Roman nobility, seems to indicate a preference for a form of aristocracy over monarchy. Although their politics were far apart, Serge too sees the need for a complete person with unified *ipse* and *idem* elements. Kostrov, for example, arrested early in *S’il est minuit dans le siècle*, is a teacher and family man who was simply being

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<sup>159</sup> Denis Diderot, *Oeuvres Complètes*, Roger Lewinter, ed. 11, (Paris: Le Club Français Du Livre, 1969), 316-317.

intellectually honest in comparing the French and Russian Revolutions. While he lacks the wealth of a Seneca, he is still close to the other criteria that Diderot recommends: he is a family man with education and ethics. Although Kostrov later makes a confession to crimes he did not commit, this cannot be held against him, especially as he did have to think of his family's security. Diderot's Seneca too is no plaster saint either. There are other Serge characters with Seneca-like traits. Ossipov, in *Ville Conquise*, displays the maturity and ethical approach to duty that Seneca shows in remaining at court. Despite these similarities however, there is a gulf between Diderot and Serge. Ossipov's duty was tied to his hope for a better future under the revolutionary banner, while that of Seneca was tied to his despair over what might happen to Rome should he leave Nero's court. Seneca belonged to an old nobility now out of power and serving corrupt monarchs. Ossipov, Kostrov, Ryjik and the others are agents of revolution and change. Serge looked to his contemporaries for the heroes and villains of his novels. Diderot turned to the distant past, and it is from the past that Diderot not only received his inspiration in Seneca, but also ammunition for his polemic against his critics. Up until this point Diderot gave us a model, which avoids the apparatchik's discourse, but the text must be examined from another perspective. There is the faceless and nameless opponent that Seneca contends with in the arena. This opponent is not a Claudius, a Nero and certainly not a Catherine. It is the servant of the crown who does not have morals or wisdom, who is not a philosopher and thus lacks the character needed to make important decisions.

#### SENECA'S ENEMIES

In the obituary of Claudius, Diderot's essay gives a very evenhanded account of the late emperor's life. Indeed, aside from Seneca himself, no other major character in



either essay receives such scrupulous attention. The narrator notes that Claudius had a great deal of knowledge despite a lack of formal education; he was also clever in simulating lunacy to escape Gaius Caligula; he could write and speak in Greek and was both an orator and historian. As an emperor things went well, at first. Claudius was modest, just, and wise, although he could also alternate between being penetrating and stupid, or patient and hasty, or circumspect and extravagant. After a few years things become worse and his reign becomes evil. The narrator admits that Claudius was “...plus faible que méchant” / “...more weak than wicked” (*Essai* 318). In his view, Claudius’ downfall as emperor stemmed from “bad education” and “vicious organization” that made him helpless before both the women of the court and more importantly his courtiers. He lacked the necessary firmness and dignity to stand up to his court (*Essai* 319). This thumbnail analysis of the breakdown in Claudius’ reign has interest in looking at the apparatchik’s discourse in this text. Again the narrator reiterates the themes he was developing with Seneca. Claudius is in many ways an anti-Seneca. If you look at what he praises in Seneca’s background, a firm family background and education with famous teachers of the day, one can see that Claudius was lacking true basis for a good moral life. He was despised by his own mother and learned largely on his own. This was not a problem while Claudius had to look out just for himself, and as the narrator notes he was able even to fool his imperial nephew. But when the responsibility of the empire came, Claudius was eventually found lacking. Because he did not have the proper family background, he did not really learn to relate to others; instead he hid and played the fool. Thus his social being was lacking. Likewise, the lack of proper education means he did not gain the wisdom he needed to make good choices for himself. For example, he had a

string of disastrous marriages. Claudius becomes the negative proof of Diderot's concept of the good man.

Despite being such a bad emperor, the narrator does not consider Claudius to be the enemy of Seneca. Instead he thought of the emperor as being weak of mind rather than being a scoundrel himself. Claudius' weakness allowed others to gain power and influence. This was the evil of his reign. This evil is specifically of two categories in the text. First there were the women of the court, Claudius' wives: Messalina and Agrippina. The former gets no respect from Diderot. Messalina was responsible for "subjugating" Claudius and of course was the ringleader in the conspiracy to exile Seneca. Her rampant promiscuity, later marriage to Gaius Silius, and subsequent fall are only fitting for the despicable woman (*Essai* 303, 305, 309). Agrippina, on the other hand, was of a different order entirely. First, she was responsible for recalling Seneca from exile. She also was better at scheming in the interests of her son so that he would supplant Britannicus. All in all, she appears both in Tacitus and Diderot as a politician more interested in power and more austere in morals than Messalina. She was also of course greedy and ambitious. During Nero's reign, she is seen as the main opponent of Seneca and Burrhus, in part because she supported the reforms of Claudius and also because she was allied with the second group of miscreants, *les affranchis* / "the freedmen" (*Essai* 312, 323, 325).

Claudius had been the first emperor to truly "systematize" the imperial bureaucracy. He grouped major offices into departments for such matters as correspondence, petitions, records and so forth. In short, he created many new institutions to serve the state's discourse. Many of these institutions were to survive into the late imperial period. While emperors previous to Claudius had relied on family or the

Praetorian Prefect as advisors on civil and military affairs, Claudius turned instead to the imperial freedmen, who were the first real apparatchiks of the Roman Empire. In later reigns they would lose their position to equestrians, but in Claudius' and Nero's reign, their power and influence were great.<sup>160</sup> Many consider Claudius' reform to have been beneficial for administration, because it came into the hands of men who owing to their position as imperial slaves, had the day-to-day knowledge of affairs that many senators lacked. They brought institutional expertise to the imperial accounts, just as they had managed household accounts as slave. Claudius, known as a fool by most senators before his elevation, tended to trust his slaves and freedmen more than the members of his government. They, however, were also social misfits, who because of their slave heritage could never be accepted by high Roman society. Claudius went against the senate's wishes in appointing them.<sup>161</sup> Their opposition did not stem solely from social prejudice, although, as with Ammianus' view of eunuchs, it was certainly a factor. The changes of Claudius effectively shut many senators out of the government; this includes men like Seneca, who possessed background, education, and rhetorical skill and seemed to be better placed to advise an emperor rather than a pack of parvenu freedmen whose sole talent was for keeping accounts. Diderot also disapproves of Claudius' reform and here we see the fault line between two discourses. This corresponds to a similar fault line in the thought of Diderot on human nature. As a result Diderot's text does not view the actions of the freedmen with any of the impartiality we saw in his discussion of Seneca or even of Claudius. It is in the discussion of the freedmen that we see the text freely borrowing from Tacitus and using an apparatchik's discourse.

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<sup>160</sup> Chester Starr, *A History of the Ancient World*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 1991), 583.

<sup>161</sup> Barbara Levick, *Claudius*, (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1990), 83.

Diderot's use of Tacitus is different from Ammianus'. Ammianus' use of Tacitus conformed to the time honored ancient practice of honoring models from the past.<sup>162</sup> Diderot, by contrast, chose to use Tacitus as a source for his opinions, just as he used Seneca as a model for the ideal citizen. The text appropriates the discourse of the historian because it already matched Diderot's in several ways. Tacitus, for example, despised the Roman mob and had a low opinion of common folk.<sup>163</sup> Diderot shared this view saying, "L'homme de peuple est plus sot et le plus méchant des hommes: se dépopulariser, ou se rendre meilleur, c'est la même chose." / "The man of the people is more sordid and the most wicked of men; to become unpopular or to render oneself better, it is the same thing."<sup>164</sup> The people simply work on instinct and lack the intelligence not to be led astray. Like Tacitus, Diderot gives them an animal-like character. Likewise, both the freedmen are also *méchant* / "wicked". In his overview of Claudius' court, for example, he writes, "...Claude, subjugué par Messaline, entouré de l'eunuque Posidès, des affranchis Félix, Harpocras, Caliste, Pallas et Narcisse, qui abusent des ses terreurs, de son penchant à la crapule, et de sa passion pour les femmes, l'administration a passé de ses mains au pouvoir d'une troupe de scélérats aux ordres des deux derniers" / "...Claudius, subjugated by Messalina, surrounded by the eunuch Posidonius, the freedmen Felix, Harpocratis, Callisitus, Pallas and Narcissus, who took advantage of his fears, of his habit for debauchery, and his passion for women, the administration passed from his hands to the power of a troop of criminals under the orders of the last two" (*Essai* 302). The narrator's denunciation contains several items of interest. For example, he states that Claudius was "subjugated" by Messalina. By using

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<sup>162</sup> Jones, *Later Roman Empire*, 1007-1008.

<sup>163</sup> Ronald Syme, *Tacitus*, (Oxford: At the Clarendon Press, 1958), 194.

<sup>164</sup> Denis Diderot, quoted by Strugnell, 81.

such a verb, he gives us a ruler not in control of himself and by extension not of his court or empire. Of course, the reality of the relationship between Claudius and Messalina was far more complex, but the narrator sums it up in one passive participle, creating a formula that directs the rest of the denunciation. For Claudius is also “surrounded” by a eunuch and a gang of freedmen. The narrator leaves us with no illusions as to who is making the decisions. Unlike Seneca who tries to steer Nero away from indulging himself too much for the good of the empire, these characters take the opposite course. He calls them “criminals”, and thus another formula appears, that of a gangster-like government where power is in the hands of men who cater to the emperor’s desires. Claudius, in the narrator’s view, lacks the will and dignity to stand up for himself; he is doomed. The text consigns the freedmen to play the role of villains and be Seneca's main opponents. The narrator, however, gives so much detail about Seneca as an individual. The freedmen, by contrast, are presented in the most simplistic manner, even more so than Messalina and Agrippina. But is the narrator expressing a prejudice against the freedmen on the same order that Ammianus’s text does with eunuchs? We will examine this question, but first we must look carefully at the description of Claudius’ court.

The textual presentation of the freedmen at court reveals Diderot’s use of the apparatchiks’ discourse, with formulas borrowed from Tacitus. It is not only because the text uses simple formulas to describe the freedmen. It is true that Narcissus and Pallas only appear, on cue as it were, to cause trouble in order to further their own station. Whether they are plotting with Messalina or Agrippina or trying to create legislation for their benefit, they only appear as villains at court. They do, however, represent the main institutions of the imperial government. When the narrator attacks them as villains, it is

also attacking their discourse of expertise and its service to the discourse of the state. Since they profit from their position and rule over the emperor, both state and institutional discourse appear discredited. The narrator, taking his cue from Tacitus, reduces the freedmen completely to one-dimensional characters. He, however, gives us no stated reason of any kind for the “criminal” behavior of these men. He even fails to distinguish them much and gives little detail on what they do specifically. Even when he presents Seneca as a challenge to the freedmen, he gives no real concrete examples, such as a policy difference, or a clash of personalities, to demonstrate this assertion. When the narrator, for example, describes the earlier plot against Seneca over Julia, the text simply states that it was the work of "une prostituée et deux esclaves" / "a prostitute and two slaves" (*Essai* 304). This form of denigration is common, and the lack of specific detail turns Seneca's foes into formulas to attack the discourses of both the state and its institutions, calling into question the legitimacy of the imperial system. The text is also reducing these characters into stereotypes. Messalina may have been promiscuous, but she was not a prostitute, and this is to see just one aspect of her character. Also, to call freedmen “slaves” is to reduce them by stripping them of their freedom and obscuring the achievement of obtaining their freedom in the first place. The text forgoes Marx's prescriptions for constructs. Messalina is really a prostitute, read loose woman, and the freedmen are still just slaves. Both a prostitute and a slave must by necessity serve the client/master. Hence they act in a servile manner and so on. In using this abusive formula, the narrator attacks the court.

Later when Messalina marries Silius, the freedmen turn against her in support of Claudius. Now the harlot and slaves turn against each other. She goes from one client

(Claudius) to another (Silius), but the freedmen cannot lose their master, who is their lease on life. So they rally to Claudius and crush Messalina's coup. It was Narcissus who played the key role, showing Claudius Silius' house full of imperial belongings and later harangued the praetorians before sending them to arrest the couple and their supporters. The narrator is of course, not impressed, for "Narcisse prend son parti, sort brusquement et ordonne au tribun et aux centurions, au nom de Cèsar, qu'on fasse mourir Messaline" / "Narcissus took up his part, went out brusquely and gave orders to the tribunes and centurions, in Caesar's name, to put Messalina to death" (*Essai* 310). Diderot follows up that statement with a quote from Tacitus that Narcissus was rewarded with an honorary quaestorship for his service (*Essai* 311). The remark shows Claudius being completely inactive; his freedman take charge and gives orders in his name. The text shows a usurpation of power by one unworthy, discrediting the legitimacy of the state's discourse in the process and then ends it with the remark to the effect that Narcissus made sure that the soldiers had Messalina killed.

It would be interesting to speculate how Diderot would have composed this passage if Seneca had been the one to manage the crisis for Claudius. Seneca helps Nero with a liaison that disgraces Octavia, and the narrator finds justifiable merit in the situation, yet he does not do the same for Narcissus. Seneca merely advises Nero and persuades; Narcissus usurps power for the emergency. While Narcissus may have been abrupt in dealing with the situation, his motive is portrayed as being solely for the use and abuse of power. In other words, he is abusing his institutional discourse, claiming an expertise in the government where a freedman has no place. Seneca, by contrast, knows his place. The text thus makes excuses for Seneca and rejects a rigid definition of

philosopher, he cannot do so for Narcissus. Instead the narrator reduces him to the status of a villain with no redeeming value. Narcissus is no better than Gallus. He is unworthy from the start, due to his slave origins (for Gallus it was his youth) and nothing can excuse this. In contrast, Serge's text never reduces the villains in such a way. On the one hand, Diderot's text uses the *idem* of slave, to characterize all the men around Claudius. On the other hand, Serge's text carefully distinguishes the various members of the Cheka/G.P.U./N.K.V.D. and their motivations. For example, in *L'affaire Toulaév*, Gordeév looked upon the plot as a means of advancement at the expense of his own boss Erchov, while Fleischmann, weary from his work, was looking for an exit to a simpler life. Similarly, in *Ville Conquise*, Ossipov could praise the efficiency and good work of Zvéréva in solving the Danilov case, despite her corrupt and sycophantic nature. Diderot's text cannot commend Narcissus' efficiency in putting down Messalina's coup. Furthermore, Narcissus' reward puts him in the same league with the senate. A quaestorship, while honorary, would recall Diderot's readers to Seneca's own progress up the ladder of senatorial positions that defined state service (*Essai* 298). A former slave of the imperial household was not abusing the institutions of the old Republic. That a mere freedman with no social background would receive even an honorary position through an active usurpation of power is as abominable to Diderot as it was to Tacitus.

Nero's new regime causes at least a partial eclipse of the freedmen's power. This is not only because their old enemy Seneca is back, but also due to Nero's own hatred of them. The narrator echoes Tacitus' portrayal of the early court being divided between the young emperor and his mother. Agrippina had the support of Claudius' old freedmen, especially Pallas, who had arranged her marriage with Claudius and who was allegedly



her lover. Nero especially hated Pallas for his servile origin and arrogance and thus turned to Seneca and Burrhus as allies (*Essai* 325). Pallas was to survive long enough to trouble Seneca and Nero, but Narcissus, the victor over Messalina, did not survive the first crisis of the new regime, Agrippina's involvement in the murder of Junius Silanus. Nero had Narcissus thrown into prison. The narrator has no sympathy for his plight and no regard for his previous service, "...ce scélérat que les lois devaient revendiquer" / "this villain that the laws must claim" (*Essai* 325). He again uses the telling word *scélérat* / (villain) which immediately brings up the old formula used to characterize the man. The text is reducing him again. The narrator makes the same charges made earlier. Narcissus had usurped power and turned aside laws as he sees fit. He is thus a villain since he does not follow the law. The narrator does not even give him any title to denote his service in the government. He strips him of nomenclature and thus any institutional status and thus reduces him to an ordinary criminal. He then goes further, quoting Tacitus, that Nero wanted to save Narcissus, because the freedman's greed and prodigality accorded with his own vice, but Seneca and Burrhus apparently stopped this (*Essai* 325). Thus Diderot not only confirms the evil of the freedmen, even when they are without power, but also shows that their removal ultimately depended on moral men like Seneca and Burrhus, and not the fickle views of Nero. Nero's hatred is a personal thing, against Pallas, who competes for his mother's attention. Seneca, on the other hand, opposes the overall corruption by men like Pallas and Narcissus. The freedmen are so bad that later when Burrhus and Pallas are accused of plotting to overthrow Nero in favor of Rubellius Plautus, a descendant of Augustus, the narrator expresses surprise and disbelief. Both are acquitted, but then the narrator finishes by quoting Tacitus that everyone regretted the

innocence of Pallas, because of his arrogance and pride. He quotes Pliny the Elder, who recorded that Nero supposedly consulted infernal spirits, but then goes on to remark that the true evil spirits were “...des scélérats, persécutrices infatigables des honnêtes gens” / “... villains, untiring persecutors of honorable gentlemen” (*Essai*, 334). The infernal spirits are perverse, obsequious men who inspire the tyrant to greater caprice and dispose of generals and ministers on *their own* authority. Diderot’s text has completed the dehumanization of the freedmen, now equating them with demons. Ammianus’ had done the same with the eunuchs, calling them “inhuman”. Yet this is not the only time in Diderot’s literature that one can see a picture of unadulterated evil.

Diderot’s characterization of the freedmen recalls another of his earlier works, *Le neveu de Rameau*. Rameau’s nephew resembles the portrayal of the freedmen in more ways than one. He is unattached socially, quite elegant in manners and a genius, but he is also morally depraved. Rameau’s nephew sees virtue as a tool to use when it is useful. Vice fulfills the same function, making the two equal in his eyes. He writes that “Si par hazard la vertu avait conduit à la fortune; ou j’aurais été vertueux, ou j’aurais simulé la vertu comme un autre” / “If by accident virtue had a passage to wealth, either I would be virtuous or I would have feigned virtue as another.”<sup>165</sup> The use of “si” / “if” indicates that the nephew sees virtue only one of several possibilities and the last phrase, *comme un autre* / “as another”, tells us that he can imitate virtue, implying that he has no real virtue or that he believes no one really has virtue. He simply reasons and uses what he thinks best for himself. According to Hegel, Rameau’s nephew proclaims to all the “vanity of all values save self-preservation and hedonistic enjoyment against the protests of the

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<sup>165</sup> Denis Diderot, *Le neveu de Rameau*, in *Oeuvres Complètes*, Roger Lewinter, ed. vol 10, (Paris: Le Club Français Du Livre, 1971), 362.

philosopher.”<sup>166</sup> He is original and not overly concerned with conformity to society’s moral standards.<sup>167</sup> Thus his *ipse* is using a variety of *idems*; much like a chameleon he can be anyone he wants, but does not use the social being to relate to others, but merely to use them. In Ricoeur’s scheme the *ipse* and *idem* tend to refer to each other, but not here.<sup>168</sup> The various *idems* he uses are constructs unconnected to his own individual being, which has its own rules, uncomplicated by society’s definitions or values. He does not conform to a set standard of behavior and in fact turns society’s standards on their head. For example, he says “...que vous appelliez vice ce que j’appelle vertu, et vertu ce que j’appelle vice” / “...that which you call vice I call virtue and virtue, what I call vice.”<sup>169</sup> This statement is an inversion of Diderot’s model of Seneca and his beliefs. This conforms more to Diderot’s characterization of men like Pallas and Narcissus. Pallas goes from being Claudius’ advisor to Agrippina’s lover. Likewise, Narcissus cooperates with Messalina to bring down Seneca, but then turns on her later. Moreover, they reap financial rewards despite their betrayals. This contrasts with Seneca sticking loyally to Nero despite all the trouble he caused and trying to better the young prince and limit his diversions, rather than exploiting them for his own personal advantage. Ammianus’ text too uses this kind of construct contrasting the eunuchs of Constantius’ court with Ursicinus’ sons, or contrasting the illegal murder of innocent Theophilus with the legal acquittal of the guilty Serenianus. Diderot’s text, however, improves on Ammianus’ by at least detailing one part of the contrast, Seneca.

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<sup>166</sup> Simon, 131.

<sup>167</sup> Simon, 129.

<sup>168</sup> Ricoeur, 143-144.

<sup>169</sup> Diderot, *Le neveu de Rameau*, 362.

The freedmen and Rameau's nephew have another aspect in common. Both have no proper origin. Diderot's text dwells extensively on Seneca's background to show all the forces that helped to shape the future philosopher and minister. Rameau's nephew does not see the importance of such things. He believes in biology. If he has a child and if "la molecule voulait qu'il fût un vaurien comme son père, les peines que j'aurais prises, pour en faire un homme honnête lui seraient très nuisibles..." / "the molecule wants that he (his son) becomes a good-for-nothing like his father, the pains that I have taken to make an honorable man of him would be very harmful."<sup>170</sup> Education and family have no importance; it is simple biology that would determine a child's future. This seems similar to Diderot's presentation of the freedmen. They appear with no background, but the text does cite their servile origin a number of times. Reading the *Essai sur les règnes de Claude et de Néron* they appear doomed because of their servile origin. Similarly Claudius' own moral dysfunction is attributed, in the text, to having avoided the proper company of family in favor of that of slaves, prostitutes and other lower class persons (*Essai* 318). This ensured that Claudius lacked the moral firmness to stand up to people as an emperor. If the noble born Claudius, maltreated by family, could fall to this level, then how much worse would slaves themselves fall into iniquity? Moral dysfunction also appears in Serge's and Ammianus' versions of the apparatchik's discourse. All of Ammianus' villains, such as the eunuchs at court, are inhuman in their corruption, and Gallus was portrayed as a monster due to his temper and cruelty. Even Serge's villains, such as Zvéreva and Fédossenko, are in part socially dysfunctional. The key difference is that whereas the texts of Ammianus and Diderot stop with the dysfunction, Serge's text goes on to see the other side of these characters as well.

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<sup>170</sup> Diderot, *Le neveu de Rameau*, 390.

Diderot's text stops detailed examination once Seneca has left the picture and the text focuses on the freedmen. The narrator uses the word *scélérat* / "criminal" or "villain" in categorizing them. For example, he recounts that Pallas proposed a law to the senate that would forbid women from giving themselves sexually to their slaves. Claudius and the senate pass the bill and further reward him with a pension of 15 million sesterces. He sees nothing but hypocrisy as the former lover of Agrippina has such a law passed and advertises poverty in spite of his wealth. This is hypocrisy, and the narrator contrasts it with the unjust prosecution of Seneca in the Julia affair and his subsequent exile (*Essai* 316-317).

Earlier we saw that Diderot viewed the common people as being driven more by emotion than reason, and that as a result, they were wicked. Thus, they are like criminals and will seek their own advantage over all else. The freedmen, being originally slaves, stand equally condemned. Is prejudice then the main reason for this reduction of the freedmen? Nero may be expected to register disgust at Pallas and his arrogance and his servile origin, not to mention his relationship with Agrippina. It would seem strange that Diderot, however, a major figure of the Enlightenment, the editor of the *Encyclopédie*, would be shocked or opposed to former slaves becoming important men in government. Would not a slave who rose to such a level of competence as to be the minister to an emperor be an extraordinary person? There is no other account of Claudius and Nero with which to balance Tacitus' judgment. More importantly the narrator lets that judgment stand. Thus, to our above question, he says no. Why? The key again lies in the figure of Rameau's nephew. The "genius" for Diderot cannot play the proper role as a minister. He may have a specialized knowledge beyond that of most people, but they are

not well informed overall and of course usually lack the background and balance needed, both intellectually and morally to conduct public affairs. Rameau's nephew describes the genius. He says that "les genies lisent peu, pratiquent beaucoup, et se font d'eux-mêmes" / "the geniuses read little, practice much, and create themselves."<sup>171</sup> This points to major difference in institutional expertise. The freedmen, like Rameau's genius, did not study a great deal but practiced the accounting for their masters. This narrow education contrasts with Seneca's list of teachers, his philosophic eclecticism, not to mention his literary output. The reader cannot have failed to notice that in Seneca's education, like that of many a Roman noble, there is no study of such sundry matters as accounting or finance, or management of any kind. The reason is obvious. Many senators used slaves and freedmen just as Claudius to manage their estates and their accounts. It seems almost hypocritical for the text to condemn the freedmen on account of their specialized education. Are we seeing more of a class-based prejudice that accounts for these formulas?

The common denominator here is money. Earlier in Claudius' reign, for example, the emperor rules in favor of a law that would permit a ten thousand sesterces maximum on fees to advocates in the law courts. The narrator records the debate in the senate as given by Tacitus. Some argue that as disease is money for the doctor, so are injuries, hatreds and accusations for the lawyer. These argue that immortality of their name should be a suitable reward for advocates. Others argue that there is no point to any work without a salary and besides what man is presumptuous enough for immortality? The narrator favors the former argument, the opponents of the legislation. He sees in the law the hand of Suius, a friend of Messalina, an informer, and an enemy of Seneca (*Essai*

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<sup>171</sup> Diderot, *Le neveu de Rameau*, 354.

307-308). More generally the narrator sees the corrupting influence of money in the public good. He states that “...ne serait-il pas également important d’exiger de l’avocat une fortune honnête, de peur qu’il ne soit tenté de sacrifier à ses besoins la vérité dont il est l’organe, et l’innocence dont il est le défenseur?” / “...would it not have been equally important to demand of the advocate an honorable fortune, for fear that he would be obliged to sacrifice to his needs the truth of which he is the organ, and the innocence of which he is the defender?” (*Essai* 308) One cannot serve two masters; in this case the advocate will be pulled between the truth and money, and the narrator is under no illusions as to which will win the contest in most cases. In Rome, many used the law courts as a route to state service, and if one could not protect the public good in the law courts, what would they do with a government position? The text does not address the arguments of those in favor of the new law: the question of how the advocates were to support themselves, but clearly takes the position of changing an institution, thus changing its discourse. Seneca came from a noble wealthy family and he did not have a problem with money. This is just one example that Diderot’s ideal good man is a man of means as well as morals and education. Later Nero, at Seneca’s prompting, revokes Claudius’ legislation on fees, despite Agrippina’s opposition. Seneca has Nero placate his mother by awarding her a title and allowing her to discreetly listen to the senate’s debate on the issue. The narrator approves of this and no doubt sees it as an example of the “five good years” that Seneca brought to Rome.

Seneca’s work in reversing Claudius’ legislation has great significance for Diderot, who in the past years of his life witnessed the increase of a salaried government in France and elsewhere in Europe. Diderot could not support the concept of a salaried

government, regardless of the style or type. The reasons were given in his opinion on Claudius' legislation; money diverts the institutional man from truth and virtue in decision-making. It allows for the monopolization of power by a few and leads to corruption and tyranny. Already in France this was happening at the very center of power. During the Seven Years' War (1756-1763), the French army's management and direction were in part under the control of Paris Duverny and his brother Paris de Montmartel. Both were businessmen, the former a contractor for the army's supply and the latter a banker, who had loaned the court large sums. Ministers and generals had to tolerate them, especially the former, "General of the Flour Bags", in part because of the support he had from Madame de Pompadour, the king's mistress. Likewise, the controller general of finance had to yield power to the latter brother.<sup>172</sup> Further changes came after the war. In 1771, for example, Chancellor Maupeou, on the king's authority, dismissed the *Parlements* of Paris and other cities and replaced them with a salaried judiciary.<sup>173</sup> The *Parlements* had been the agency for law and order in France and had been no friend to the *philosophes*. Diderot himself had suffered from this institution, which suppressed his *Encyclopédie*, and had ordered the burning of Helvetius' *De l'esprit*. Diderot was well aware of the reactionary nature of the *Parlements*, but despite this, opposed their abolition, which put him into direct opposition with his friend Voltaire, who supported Maupeou. The dispute between the two reflects the sentiments expressed in the debate over Claudius' legislation. Diderot wrote to Catherine on the matter. He asks, "Mais la destruction de ce corps est donc un bonheur? Non. C'est un très grand malheur, parce qu'elle a entraîné la ruine de vingt mille familles..." / "Is the destruction of this body

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<sup>172</sup> Lee Kennett, *The French Armies of the Seven Years' War: a Study in Military Organization and Administration*, (Durham: Duke University Press, 1967), 8-9.

<sup>173</sup> Strugnell, 134.



therefore a good thing? No. This is the greatest tragedy, because it entailed the ruin of twenty thousand families....”<sup>174</sup> Diderot goes on to explain that the loss of the *Parlements* would not only deprive many of their livelihood, their alliances, their fortunes, their importance and so forth, but furthermore they would be replaced by “...de malfaiteurs, de sycophants, de gueux, d’ignorants, une misérable canaille qui tient l’urne fatale où nos vies, notre liberté, nos fortunes et notre honneur sont renfermés” / “...wrongdoers, sycophants, beggars, ignoramuses, a miserable mob which holds the inevitable ballot box where our lives, our liberty, our fortune and our honor are contained”; Diderot goes on to condemn this mob who now will depend on a “salarie fixé par la cour” / “a salary fixed by the court.”<sup>175</sup> The words and expressions are similar to the ones the narrator uses to condemn the freedmen. It is also curious that in discussing the loss of the *Parlements*, Diderot emphasizes that influential families will lose power, wealth and position to a group of “canaille” who become paid servants of the king. Diderot, who had his own works suppressed by this institution, is now being concerned about its members, but it is in line with the *Essai sur les règnes de Claude et de Néron*. Like Seneca, the members of the *Parlements* have families and position and therefore are better guides for society, as opposed to paid servants of the king who could be anyone and would likely pay more attention to their salary than to justice or virtue. It should also be said that for Diderot any strengthening of the monarchy was not good. Unlike Voltaire, who admired the Prussian system and wanted a stronger centralized monarchy, Diderot did not want to lose the *Parlements* because they were independent of the

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<sup>174</sup> Denis Diderot, *Mémoires pour Catherine II*, in *Oeuvres Complètes*, Roger Lewinter, ed. vol 10, (Paris, Le Club Français Du Livre, 1971), 545.

<sup>175</sup> Diderot, *Mémoires pour Catherine II*, 545.

court.<sup>176</sup> But more than antipathy for Frederick II was at work here. Diderot addressed the twin problems of a proper discourse of the state and of its institutions. Monarchies and money appear to corrupt both and the society as well. Good moral families who do not need the support of any monarch appear to be better able at overseeing a society. Diderot had clearly rejected monarchy and saw an aristocratic republic as a possible replacement.

The loss of the *Parlements* and strengthening of the centralized monarchy combined to force Diderot to look outside of France for political and social potential for his “good man”. Diderot’s search took him both to Holland and Russia. His attempt to guide Catherine to a path of reform in Russia came to grief and this may have convinced Diderot of the need for revolutionary change. The earlier (1773-1774) trip to Holland no doubt provided some thought on the discourse of state that he sought. Diderot made two visits to the country and wrote down many observations and thoughts.<sup>177</sup> As Strugnell points out, Diderot was not as perceptive about Dutch affairs as he may have thought. Holland was one of the few republican states at this time and certainly compared with France, Holland did enjoy a freedom of the press, speech and thought.<sup>178</sup> In reality, a few powerful families held a grip on the government, as secure as any monarch. They dominated Holland. Diderot’s account emphasizes that each province of the country was sovereign. In the multiple assemblies of government, however, the average burgher or

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<sup>176</sup> Davidson, 44.

<sup>177</sup> Holland, along with seven other provinces of the northern Netherlands had broken from Spanish Hapsburg control in the Eighty Years War, which lasted from 1568 to 1648. Thus the region enjoyed republican style government that was atypical for Europe at that time. There was, however, a local dynasty, the House of Orange, which also intervened in the political life of the state.

<sup>178</sup> Strugnell, 147-149.

man of property did not run the country in the way of Diderot's *homme de bien*.<sup>179</sup> True power lay with the members of the States General, who were a closed caste of families.<sup>180</sup> There was no diffusion of power. Holland was in reality an oligarchy. This was for Diderot was just as great a disappointment as Catherine would prove. Thus Diderot's use of Tacitus was not simply repeating ancient wisdom. In his view, he had conducted his own research, in France, Holland, and later Russia and found what he saw as a truth in the discourse of the state and its institutions. His own experiences merely confirmed the wisdom of Tacitus with regard to Claudius' freedmen. This is not to say that Diderot's view is not prejudiced against those of inferior background and education, and that his simplistic explanation is a construct that explains nothing, but unlike Ammianus, Diderot did try to find causation for behavior. In any event, his logic eventually presented a problem. He had already accepted the demolition of the divine right of kings. On the other hand, he had already rejected the common man as being too unstable and driven by emotion to govern a nation virtuously. Who would govern the nation? This led him to look further still. Failure to find in Europe any model of a state where the "good man" was in charge would lead him across the Atlantic. But before we look at this, we must look at the final expression of villainy in the *Essai sur les règnes de Claude et de Néron*.

#### SENECA AND ROUSSEAU

Seneca was more than an antiquarian study for Diderot. The narrator's response to critics, which pepper the *Essai sur les règnes de Claude et de Néron*, is proof that, in his view, Seneca was relevant to the issues of his day. In the same year that the *Essai sur la*

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<sup>179</sup> Denis Diderot, *Voyage en Holland*, in *Oeuvres Complètes*, Roger Lewinter, ed. vol 11, (Paris: Le Club Français Du Livre, 1971), 351-355.

<sup>180</sup> Strugnell, 148.

*vie de Sénèque* was published (1778), Diderot's former friend and later enemy, Jean-Jacques Rousseau, finally passed away. His death brought out a wave of emotion in his favor and in Diderot's eyes made him the darling of literary critics, the same critics who savaged the first edition, in part because they felt it was an attack on Rousseau.<sup>181</sup> The quarrel between Rousseau and Diderot goes far back in the history of their association. It may seem irrelevant to both a narrative about Seneca and the apparatchik's discourse, but Diderot apparently thought otherwise. In the middle of the *Essai sur les règnes de Claude et de Néron*, immediately after discussing the role of Silius, an informer and enemy of Seneca, the narrator breaks off from the topic of events to engage in several pages of diatribe against the now dead Rousseau. If his readers are unsure about the importance of this digression, the text includes an appendix to the second edition recounting the history of the quarrel with Rousseau. In no other part of this text does the narrator's anger and resentment seem to get the better of him. He has nothing but derision for Rousseau and it exceeds even his denunciation of the freedmen. After all, as the narrator points out, he has been with Rousseau for seventeen years, unlike the critics who extol his name now (*Essai* 356). Thus the critics are like the blind man in *Lettre sur les Aveugles*. But what relevance does this digression and the quarrel it points to have for the apparatchik's discourse? If Seneca is an expression of the "good man", the philosopher from whom we should learn, then Rousseau is the opposite. He is the ultimate criminal, whom we must shun. Why? Because like Rameau's nephew and like Tacitus' depiction of the freedmen, Rousseau places himself above all others, only in a more extreme fashion. He shows an uncompromising individuality that is the antithesis of Diderot's model in Seneca, a man

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<sup>181</sup> P.N. Furbank, *Diderot: A Critical Biography*, (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1992), 406, 410.

nurtured by family and working within society, balancing the social and individual beings.<sup>182</sup>

First, it is significant that the narrator begins his attack on Rousseau following the narrative of Silius and Seneca. Silius is another villain in Seneca's narrative. The text cites him as the main reason the senate supported Claudius' legislation on advocate fees. This puts him in the same class as the freedmen. The narrator calls him, "Un délateur vénal et formidable, un scélérat justement excécré de la multitude des citoyens..." / "A venal and formidable informer, a villain condemned by the multitude of citizens..." (*Essai* 349). Also and equally heinous, Silius personally attacked Seneca, charging him with corruption and with the adultery in Germanicus' house. Silius was the originator of the story of an affair between Julia and Seneca, which Messalina and the freedmen then put to use (*Essai* 307, 349). The word *délateur* / "informer" in particular has an ominous ring. Silius' very role pertains directly to the apparatchik's discourse. He manufactures formulas to have people condemned. The alleged liaison with Julia turned Seneca into an adulterer and an exile. Eventually, Silius would overreach himself in Nero's reign and in the end be condemned himself. It is at this point that the narrator takes up the issue of the critics and their hero, Rousseau. Seneca dealt with his Silius; now it was Diderot's turn.

The narrator starts by apologizing for interrupting the narrative. He then makes his main charges against Rousseau. Did Rousseau vilify his old friends? Did he respond with ingratitude to his benefactors? Did he put down on his tomb confidential and surprising secrets? He concludes the barrage of questions thus, "Je dirai, j'écrirai sur son monument: *Ce Jean-Jacques que vous voyez fut un pervers*" / "I will say, I will write on his monument: *This Jean-Jacques that you see was a perverse man*" (*Essai* 353). This is

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<sup>182</sup> Strugnell, 72.

not the place to go into the long history of disagreement between the two philosophes, but it is significant for this study that it started, in part, over one line in Diderot's play *Le Fils Naturel*. Rousseau found the line, "Only the wicked man lives alone" to be insulting. Later attempts to patch up things only furthered the quarrel. Their mutual friend, Mme. D'Epinau, tried to reconcile them, but found herself on Diderot's side of the argument, and after a last attempt at a meeting (1757), the two never saw each other again.<sup>183</sup> In the intervening years, between the meeting and Rousseau's death, the gulf between them, both personal and ideological, widened. Rousseau's death and veneration by critics was hard enough for Diderot; the posthumously published *Confessions*, in which Rousseau attacked Diderot and many of his friends, was the last straw.

The narrator makes it clear that the *Confessions* are a central issue. Impartial observers may say that such "hidden memoirs" are not at issue and that any quarrel is finished, but he does not agree (*Essai* 354). The narrator adds,

Il faut convenir qu'il est fou, qu'il est atroce d'immoler, en mourant, ses amis, ses ennemis pour servir de cortège à son ombre; de sacrifier la reconnaissance, la discretion, la fidélité, la décence, la tranquillité domestique à la rage orgueilleuse de faire parler de soi dans l'avenir. / It is necessary to agree that it is insane, that it is atrocious to immolate, in dying, one's friends, one's enemies in order to serve as the cortege to his shadow; to sacrifice gratitude, discretion, fidelity, decency, domestic tranquility to prideful rage to make others speak of one in the future (*Essai* 354).

Diderot apparently was criticized for being "violent" in his discussions about Rousseau and from the above statement one can see why (*Essai* 354). The key point is that Rousseau, in trying to please posterity, scorns and credits others in the process. For Diderot this is symptomatic of Rousseau's pride and uncompromising individuality. He may write well, but he has a character disorder that would allow him to vent publicly

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<sup>183</sup> Furbank, 151-153, 163.

such hatred of M. d'Alembert, Voltaire, Mme. D'Épinay, F. Grimm, or Diderot himself (*Essai* 354). Diderot was not questioning whether the *Confessions* should have appeared or not. What makes him angry is the content. Instead of leaving honorable memories for posterity, Rousseau instead attacks many respectable friends who had done him service in the past. Diderot can praise Rousseau's repentance in the *Confessions*, but not the libel, nor the cruelty (*Essai* 355).

This seems to put Rousseau in the same camp as the freedmen. The narrator contrasts Rousseau's writing with his character. This distinction between Rousseau's morals and eloquence makes him into another Silius or Pallas.<sup>184</sup> The narrator indeed does directly contrast Rousseau to both Seneca and Tacitus. While Jean-Jacques is the "saint" of all the critics, the narrator upholds another, Seneca. Momentarily breaking with the ideas from *Lettre sur les Aveugles*, he asserts that he knows both better than the critics (*Essai* 356). This may certainly be true in regards to Rousseau, whom he knew for seventeen years, unlike Dorat of the *Journal de Paris*, who never even met the man, but also Diderot never met Seneca (*Essai* 356). Diderot may know all there is to know about Seneca from literary sources, but in comparing Rousseau to his presentation of Seneca, he is straying into fantasy. When the narrator discusses Seneca on his own, he generally avoids the facile constructs and presents a credible picture of a whole person. When Seneca, however, is compared to others, Messalina, Pallas, Narcissus, Silius, Rousseau, the text degenerates into the same polemic we saw in Ammianus, especially when he tries to compare a first century Roman noble/philosopher with a contemporary. The connection between Seneca and Rousseau seems to have been started by the critics who made unpleasant comparisons between the *Essai sur la vie de Sénèque* and the

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<sup>184</sup> Mason, 57.

*Confessions*. The narrator wonders why he cannot attack Rousseau, yet the critics can attack Seneca, who has been dead now for centuries (*Essai* 356). Indeed the critics' attack on Seneca seems to hurt Diderot more than Rousseau's on Diderot and his friends.

The question of this passage becomes this: is Rousseau himself an anti-Seneca for Diderot and what pertinence might this have for the apparatchik's discourse. While it is true that the narrator seems angry in his text and that he is making an unequal comparison, he did not select Rousseau as a target simply out of spite. The basic charge against Rousseau, aside from hurt feelings, seems to be the author's lack of credibility. As he points out, Rousseau writes well and is eloquent, but is he also a moral man? In the narrator's estimation, the answer is no. He complains that Rousseau is not consistent; among Catholics, for example, he would make himself out as a Protestant and vice versa. If he were in the company of both, he presented himself as a deist. He also could write two letters to Geneva in the same week, one arguing for peace and the other for war. He can decry *les lettres* and culture in general, yet claim that he has had culture all his life. He preaches against low morals, yet writes a sleazy novel. He attacks the Jesuits, yet defends them against expulsion from France (*Essai* 359-360). All these charges made by Diderot have one common theme, a lack of consistency. Where does Rousseau stand on any issue? Like Rameau's nephew, he seems not to have a social being connected to his individual being, but merely uses social constructs as needed in individual situations. This also puts him with the freedmen. Like Narcissus who works with Messalina then turns against her, Rousseau uses people, such as Grimm, Voltaire, Mme. D'Epainay, and Diderot himself, and then attacks them in his *Confessions*.



The charge of hypocrisy is a serious one for Diderot. In his view, “both principles and consequences must stand up to rational scrutiny.”<sup>185</sup> In the *Essai*, Diderot had come to the conclusion that any person’s social and individual being and their relation was dependant on the society in which that person lived. The whole of the *Essai* revolves around this key point. In Ricoeur’s terminology, sameness and self must relate, though in Rameau’s nephew and Rousseau, according to Diderot, they do not. It is Seneca’s family and education, which enable him to work in Nero’s court and give the Romans five good years in spite of the circumstances. Rousseau’s philosophy, as demonstrated by the *Confessions*, appears as a direct challenge to ideas of the *Essai sur la vie de Sénèque*. In his last work, Rousseau preserves his individuality against all in an uncompromising fashion. There is no boundary or convention he respects. For Diderot this is sheer sophistry.<sup>186</sup> Diderot despite his radical thought never lost his connections with society. Even as a young bohemian, in his first marriage to Antoinette Champion, for example, he maintained a familial and middle class ethic. He carefully guarded the rights of his family.<sup>187</sup> Even after their later divorce, Diderot worked with his former wife to raise their surviving daughter Angelique. Diderot was diligent in overseeing her education and also later in giving her away in marriage. He ensured that she had finished her education and was given a substantial dowry, which Diderot was able to provide due to Catherine’s financial help, before allowing her to marry.<sup>188</sup> Thus Diderot was not presenting empty theory with Seneca’s life. He himself was emulating Seneca’s parents with his own child. Rousseau, by contrast, had his five children taken in by foundling homes. He did not

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<sup>185</sup> Strugnell, 73.

<sup>186</sup> Strugnell, 72.

<sup>187</sup> Jean Fabre, “Deux frères ennemis: Diderot et Jean-Jacques” in *Diderot Studies* 3 (1961): 158.

<sup>188</sup> Furbank, 343.

uphold his responsibility either to them or their mother, Thérèse de Levasseur. Thus in Diderot's view Rousseau was antithetical to his version of Seneca. As John Mason writes, "Rousseau préférait celle de la vérité et de la liberté. Cependant la liberté de Rousseau était une liberté sans obligations personnelles" / "Rousseau preferred the values of truth and liberty. The liberty of Rousseau, however, was a liberty without obligation."

<sup>189</sup> This is why Diderot's text presents Rousseau as a demagogue, a fanatic, a fool and so forth. His philosophy is destructive to society and its unchecked individualism is the mark of Rameau's nephew, or more ominously that of the freedmen or Nero. Rousseau is Diderot's recent example for his readers of the foe that Seneca faces in the arena.

All this does not deny that Diderot in both his presentation of Seneca's foes at court and his presentation of Rousseau is not engaging in reductionism and one handed reporting; in short, Diderot uses the simplistic formulas right alongside with the more detailed presentation of Seneca himself. Diderot looks both backwards to Ammianus, especially in his use of Tacitus, but he also looks forward to Serge. Diderot did not write on Seneca, as said before, out of antiquarian interest, nor simply to settle the score with Rousseau. He was writing about events of his own day, using the example of another that he admired as an object lesson for his readers and also drawing attention to those who stand in the way of that lesson. Diderot, unlike Ammianus, but like Serge, was looking to the future. In his novels, Serge, tried to show the pitfalls that befall a revolution in the hopes of avoiding them in the future. Diderot was doing much the same, albeit in a different way.

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<sup>189</sup> Mason, 58.

## SENECA AND THE AMERICAN REVOLUTION

In the year following the return from Russia (1776) Diderot witnessed two events that confirmed a new reorientation in his political thought. These were Louis XVI's sacking of the reformer Turgot as finance minister, in May, and then the news arriving of the Declaration of Independence, in August. The former event was just another sign that the old monarchy, whether the Bourbon or any other, was incapable of change for the better. The latter excited Diderot, and he at once was ready to champion the rebels. The event did not take him by surprise. In 1769, he had read Dickinson's *Farmer's Letters*, which articulated a political platform of limited government, controlled power, the very things that Catherine would reject.<sup>190</sup> These reforms remind one of Seneca's attempts to restrain Nero and the freemen. Only Seneca was doomed in a corrupt system that Diderot now saw was incapable of improvement. A new discourse of state and state institution had to be found. The American cause offered a fresh approach and a true solution to this problem. He was of course now too old to help the rebels directly, but he did act as an apologist for them and indeed it was in the *Essai sur la vie de Sénèque* that Diderot published his first tract on the revolution, *Apostrophe aux Insurgents d'Amérique*. Even throughout the *Essai sur la vie de Sénèque*, and especially in the *Essai sur les règnes de Claude et de Néron*, there are references, often oblique, to the American cause. For example, in one section Diderot uses Nero's speech to the Armenian king Tiridates as an opening to attack monarchy. He calls the speech "insolent" and then exclaims, "Dans quelle abjection ces orgueilleux Romains avaient plongé l'univers!" / "In what abjection did these proud Romans plunge the universe!" (*Essai* 327). He goes on to claim that Roman subjection of the surrounding nations eventually left them too weak to resist

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<sup>190</sup> For more information on the *Farmer's Letters*, see Strugnell, 205-206.

barbarian incursions. The closest analog to Rome's empire in Diderot's time was that of Great Britain, a commercial nation, which after the successful Seven Years' War against France acquired a large empire in North America, India, and in the Caribbean. We have a twin condemnation of both monarchy and colonialism.

The American Revolution gave hope to Diderot for another reason, even more germane to his exploration of Seneca's life. While hostile to monarchy, Diderot had no faith in the common people in ruling themselves. True democracy in his view was impractical in a large country such as America.<sup>191</sup> Diderot was no populist. We earlier saw him calling the people wicked and always thought them to be too fickle.<sup>192</sup> The compromise between a fickle people and an arbitrary monarch lay with a smaller body of men, who like Seneca, combined background, morals and education, a group of "good men".<sup>193</sup> Looking at the major leaders of the American Revolution: Washington, Jefferson, Franklin, Samuel and John Adams and the rest, Diderot could see a group of men who possessed the qualities he saw in Seneca. They were men of property by and large and also combined education with deep moral sense, something Diderot would have found when reading the text of the Declaration. Diderot could never completely accept a truly democratic solution and saw hope in American society being guided by an assembly of sages. There is a despotic element in this line of thought, but Diderot saw such in all human discourse.<sup>194</sup> But in a proper discourse, such despotism is not absolute. Seneca's father had to persuade his son to give up a vegetarian diet. Diderot was looking for a society with a delicate balance, open and without monopolization of power, but still

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<sup>191</sup> Strugnell, 218.

<sup>192</sup> Norman Suckling, "Diderot's Politics", *Diderot Studies* 16 (1973): 284.

<sup>193</sup> Strugnell, 218.

<sup>194</sup> Joseph Waldaver, "Society and the Freedom of Creative Man in Diderot's Thought", *Diderot Studies* 5 (1964), 78-79.

under guidance by those with the proper background. It is perhaps fortunate that when he died (1784) the American republic had just secured its independence from Great Britain. He missed both the French Revolution and the American experience of democracy. Neither would have lived up to his expectations. Money, specialized narrow interests, and the people, could not be kept from having a say in both the French and American republics. Diderot's ideas in the end were not practical and as such not based in complete reality, hence the need to resort to Tacitus and use an ancient form of the apparatchik's discourse. Nevertheless, unlike the ancients, he was looking forward to a new society and in this instance he belongs more with Serge, than with Ammianus. Now we come to an author who also looked forward to a new society, but did not have the hope of either Diderot or Serge.

## CHAPTER 5: GEORGE ORWELL: REJECTING THE DISCOURSE

Unlike the other authors in this study, George Orwell is a writer and political commentator whose stature is iconic in nature.<sup>195</sup> His two most famous books, *Animal Farm* and *Nineteen Eighty-Four*, have been treated on film and have been required reading in secondary schools both in the United States and Great Britain.<sup>196</sup> Even more interesting, in regard to the apparatchik's discourse, is that on the surface, Orwell would seem to be the first and last word on the subject. Phrases like "Doublethink", "Big Brother" or "Newspeak" have entered the common idiom on totalitarian dystopic thinking. A close examination of Orwell's works, however, shows not so much extraordinary perception of the apparatchik's discourse, but a heroic attempt to break free of it and, indeed, of all ideology and see what the future held for totalitarian regimes based on such discourses. Thus, Orwell tries to be a truly neutral observer and indeed is devastating, at times, in his description and criticism of the apparatchik's discourse, but he cannot escape from it himself. He does not see, as does Serge, that the formulas of the apparatchik's discourse can play a positive and negative role in political discourse at large. After having discarded the apparatchik's discourse of the society of his youth, he finds himself still bound by it in his later writings. The result is a negation and affirmation of the ideology under criticism.

Raymond Williams had already noted this tendency and attacked Orwell for what he perceived as a failure of nerve in the political climate of his day, which was disguised, in his view, by a so-called empiric outlook. His writing was merely a "successful

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<sup>195</sup> Orwell was born Eric Blair, but changed the name after his decision to become a writer, so as to distinguish himself from his previous life as an Etonian and an imperial policeman. See Jeffery Meyers, *Orwell: Wintry Conscience of a Generation*, (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 2000), 102.

<sup>196</sup> Stephen Sedley, "An Immodest Proposal: *Animal Farm*" in: *Inside the Myth, Orwell: Views from the Left*, (London: Lawrence & Wishart, 1984), 156.

impersonation of the plain man who bumps into experience in an unmediated way and is simply telling the truth about it.”<sup>197</sup> What probably irritated Williams more was the fact that Orwell’s novels *Animal Farm* and *Nineteen Eighty-Four* became ammunition for polemics against Communism, Socialism, and other forms of leftist thought. This would seem strange about a man who for most of his adult life remained a leftist in outlook. One could never accuse Orwell of being a socialist turncoat.<sup>198</sup> Orwell never publicly accepted conservative opinions of his books and after the publication of *Animal Farm*, refused offers to speak to Conservative party groups on the subject of Russian domination of Eastern Europe, especially as the Conservatives still supported British domination of India.<sup>199</sup>

Orwell is in many ways like Victor Serge. While critics have compared Orwell to other dystopian writers such as Huxley or Koestler, Serge in fact forms a better counterpart, especially in looking at the apparatchik’s discourse. First, the two were contemporaries and were thus experiencing the same phenomena, albeit from different perspectives. Also both wrote non-fiction and novels with strong autobiographical content in addressing social and political topics. Both were independent men of the Left who found no home in any political party or movement and moreover were to face much difficulty in publishing their works precisely because of this independence.<sup>200</sup> But it is here that the similarity stops. Orwell went on to fame and became a valuable resource for Cold War propagandists, while Serge’s work for the most part languished in obscurity.

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<sup>197</sup> Raymond Williams, *Politics and Letters*, (London: NLB, 1979), 385.

<sup>198</sup> Christopher Norris, “Language, Truth and Ideology: Orwell and the Post-War Left”, in *Inside the Myth, Orwell: Views from the Left*, (London: Lawrence & Wishart, 1984), 243.

<sup>199</sup> John Newsinger, *Orwell’s Politics*, (Houndmills: Macmillan Press LTD, 1999), 17.

<sup>200</sup> For more information on Orwell’s trouble with publishers see Newsinger, 55-56. See also Meyers, *Wintry Conscience*, 246-248.

This difference points to a larger one. As stated above, Orwell rejected not only the discourse of his upbringing and early career, but ideology altogether. Serge, as we have seen, took a different course. Raised in the home of revolutionaries, he never lost the ideology that was his birthright. He was able to pass from anarchism to Bolshevism and beyond in large part because he had a revolutionary discourse of his own. No matter what party he was in, Serge remained a critic and still upheld revolution as his main goal. Moreover, as we saw, he appreciated the need for the apparatchik's discourse to attain higher goals. His criticisms were directed at the discourses that sought to pervert revolutionary aims. While this meant that he could be an apologist for the Bolsheviks, it also meant that he could turn against Bolshevism as he did later when he broke with Trotsky.

Orwell did not pass through various leftist organizations like Serge. While he was temporarily involved with the I.L.P. (Independent Labour Party), Orwell usually remained uninvolved with organizations altogether. In both *Burmese Days* and *Nineteen Eighty-Four*, Orwell's main characters and a narrator articulate Orwell's own criticism. In *Homage to Catalonia*, Orwell is speaking more directly, though his own narrative voice does change, while in *Animal Farm* there is no central character and so the narrator takes responsibility for the exposition. Whether the target is a racial or Leninist discourse, Orwell's text makes its criticism on a perceived empiric basis. There is no comparison with an obvious rival discourse. The only place where this changes somewhat is in *Homage to Catalonia*, where there is a comparison between the discourse of the P.O.U.M (Party of Marxist Unification), the main indigenous Marxist party in Catalonia, with that of the Soviet dominated Communists. Not surprising is also that Orwell's socialist beliefs



come out most strongly in this work. In the novels, on the other hand, both the narrator and the main character remain trenchant critics of the prevailing ideology and its discourse. They can cite nothing, however, to put in its place, so all that is left is the criticism and a sense that the status quo simply cannot be changed.

This tendency is reinforced by the structure of the novels, primarily *Burmese Days* and *Nineteen Eighty-Four*. In both, Orwell relies on both a strong narrative voice and a major protagonist, John Flory and Winston Smith respectively. These characters are as complex as any of Serge's, but they are surrounded by other characters that seem to do nothing but serve plot functions. This contrasts strongly with Serge's use of multiple characters, all with significant detail. Both Flory and Smith are characters as described by Ricoeur. They have functioning traits, established by habit that relate both to the *ipse* and *idem*. More importantly, Orwell uses them as a contrast to the setting in order to delineate the ideological world the main character inhabits for the reader. Orwell, however, goes further. Both novels use a narrator to articulate the setting and the situations faced by the main characters. While the voice of the narrator may change from detachment to irony and back again, the function remains the same: to provide a seeming objective commentary to the action.<sup>201</sup> This leaves the reader with one effective viewpoint combined in the narrator and the protagonist who stands against the discourses of the state and institution to which he belongs, but without any means of challenging it effectively. These main protagonists reinforce the commentary given by the narrator, often making futile gestures of protest in the process. Unlike Serge's characters, they present no rival discourse that challenges the system they oppose. Since the characters end the book in failure, we are left simply with an inevitable continuation with things as

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<sup>201</sup> Lynette Hunter, *Orwell: The Search for a Voice*, (Milton Keynes: Open University Press, 1984), 22.

they are. Orwell's problem was not a lack of nerve, as Williams indicates, but rather a failure of understanding, of ideology and the apparatchik's discourse. The dreams and theories of intellectuals held no attraction for him, but in condemning theory and discourse completely, he ended up underwriting, in his novels, the status quo he equally despised.

#### *BURMESE DAYS*: RACISM AS THE APPARATCHIK'S DISCOURSE

*Burmese Days* is one of Orwell's earliest novels (1934) and of course reflects the time when the author himself was an apparatchik, a policeman in colonial Burma, enforcing a discourse no less brutal and oppressive or less flawed than the Stalinist one Orwell confronted later in life. His time there had an important impact on his life. Orwell became disgusted with his life as a policeman and the racist colonial system he was upholding. Yet he was also ashamed of his own deeds while in Burma. Like the main character John Flory, Orwell had a Burmese boy to dress him in the morning. He also took advantage, as did Flory, of Burmese girls for sex. He cracked the skulls of locals and nursed a hatred of young Buddhist students who jeered at him on the streets and tried to cheat on him when he played at football matches.<sup>202</sup> Many of the characters in the novel are thus taken from Orwell's life. Flory has the servants and girls, but Westfield is the policeman, while Ellis has the hatred of the Burmese.<sup>203</sup> Despite this, Orwell did not end up as a typical Anglo-Indian.<sup>204</sup> He was out of step with his superiors and disliked the culture of the clubs, the booze, and the concept of empire.<sup>205</sup> As Harold Acton pointed

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<sup>202</sup> Meyers, 62-63.

<sup>203</sup> See George Woodcock, *The Crystal Spirit: A Study of George Orwell*, (Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1966), 87.

<sup>204</sup> The phrase "Anglo-Indian" does not imply someone of mixed race but rather Englishmen and women who had become long term residents in Britain's Far Eastern colonies, especially India and adjoining states.

<sup>205</sup> Meyers, 63.

out, “But for his nagging ‘social conscience’, I suspect he might have found happiness there.”<sup>206</sup> Five years were enough to transform him from a policeman into a “...determined opponent of authority and supporter of the downtrodden.”<sup>207</sup> Alongside this hatred of colonialism, however, was an equal distrust of the ability of the local people to rule their own country. He could not support imperialism, but he could not imagine an alternative and so the criticism while pertinent and incisive, leads one right back to the colonial regime as the best alternative available. His dilemma was similar to Diderot’s, whose disdain for the king’s apparatchiks led him to look around for another solution to the question of government. Diderot’s solution was to look to the past and try and transform Seneca into a model for good honest government. Serge, of course, looked to a future revolution, which would finally right things. Orwell did not look to past or future, but remain focused on the existing conditions. The contradictions of this attitude and Orwell’s own life provide the reference point for *Burmese Days*.

The ideology in *Burmese Days* is of course racism, which underlies the logic of empire and along with the power of British military might provides all the justification that a typical Anglo-Indian needs. John Flory acts as Orwell’s mouthpiece in attacking this discourse and its formulas. He presents the empire as a sham for the exploitation of the Burmese. Another character, Dr. Veraswami, provides the counterpoint. The fact that Orwell has a white man attacking colonialism, while an Indian defends it makes the condemnation of racism all the more ambiguous. More importantly these two discuss these weighty issues in secret at the doctor’s bungalow. Flory must go to the doctor to express his true feelings, “...like a non-conformist minister dodging up to town and going

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<sup>206</sup> Meyers, 63.

<sup>207</sup> Newsinger, 3.

home with a tart.”<sup>208</sup> He can talk to the doctor in a way he cannot talk to his fellow Anglo-Indians at the club. The narrator in this scene confirms that this situation is unusual. “It was a topsy-turvey affair for the Englishman was bitterly anti-English....” (*BD*, 39) Thus Orwell is reinforcing in the voices of his narrator that Flory is unique and up against great odds. The narrator’s voice, while seeming objective, views Flory’s relationship with the doctor as unusual. This idea is closer to the conventional thinking of Flory’s society. The apparatchik’s discourse of the white functionaries who uphold racism is so common that Orwell, though damning it through Flory’s own words, cannot help but make Flory seem hopeless from the “objective” point of view of the narrator. By being “anti-English” Flory seems to be contradicting his own identity. Flory’s Englishness, however, is only his *idem*, not his *ipse*. We know this for Flory can enter the club, have a drink and make simple conversation, but he cannot even express himself honestly without condemnation by his fellow whites, let alone take any sort of action. Only the doctor, who disagrees with him, allows him to express his hatred of the system. Thus we see Flory’s *ipse* suppressed by a discourse that monopolizes all thought among the whites, including the narrator. Furthermore to express his *ipse*, which distinguishes him from the *idem* of colonial society, Flory must go to a man, not only judged by that discourse as inferior, but a man who agrees with the discourse. In fact, Dr. Veraswami articulates the apparatchik’s discourse of imperialism with eloquence unequaled by any of the white characters in the book. The absurdity of Flory’s position could not be made clearer.

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<sup>208</sup> George Orwell, *Burmese Days*, (New York: Harcourt, Brace and Company, 1934), 37 (hereafter cited in the text as *BD*)

The character of Flory illustrates well the major distinction between Orwell on one hand and Serge, Ammianus, and Diderot on the other. Serge's novels have heroes who extol his revolutionary discourse even when the revolution is off course and in the hands of timeservers and sycophants. Ammianus' Ursicinus may well have faced the courtiers and eunuchs alone at Constantius' court, but Ammianus' text does not shy from trying to extol, if indeed in the most bland and whitewashed terms, his hero as a paladin of virtues, who will outlast the present corruption. Diderot could boast of reading history his own way and thus his text portrays Seneca as a hero fighting, despite his eventual fall and execution. In other words, all three authors display a partisanship in their work, ranging from Ammianus' grotesque portrayals to the more nuanced of Serge. Orwell by contrast prefers a simulated "objectivity" to his characters as well as the narrators. The problem is that this objectivity is really a pose. Orwell could flee the colonial scene himself, but his mind still was held by its seeming discourse and apparent superiority. His characters are likewise held.

Flory articulates the reality behind the formulas of the apparatchik's discourse of racist colonialism. The main formula is that British rule is necessary since the Burmese cannot develop the country themselves, but Flory points out plainly that British rule simply allows the oilmen, the miners, planters, and other exploiters to loot the country's resources (*BD*, 40). This is a statement by an exploiter himself. Flory works for a timber company and has no illusions about colonialism or his role. He states that the law and order in Burma are only for "the moneylender and the lawyer and that the only progress that Britain has brought is the construction of more prisons" (*BD*, 41). His statements are confessional in nature, but are still a clear indictment of the Anglo-Indians and their

discourse as it is of himself. Dr. Veraswami, however, will have none of it. Standing in complete opposition to Flory, he enumerates the benefits of British rule, such as the development of manufactured goods, which the Burmese and Indians could not produce themselves. He also claims that Britain keeps real exploiters, like Japan, from descending on the region (*BD*, 40). Although the doctor sounds like a paid spokesman for the British, his ideas are in fact sincere and he has learned from racism, applying its discourse to the Japanese, condemning them as a group, while exculpating the British. “Dr. Veraswami had a passionate admiration for the English, which a thousand snubs from Englishmen had not shaken” (*BD*, 40). Thus the narrator points out the absurdity of the doctor’s view. The doctor works at the local prison, so he has seen the dirty side of British rule in addition to listening to Flory’s diatribes, but the doctor is in fact the greatest example given by Orwell of the bankrupt nature of racism as well as its pernicious ability to capture educated minds.

Like all speculative formulas, racism is based on a false, but difficult to disprove discourse, in this case, that the white man knows what is best for the non-white native. Since he has studied their history he knows that he understands them.<sup>209</sup> This reasoning informs the apparatchik’s discourse in a colonial setting. According to Lord Evelyn Cromer, “Accuracy is abhorrent to the Oriental mind...the European is a close reasoner; his statements of fact are devoid of any ambiguity.”<sup>210</sup> This is difficult to disprove since it generalizes about so many people at once. The material disparity between European and Asian civilizations would seem to support it, as demonstrated by Dr. Veraswami’s comments on the manufactured goods Asia cannot produce. Furthermore, this racist

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<sup>209</sup> Edward Said, *Orientalism*, (New York: Pantheon Books, 1978), 34.

<sup>210</sup> Lord Evelyn Cromer, quoted by Said, 38.

variant of the apparatchik's discourse reduces groups of people to a specific *idem*. This is very similar in fact to Ammianus' commentary on eunuchs, which were imported from lands east of the Roman Empire. The "Oriental" is "irrational", "depraved", and "childlike", while the "European" is "rational", "normal", and "mature".<sup>211</sup> Ammianus' eunuchs and Diderot's freedmen were also depraved and inhuman, especially in their greed. In both situations the terms are arbitrary and have no necessary basis in fact. Still it is not easy to disprove and conversely easy to believe, especially when it is buttressed with obvious British military power. Dr. Veraswami would seem to contradict this model. He is a trained physician, which would seem to require a rational, normal, and mature mind. His arguments with Flory, while based on the same racist formula, are still logically argued and presented rationally. The doctor is not irrational, depraved, or childlike, except perhaps in his uncritical admiration of the British. On the other hand, the university where he trained to be a doctor was set up by the British, and the colonial government provides his livelihood. So not only does the doctor have good reason to admire the British, but also Flory's total condemnation of the colonial system loses some of its edge.

Both Flory and Dr. Veraswami serve racism in both overt and covert ways. The doctor in his praise of the British goes further and denigrates his own people. Sounding like the above quoted Lord Cromer, the doctor considers "Orientals" to be apathetic and superstitious. He sounds like any white racist. He remarks for example that "The Indians introduce diseases, and the English cure them" (*BD*, 41). So the doctor not only works for the colonial regime, but also openly proclaims its virtues in a completely one-sided view that coincides with the views of white racists. Flory, who works for one of the exploiting

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<sup>211</sup> Said, 40.

companies, while he privately condemns colonial racism and its effects on Burma and seems to have a genuine appreciation for the country and Burmese culture, takes his own liberties. His house has many Burmese servants who do all the work in his bungalow. He also bought a Burmese girl (Ma Hla May) to be his concubine (*BD*, 50-54). His treatment of the servants is not cruel, but it's no less condescending than in any other white household and still reflects the racist viewpoint. His treatment of Ma Hla May is also very one-sided. Their sex is couched in terms of Flory using an object and later feeling ashamed and finding her "nauseating and dreadful" (*BD*, 52). Again, it is the narrator who makes this point to us. Later Flory pays her off, like a prostitute, so that he may pursue Elizabeth Lackersteen. On the other hand, Ma Hla May considers Flory as someone to be controlled and needs him so as to maintain her status. Despite his interest in Burmese culture, Flory's relationship with the Burmese themselves appears as one of control and use.<sup>212</sup> This duality fits closely with the picture of the European scholar of the "Orient". The scholar has a love/hate relationship with the "Orient". He loves its exotic culture, a "salutary derangement" from European habits, but then also attacks it as "underhumanized, antidemocratic, barbaric..."<sup>213</sup> Flory exhibits similar tendencies. His talks with Dr. Veraswami are an example. Here, with an Indian, he can engage in blasphemous talk. It's his "salutary derangement" away from the European habits of racism. Later, however, the manipulations of his concubine, Ma Hla May, disgust him and cause him to turn to a true soulmate in an English woman, Elizabeth Lackersteen. Thus, both lives fit comfortably into the racist colonial society in Burma, except of course, for Flory's conscience.

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<sup>212</sup> Daphne Patai, *The Orwell Mystique: A Study in Male Ideology*, (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1984), 39-40.

<sup>213</sup> Said, 150.



The picture of Flory and the doctor is problematic when examining the apparatchik's discourse of racism. On the one hand, we see the figure of Flory, who feels confined by it and must go to an outsider to express his true feelings. As we saw above, Flory's *ipse* only finds expression outside white society, whether it is trashing British colonialism to the doctor, or going out on his own in the jungles and towns. The discourse of racism is so strong that Flory suffers from other whites for his friendship with Dr. Veraswami. Orwell is giving us an excellent example of the effects of the racial formula on people who disagree. In Flory we see clearly the perverse interaction between *ipse* and *idem*. On the other hand, we have Dr. Veraswami. He is an articulate spokesman for British imperialism and unlike Flory does not live a lie. He says what he thinks and is proud of it. Moreover, he later learns that his position is being attacked, not by a European, but by another non-white, U Po Kyin, the local Burmese magistrate and the chief villain of the book. Orwell seems to be giving a very ambivalent statement about racist colonialism. Although Flory is a victim of its attitude, this attitude seems to be validated by the two chief non-white characters in the book, albeit in different ways. We need to look more closely at both of these themes.

Flory suffers for his friendship with Dr. Veraswami, or "Dr. Very-Slimy", as his clubmate Ellis is wont to call him. Ellis has no kind word for any Burmese or Indian, especially the doctor, "...a black babu who calls himself a doctor because he's done two years at an Indian so-called university" (*BD*, 25). Ellis' statements are in perfect agreement with the apparatchik's discourse of this novel. He represents an institution, the Anglo-Indian club, which maintains the state's discourse of control by invoking the formula of white superiority consistently and often. By calling the doctor "a black babu",

he ridicules the man, making him seem but a child, and an unclean one at that, someone in need of care by a superior. He then denigrates the university the doctor attended since it's in India. The phrase, "so-called" puts the university under a question mark and with it the claim to be a doctor. Thus the articulate pro-British doctor becomes the uneducated "Very-Slimey". An *ipse* is destroyed and the *idem* of racism, judging a person solely by his color comes into play. Much like the discourse in Ammianus, it is very dualistic with good and bad sharply delineated. You are white, good, educated and proper or you are black, bad, uneducated and improper. No exceptions are allowed. Unlike Ammianus, however, what people say or do, let alone who they are, is less important than race.

The novel reinforces the point in a number of ways. First, aside from Flory, the other major characters of the book, both white and non-white, are two-dimensional. We never see, for example, the root of Ellis' strident racism. Instead the negative remarks are repeated about the Burmese or Flory, because he loves them, after another. Did Ellis have a bad incident, as Orwell did when Burmese footballers would try to trip him on the playing field, with crowd approval?<sup>214</sup> This question is never answered. The only other information given is that although intelligent, Ellis did not belong in the East (*BD*, 24). The other characters are similar. Westfield is a hardened, gun-happy policeman, who arrests Burmese people for crimes simply on the fact of their being flogged for some offense in the past (*BD* 74-75). He hopes that a riot will happen and he will get to put it down (*BD* 256). Mrs. Lackersteen seems solely interested in climbing the social ladder. This involves the twin jobs of keeping an eye on Mr. Lackersteen, a drunken fornicator, and trying to find a suitable husband for her niece, Elizabeth (*BD*, 27-31, 109). About these and the other white characters, the text does not give more details. They seem to

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<sup>214</sup> Meyers, 63.

fulfill plot functions. Ellis, for example, is a goad to Flory to heighten his isolation; the Lackersteen's provide the niece who will be Flory's failed love interest. Even the doctor seems to be nothing more than a mouthpiece for the benefits of British rule while also giving the reader a face to Flory's bad conscience about racism. Orwell seems to be demonstrating the effect of the apparatchik's discourse by leaving these characters as mere forms with no substance, simple *idems* of established character types. All the Anglo-Indian characters are by and large selfish, bigoted and vapid. By creating this monolithic group, Orwell highlights Flory's isolation. There is no one in the group that he is close to or can talk to as he can with the doctor. Later we see that he cannot relate to Elizabeth, the woman he fancies. Orwell also, like Serge, seems to be showing the negative effects upholding this discourse has on the rulers themselves. Flory's romantic/sexual problems, for example, mirror both Fédossenko and Ryjik. The former, as we saw in *S'il est minuit dans le siècle*, took advantage of his position to rape a woman, while Ryjik, in *Ville Conquise*, seemed unable to break out of his Chekist *idem* and relate to Xenia on a romantic level. Of course, Flory never raped Ma Hla May, but he never really loved her either. Orwell himself was never in step with the clubs and the abuse of alcohol that typified Anglo-Indian culture. Aside from Flory, none of the characters has an interior life thus giving the impression that unlike Flory, they do not think. They simply respond to stimuli on the basis of preestablished patterns of behavior. The formula of racism supersedes any critical thinking, by simplistically putting people into categories based on skin color. By accepting it, the Anglo-Indians become simplistic themselves, a parody of the supposed superiority of the white man.

Orwell's narrator provides the reader with enough commentary about the situation in Burma and Flory's plight to remind the reader that the narrator, is himself an old Burma hand. There is plenty of dialogue, but this provides a minority of the information given. The narrative voice is authoritative, but not distant, and thus lacks the "objectivity" that Orwell seems to ascribe to it.<sup>215</sup> Even when the narrator delves into Flory's mind we have the impression of someone familiar with Flory's plight, but still trying to maintain aloofness. This is the worst of both worlds. Flory's thoughts and emotions are the main thread of the story. Flory is the only character in the book with an interior life, yet it is viewed from without, by a narrator who is not a detached objective observer.<sup>216</sup> This dilutes somewhat the anti-colonial discourse of the book and contributes to the reduction of the other characters.

In *Burmese Days*, Orwell is trying to present his information as if it were second hand, but the familiarity in the narrator's voice destroys this illusion. A very good example of this is Verrall, whose very name is a play on the words "virile" and "feral".<sup>217</sup> The only aristocrat among the Anglo-Indians, he is, like Flory, an outsider. The narrator introduces him by mentioning his peerage and then going on about how, despite a lack of money, Verrall had managed to keep what was dear to him, clothes and horses, by skipping out on paying his bills (*BD* 201). This is text's way of foregrounding the character and fixing the prejudice, with a little ironic commentary, but it prevents us from evaluating the character on his terms. Verrall is an aristocrat and like all aristocrats, so the narrator tells us, he does not care about basic responsibility. Later he mentions that to

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<sup>215</sup> Lynette Hunter, "Stories and Voices in Orwell's Early Narrative", in *Inside the Myth, George Orwell: Views from the Left*, (London: Lawrence & Wishart, 1984), 169.

<sup>216</sup> Christopher Small, *The Road to Miniluv: George Orwell, the State, and God*, (Pittsburgh, University of Pittsburgh Press, 1976), 26.

<sup>217</sup> Patai, 24.

list all the people Verrall held in contempt would take too long a time to list (*BD*, 202). This marks him out as being quite selfish. Thus the reader is not surprised when he snubs the other members of the club or does what pleases him, or beats the club butler because the drink he ordered was too warm (*BD* 208). This should be a vivid scene and exposé on a terrible aspect of colonialism. But this does not happen since our knowing narrator has already given us the background on the character. Because of his social station he is immune to any charge; he can act out any fantasy, and no one dare criticize him.<sup>218</sup> Even Ellis, the most explosive personality, when angered at Verrall for beating the club's butler, fails to give the young aristocrat the thrashing he deserves. It's not that Ellis cared about the butler. The point was that the butler was club property and Verrall was the newcomer, but because of his social position, no repercussion followed (*BD*, 208-209). On the one hand, Verrall epitomizes the absurdity of the racist ideology. He is socially superior to all the other whites, yet seems even more obnoxious, vapid and with nothing redeeming in character. On the other hand, Orwell's narrator treats Verrall as he does all the others. Through careful foregrounding, the text has set up the Anglo-Indians to be a mockery of the claim to white superiority, but in doing so Orwell has robbed these characters of any deeper meaning, reducing them just as they reduce the Burmese and Indians. They appear more as comic stereotypes created by an insider who has a score to settle and thus the impact of their racist attitudes is lessened.

The artificiality of the characters thus reflects that of the racial construct they use to justify their presence in Burma. Orwell was trying to present the reality of colonial rule. Many have compared *Burmese Days* to E.M. Forester's *Passage to India*, though Orwell remarked that the portrayal of the Anglo-Indians in Forester's novel would have

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<sup>218</sup> Hunter, 173.

ensured the collapse of British rule in India in a week.<sup>219</sup> *Burmese Days* is a more honest picture of the manner of white rule, epitomized by the code of the Pukka Sahib, the name the local natives give to the British rulers:

Keeping up our prestige  
The firm hand (without the velvet glove)  
We white men must hang together  
Give them an inch and they'll take an ell, and  
Esprit de Corps

All the white characters in the novel, except Flory, uphold this code, which is a summarization of the apparatchik's discourse in this novel.<sup>220</sup> Flory does not judge by color or appearance, which is represented by all but the second line of the above code. Four parts of the code use the formula of racism, white unity and appearance against the non-whites, with the second line alluding to the violence needed on occasion to uphold the racist formula. Later in the novel, Flory tries to propose Dr. Veraswami as a new member of the club, the first non-white. The other four men in the room, Macgregor, Ellis, Lackersteen, and Westfield are opposed. Orwell does give each of them different personality reasons for opposing the nomination. Lackersteen, for example, really could not care, but he is a coward at heart. Ellis is of course a pathological racist and abuses Flory to his face, "You nigger's Nancy Boy!" (*BD*, 235) Macgregor, the leader of the club, is more polite and proper, but he too dislikes the doctor for personal reasons, and while he hates to hear the Burmese insulted, still does not believe in equality (*BD*, 30). All have their reasons, but most important is that the club in Kyauktada is the last in the region to be all white. All the white characters, save Flory, prefer to keep the club as is, even though Ellis alone seems to grasp the full import of the code of the Pukka Sahib, "If

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<sup>219</sup> Jeffrey Meyers, *A Reader's Guide to George Orwell*, (London: Thames and Hudson, 1975), 68.

<sup>220</sup> Meyers, *Reader's Guide*, 67.

we aren't going to rule, why the devil don't we clear out?" (*BD*, 25) But even Flory is not too eager to challenge this code, and his proposal of Veraswami came only after much hand wringing and pleas on the good doctor's part. While *Burmese Days* contains a strong condemnation of the colonial discourse and shows the baleful effects of its dogma on the rulers, it does not pretend to show a better way than that presented. The narration and two-dimensional characters do not help. If the white characters in the novel leave much to be desired as people, the non-white characters are not much better. Orwell may have hated colonialism, but it did not make him a supporter of nationalism either. In this novel there is a lack of a countervailing discourse alongside an honest critique that leaves no option but a return to the same. This becomes more apparent with the Burmese characters in the novel.

U Po Kyin is the ostensible villain of the text. In a novel known for its indictment of racist colonialism, a native Burmese is the most evil representative of all. At first glance, the corrupt and venal nature of this magistrate would seem to vindicate Dr. Veraswami's assertion of the superiority of English over Asian character and therefore the former's fitness to rule.<sup>221</sup> In fact, the behavior of the magistrate is just yet another argument against that rule, but at the same time also argues against any reasonable self-rule for the Burmese. Like the white characters above, the text introduces U Po Kyin via a familiar narrator who fixes prejudices in advance. Appropriate to a novel on racism, there is first a physical description. U Po Kyin, although fat was really "symmetrically fat", unlike the white men and quite beautiful (*BD*, 5). With unblinking "porcelain" like eyes and his obvious weight, he projected a sense of greatness, wealth, and power, a man to be envied and feared (*BD* 14). So that the reader does not miss the

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<sup>221</sup> Meyers, *Wintry Conscience*, 115.

connection between U Po Kyin's weight and his grasping manner, the narrator points out that he needs help arising from a chair and so for aid must bark at servants, who call him "Most holy god" (*BD* 5-8). The physical details are quite colorful, but clearly symbolize a villain. Earlier, Orwell showed us the harmful effects of imperialism on the British. Now he will show its effects on the Burmese.

U Po Kyin's rise to the position of a senior magistrate involves spying and crime. His first job was as a clerk for a rice merchant, from whom he would steal to supplement his pay. Later a bit of blackmail secured a government clerkship. While a clerk, he learned about a scheduled promotion of some of the clerks. To ensure his promotion, he denounced the others just before the promotion was to take place. It is not stated, but he must have already had spies for "...his information was always a week ahead of everyone else's" (*BD* 6). As a senior magistrate, he was no different. In court cases, he took bribes from litigants on both sides, but he always judged on the merits of the case to keep from being caught. He kept a gang of "dacoits" to terrorize the local population into paying a "ceaseless toll" and kept many people on his payroll. He could steal, rape, discredit, accuse and have his way in anything and everyone in Kyauktada knew, except of course for the British (*BD*, 6-7). He seems the epitome of the "evil Oriental", but shows himself more clever, intelligent, and observant than his colonial masters.

In fact U Po Kyin is a product of the colonial discourse, as much as Ellis or Westfield. He steals and terrorizes much as the British do. In fact they are his inspiration. As a child he would watch in fear as their soldiers marched and wondered, "In his childish way he had grasped that his own people were no match for this race of giants. To fight on the side of the British, to become a parasite upon them, had been his ruling



ambition, even as a child” (*BD*, 6). U Po Kyin is a perverse version of Dr. Veraswami. Both respect and like the British, despite the evidence of the true nature of their rule. Both have also profited from it, in different ways, but while the doctor esteems them and sees only their good qualities, U Po Kyin sees the whole picture and is determined to profit for himself, just as they do. Other Burmese characters have similar concepts. Flory’s concubine, Ma Hla May, as we saw earlier, sees Flory in terms of use; there is no love in the relationship. She desires nothing more than to be a “bo-kadaw”, a white man’s wife. She loved being an idle concubine and hoped to have power over Flory via sex and magic. She thinks of lechery as witchcraft. Each time they have sex, he will become more and more her “half-idiotic slave” (*BD* 54). The idea seems ludicrous, but it points to the same grasping corrupt nature we see in U Po Kyin. Later, after Flory has dismissed her from his house, she tries to corner him, following him, demanding more money and making a scene. He responds with fear, bribery, and shame, but he never tries to treat Ma Hla May as an equal, in the same way he treats Dr. Veraswami. As Daphne Patai points out, “There is an inevitability about Flory’s interactions with her (Ma Hla May) that is in sharp contrast to Orwell’s critique of imperialism.”<sup>222</sup> Flory’s manservant, Ko S’la is similar. He is loyal to Flory and did not like Ma Hla May’s influence, but this is mainly because he wants to run Flory’s household and profit from him. When, later in the novel, Flory courts Elizabeth Lackersteen, Ko S’la sees the threat immediately. She will be the new boss of the household and make him and all the other servants miserable (*BD* 115). There is, however, more here than a fear of a loss of control. Ko S’la and the other Burmese men view Englishwomen as “a race apart, possibly not even human, and so dreadful that an Englishman’s marriage is usually signal for the flight of every servant in

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<sup>222</sup> Patai, 32.

the house, even those who have been with him for years” (*BD*, 110). The Burmese seem to have their own discourse, conditioned by the impact of colonialism. The narrator gives us a clue as to the origin of this discourse. Both Englishwomen in the novel are described in most unflattering terms. Mrs. Lackersteen is lazy and domineering, while Elizabeth is openly bigoted against the Burmese. Their expressions of social superiority are at odds with female subservience in traditional Burmese society, hence the classification as being non-human.<sup>223</sup> Thus the apparatchik’s discourse of colonialism creates formulaic stereotypes for both Europeans and Burmese, reflecting a clash in values. Despite all of the benefits from British rule, all the novel’s characters, aside perhaps from doctor Veraswami, seem to have a defective character that is founded on the colonial discourse. The Burmese emulate the behavior that Flory encountered in the club. Just as imperialism serves the moneylender and banker so it serves some of the Burmese. Flory’s concubine and manservant are simply less powerful versions of U Po Kyin.

Thus the state discourse of British rule as upheld by the formula of racism corrupts the rulers by blinding them to reality and destroying their thinking; it also corrupts the locals who try to profit from the rulers and in the process act like them. Both groups cherish the *idem* of racial difference as it allows them to profit. The character of both is very similar to Diderot’s descriptions of the freedmen at Claudius’ court. There are a whole host of characters who uphold a discourse in order to profit from each other. Like Diderot, but unlike Serge, Orwell does not try to explore beyond the dark exterior of their characters, but also unlike Diderot, he does not see a hope past them. Having exposed the sham of colonialism and its effects on people, Orwell’s novel cannot see a way past it. The familiarity of the narrator’s voice combined with the hopelessness of the

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<sup>223</sup> Patai, 35.

characters leaves us in no doubt about positive change. There is no respectable Burmese or Indian nationalist and the one British character with a conscience, Flory, as we shall see, is too cowardly to both challenge the status quo and find a new construct that might better serve the Burmese.

As with many affairs in Kyauktada, U Po Kyin knows what is going on with the white's only club. He is aware of the Commissioner's order to Macgregor to integrate the club by inviting in one respectable non-white. As we have seen before this is not a welcome proposition to the white club members. U Po Kyin knows this too and he also knows that Dr. Veraswami would be the first in line for consideration (*BD* 142-143).

The doctor has his trusted position at the prison and his education, but more important he has a friend in Flory. U Po Kyin does not have this, but realizes that if the doctor could not join the club, he would be next due to his stature as a magistrate. Thus he needs to make the doctor unacceptable to the British (*BD*, 143). Therefore, he puts together a pastiche of plots to discredit his victim. U Po Kyin will try to strip the doctor of his *ipse*, his steadfast loyalty and admiration of the British, and force him into the *idem* of a nationalist and rebel. "We must persuade the Europeans that the doctor holds disloyal, anti-British opinions" (*BD*, 11). He starts by having a libelleous article written and ascribed to Veraswami. The article, which accuses Macgregor of having numerous bastard children and leaving them unprovided for, appears in a nationalist publication, the *Burmese Patriot*. Despite the doctor's well-known loyalty, U Po Kyin is confident he can destroy him. "No European cares anything about proofs. When a man has a black face, suspicion *is* proof" (*BD*, 12). The magistrate knows the apparatchik's discourse of the Pukka Sahib well. The formula of racism combined with a plot denies the doctor's

loyalty, service, or education. He has a black face and that is enough. Once linked to the article, there seems nothing that can save him.

Dr. Veraswami is well aware of U Po Kyin's desire to discredit him. But this knowledge does not seem to help him. In this struggle, such details as proofs or evidence mean nothing. He knows that the color of his skin, the formula of racism, and the damning accusation are enough. His only hope lies in John Flory. As a white man Flory can get Veraswami into the club where he would be protected. Once in the club, he would be accepted as "white". As the doctor points out, "...And you (Flory) do not know what prestige it gives to an Indian to be a member of the European club. In the Club, practically he is a European. No calumny can touch him" (*BD*, 47). As in the code of the Pukka Sahib, it's all about prestige and appearance. U Po Kyin's assistant Ba Sein sees this as the great danger. He tells his master, "You cannot hurt an Indian when he has a European friend. It gives them...what is the word they are so fond of...prestige" (*BD*, 12). U Po Kyin is also aware of the threat in Flory, but he has measured him well too. Flory will be attacked also, if he tries to help the doctor. His *ipse* will be subsumed under the label of "race traitor", the one thing that would void his standing as a white man at the club. Flory's own known opinions and his friendship with the doctor will help in this regard. There is a neat irony here. Veraswami is depending on Flory's friendship to save him, yet that friendship can also doom Flory, making him unable to save the doctor. The apparatchik's discourse of racism works like that in Serge's *L'affaire Toulaév*. Toulaév's chauffeur was being pressured by the GPU men to accept the label of assassin, ignoring all that was unique and special about the chauffeur. He was able to resist them and avoid becoming labeled as the triggerman in a conspiracy. Veraswami and Flory do not have this

ability. Accusations coupled with just one fact of their identity, the doctor's dark skin and Flory's unconventional opinions, is enough to condemn them in the eyes of the whites of the club. The apparatchik's discourse condemns Flory because he obviously does not uphold it himself and it condemns the doctor because he is non-white and appears to have attacked the state's discourse as well.

Flory is not a noble man. He is a true Anglo-Indian who makes his fortune and home in Burma and avails himself of the advantages of being white. He is fearful of breaking the discourse of the Pukka Sahib and championing the doctor, yet Flory is certainly the most heroic in the book. He does eventually propose the doctor's admission to the club, despite his own fear of being verbally attacked. He did save Elizabeth Lackersteen when a bison was menacing her (*BD*, 79-80). Later when the club is attacked by a mob of Burmese, Flory volunteers and swims for help from police (*BD*, 250). All these actions in an otherwise run of the mill Anglo-Indian existence fail to be innovative in creating new habits to lead to a new life, a new *idem* or identity.<sup>224</sup> Flory knows how he feels, but he cannot make his *ipse* and *idem* coincide in a positive way. Cursed with a horrible birthmark on his face, he was already shy of people, let alone confrontation (*BD*, 64). He has been in Burma for fifteen years and now sees how corrupted he has become with the whisky, servants, Burmese girls. It was only after being so corrupted, however, that he saw the truth in empire, for "...you cannot stop your brain from developing and it is one of the tragedies of the half-educated that they develop late, when they are already committed to some wrong way of life..." (*BD*, 68). Flory is an inverse of Diderot's Seneca. The former is trying via heroic acts and, he hopes, via Elizabeth Lackersteen, to

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<sup>224</sup> As discussed earlier, Ricoeur saw habits as the key to determining character and distinguishing the *ipse* from the *idem*. Habits start with innovative acts that are unlike what has come before. See Ricoeur, *Soi-même comme un autre*, 146.

have his *ipse* become his *idem* and have a life to be proud of; Seneca, on the other hand, already had the life he wanted and so his heroism is simply good habit, not innovation trying to overcome bad habit. Corrupt people surround both and both lives will end in suicide, but no one orders Flory. His suicide is a result of perceived failure; Seneca's was a result of an evil ruler who could not stand his heroism. Flory never let it come to that. When at the end of the novel, Ma Hla May confronts him in the church, before all the other whites, screaming "Pike-san!", demanding money promised and detailing what Flory had done to her, our hero sees the end of his life. "Oh God, God! Must they know—must Elizabeth know — that *that* was the woman who had been his mistress? But there was not a hope, not the vestige of a hope, or any mistake" (*BD*, 273). Ma Hla May was U Po Kyin's secret weapon against Flory should he propose Dr. Veraswami for the club. Flory had sent the concubine away when he became interested in Elizabeth, but now she was back. Elizabeth Lackersteen, not very enamored with things Burmese as it is and aware of Flory's unconventional opinions, is disgusted. Whatever feelings she had for Flory are now gone, and he stands condemned in her eyes (*BD* 275-276). This sends Flory to his suicide just moments later.

Flory never made it out of Burma; Orwell did. Some think that Flory's fate was Orwell's own if he had not left when he did.<sup>225</sup> The Irish novelist Sean O' Faolain has remarked, "Orwell's character had no better than a dog's chance against his author."<sup>226</sup> One might better say that neither Orwell nor Flory stood a chance against the colonial discourse they so despised. Orwell simply escaped, made the break with colonialism and found a new path for looking for answers via writing, but it was a very personal solution

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<sup>225</sup> Meyers, *Wintry Conscience*, 72.

<sup>226</sup> Meyers, *Wintry Conscience*, 115.

that offered no hope to the Anglo-Indians, let alone the Burmese. His novel is a crystal clear presentation of the brutality of racist colonialism and its horrible effects on both ruler and ruled alike. Orwell sees clearly the discourse and how it reduces the *ipse* of people into a seamless, yet simplistically flawed *idem*. In this “stultifying world” your every word is monitored; free speech and open friendship is not possible and all Anglo-Indians, not to mention the Burmese are but a “...cog in the wheels of despotism” (*BD*, 69). His use of an authoritative, familiar narrator and of character stereotypes drawn from his own experiences show an understanding about how the racist discourse is an apparatchik’s discourse much like one in *L’affaire Toulaév*; it reduces people for the good of a system.

On the other hand, this system seems to be the best thing possible for Burma. Orwell is no fan of colonialism, and yet pragmatically his text upholds it as being the best thing given the circumstances. Orwell may have escaped Burma, but he did not escape the influence of the racist discourse. His empiricism is conditioned by his role as an authority figure policing a population that was of a different culture and from Orwell’s own personal perspective quite hostile at times.<sup>227</sup> As we saw, his text portrays none of the Burmese characters as being anything more than parasites on their British masters. They are more interested in private profit than any genuine concern for Burma or its people. It shows us one perspective, since there were certainly some Burmese who did not act like characters in the book. It is ironic that throughout the novel there are none of the “uppity” Burmese youths who terrorized Orwell and who showed certainly a more nationalistic spirit than either U Po Kyin or Ma Hla May. The one non-white character,

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<sup>227</sup> See Norris, 245-246. Norris tries to show via Althusser that Orwell’s empiricist ideology is a delusion and that he really was trapped by the viewpoint of the bourgeoisie.

who would show prominence in a post-colonial Burma, Dr. Veraswami, proves the rule. He was just as racist as Ellis or any other club member. He upheld the code of the Pukka Sahib despite the snubs, the prison, and the fact that he knew he was not welcome at the club and even went out of his way to tell Flory to tell the others that if elected he would never come to the club itself (*BD*, 47). Even the local nationalist paper *Burmese Patriot* seems to be under the control of U Po Kyin, and given that he could foment a riot, he probably does have his hand in nationalist groups, if only to control them and use them to demonstrate his loyalty to the British. What we have then is an extension of the racist formula. In *Burmese Days*, the colonialist discourse tries to disguise the white man's greed; the Burmese, however, are also greedy and corrupt. Now that they are corrupt, they cannot be left to their own device. This completes the vicious circle. Like Marx's example of the construct, Orwell's novel can give a simplistic reason for Burma's condition and its future prospects but it cannot really explain Burma. Orwell could not see past what his role as a policeman had taught him. The narrator's commentary reveals a man who knows what colonialism is but has no idea about how to end it, or any inclination to try.<sup>228</sup> Thus Flory can admire aspects of Burmese culture and even tries to educate Elizabeth Lackersteen on it, but he does not identify with the Burmese or their plight and takes his liberties, much like Orwell himself.<sup>229</sup> Orwell only started to break the circle by leaving Burma, and it was still with him when he wrote *Burmese Days*. Later, he would go to Spain, and encounter another form of the apparatchik's discourse.

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<sup>228</sup> Lynette Hunter, "Stories and Voices in Orwell's Early Narratives", in *Inside the Myth, Orwell: Views from the Left*, (London: Lawrence & Wishart, 1984), 173.

<sup>229</sup> Orwell's own views while in Burma are of interest. According to Christopher Hollis, a conservative MP who visited him in 1925, "Blair (Orwell) believed that freedom and liberty were all very well in theory but that they don't agree with niggers." Another witness, Maung Htin Aung, recalls Orwell's physical abuse of Burmese in November 1924. His own career did no credit to a future anti-colonialist writer. See Newsinger, 4.



## HOMAGE TO CATALONIA: ORWELL AND THE STALINIST DISCOURSE

Unlike *Burmese Days*, *Homage to Catalonia* is not a work of fiction, but combines two genres into one, being both a wartime memoir of a front-line soldier, which was made popular after World War I by veterans, such as Erich Maria Remarque's *All Quiet on the Western Front*, and a political commentary about what was going on behind the front lines. The text integrates these two themes by alternating chapters. So there is a continuous going back and forth between the front-line in Aragon and the home front in Barcelona. During the war, Orwell fought on the Republican side in a militia unit controlled by the P.O.U.M. (Party of Marxist Unification). This party was indigenous to Catalonia and was a breakaway party, distinguished by its sharp criticism of Moscow and its (incorrect) identification with the Trotskyist movement. The effect of joining a P.O.U.M unit, as opposed to joining the Communist controlled International Brigades, was to have profound repercussions for Orwell, especially as it was not his first choice. Although newly married to Eileen O'Shaughnessy, wanting children, and just starting as a writer, Orwell wanted to go to Spain, simply to fight Fascism. He told his wife, "...This fascism, somebody's got to stop it."<sup>230</sup> Fighting was clearly his goal, although he told his wife he was going as a journalist, a fact some still believe as some have accused Orwell of going to Spain more in search of a good story rather than stopping Franco.<sup>231</sup> This criticism, and others, is crucial to our reading of *Homage to Catalonia*, especially in relation to the apparatchik's discourse, for in this book, Orwell undertakes a systematic examination of the apparatchik's discourse of the Communist party, while trying to defend that of the P.O.U.M. As with *Burmese Days*, Orwell's book tries to be objective

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<sup>230</sup> Meyers, *Wintry Conscience*, 140

<sup>231</sup> Newsinger, 58.

and non-ideological, but unlike the novel on colonialism, the text here cannot resist eventually taking sides.

Taking sides is common in any civil war and many on the left took sides after *Homage to Catalonia* was published. Bill Alexander, himself a veteran of the International Brigades, took issue with Orwell's text. Echoing Raymond Williams' attack on Orwell's supposed objectivity, Alexander charges that Orwell was remote from his comrades and always put his journalistic needs ahead of those of soldiering. To support his claim he quotes Bob Edwards, of the I.L.P (Independent Labour Party), the group with which Orwell was associated and a sister party to the P.O.U.M., who saw Orwell at the front.<sup>232</sup> This is an interesting argument since it mirrors the non-ideological stand of *Burmese Days*, where despite the anti-colonial rhetoric, the novel still provides no solutions and is simply telling its story. Such a lack of involvement, however, does not seem to be the case with *Homage to Catalonia*. The book alternates between a war memoir and political commentary on the civil war. In fact Orwell uses two narrative voices in the text. A voice of the past, experienced, yet trying to be a detached narrator predominates in the sections describing the war. When Orwell moves to commentary, on the other hand, a present tense voice appears, cautious and reflecting, but far less detached.<sup>233</sup> Unlike *Burmese Days*, the text here eventually and clearly takes sides, in favor of the P.O.U.M. over the Communists, albeit with some wavering. Besides, if Orwell really did go to Spain for a book, he went through a lot to get it, including mud, boredom, hunger, lice, a severe wound to the throat and a manhunt by the Spanish police. In the end we cannot know what was in Orwell's head when he left for Spain. At any rate

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<sup>232</sup> Bill Alexander, "George Orwell and Spain", in *Inside the Myth, Orwell: Views from the Left*, (London: Lawrence & Wishar, 1984), 95.

<sup>233</sup> Hunter, *George Orwell: The Search for a Voice*, 71-72.

it does not matter for us, whether he wrote to *Homage to Catalonia* to be a best seller or in “white hot anger”.<sup>234</sup> The crucial question is how Orwell’s “objectivity” interacts with his presentation of the apparatchik’s discourse of both the Communists and the P.O.U.M. Our first clue is that unlike his colonial experience, Orwell did not write a novel, a story of fiction centering on one character or with one voice.

The man going to Spain was not the man remembering Burma. The narrator of Orwell’s past reveals his inability to understand what is happening.<sup>235</sup> Throughout the text, Orwell advertises his inexperience and naivete with Spanish political scene, saying that “When I first came to Spain, and for sometime afterwards, I was not only uninterested in the political situation, but unaware of it.”<sup>236</sup> As far as Orwell was concerned, he was fighting fascism, and he admits that at the beginning his view of the war was that given in the English press, the Spanish Republic was under attack by Hitlerites. He was going to stop them. These remarks come at the beginning of the fifth chapter, where there is the first explanation of the political situation on the Republican side. It’s odd here that Robert Stradling, another leftist critic of Orwell, condemns the author for inclusion of the political commentary and not giving a simple straightforward war memoir. He finds it appalling that the two longest chapters of the book deal with political topics and not the front line.<sup>237</sup> This seems like an inversion of Alexander’s position. Writing a straight war memoir would seem to be the best way to write a best seller, without all the difficult political commentary. Orwell, however, did not believe

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<sup>234</sup> Meyers, *Wintry Conscience*, 173.

<sup>235</sup> Hunter, *George Orwell: The Search for a Voice*, 72.

<sup>236</sup> George Orwell, *Homage to Catalonia*, (New York: Harcourt, Brace & Company, 1952), 46-47 (hereafter cited in text as HTC)

<sup>237</sup> Robert Stradling, “Orwell and the Spanish Civil War: A Historic Critique”, in *Inside the Myth, Orwell: Views from the Left*, (London: Lawrence & Wishart, 1984), 112.

that one could understand the Spanish Civil War in solely military terms. He admits it was more complex than it first appeared to him, a war of ideology. Besides the text is grouped into separate chapters precisely so those without the political inclination could skip the political chapters (*HTC*, 46).

While both Alexander and Stradling attack different aspects of the book, both are aimed at portraying Orwell as a propagandist hiding as an objective reporter. In fact Stradling goes so far as to compare Orwell to Frank Pitcairn, better known as Claude Cockburn, the reporter for the British Communist paper, *Daily Worker*, who covered the Spanish war.<sup>238</sup> This is ironic since one of Cockburn's articles would be used to exemplify Communist journalism in the book. Is Orwell a propagandist? Yes, but then so is everyone else writing about this ideological war. Orwell was correct. You could not understand this war in just military terms, and he took his position like anyone else. Here Orwell's text comes closest to the view of the apparatchik's discourse in Serge's novels. The book describes clearly his transformation from a political neophyte to a partisan for the P.O.U.M. At first his presence in a P.O.U.M. unit was simply on account of his I.L.P. papers and he was unaware of the differences between the factions on the Republican side. He even admits that it exasperated him. He writes that it was "...my attitude always was, why can't we drop all this political nonsense and get on with the war?" (*HTC*, 47) This was not only Orwell's attitude, but that of the English press, the Communist party and their allies in the Popular Front government (*HTC*, 47, 59). In Lynette Hunter's view, it is precisely where Orwell's text moves from war description to political commentary that his narrative voice changes from the past to the present, often in a frustrated

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<sup>238</sup> Stradling, 111.

manner.<sup>239</sup> This may result from his writing the book in "white hot anger" at the Communist obstruction of his viewpoint. In much of the text, however, there is a repetition of the correctness of the Communist apparatchik's discourse, which was the upholding of the state discourse of the Spanish republic, and a repudiation of revolution and the institutional discourse of getting on with the war. In short, the Communist discourse opposed both the P.O.U.M. and Franco. The P.O.U.M. discourse, which was the reverse, repudiated the state discourses of both Franco and the Republic. Their slogans struck Orwell as "futile" and unnecessary (*HTC*, 63). He also criticized the P.O.U.M. among his militia mates (*HTC*, 71). In short, he originally rejected the discourse of the P.O.U.M. and accepted that of the Communists. Thus all these criticisms were reasonable to an extent and show that Orwell was a long time in agreeing with the party, let alone being a militant for it.

A critic could try to dismiss the above as just posturing by Orwell, but the truth of *Homage to Catalonia* is that Orwell gives us too many details to consider this work an example of the kind of facile formulas that we saw of the Stalinists in Serge's novels and later in this book. The problem with the critics is simply that by the end of the book, Orwell has completely denounced the Communist role in Spain and upholds the P.O.U.M. discourse as the people who offered the best hope to the Spanish.<sup>240</sup> The text trades one discourse for another. Orwell states in his text that he tried to join the Communist-run International Brigades. He wanted to go to the Madrid front, where the heaviest fighting was going on and that meant joining the Brigades (*HTC*, 117). Bill Alexander criticized Orwell for not joining them, saying that if he had Orwell would have

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<sup>239</sup> Hunter, *George Orwell: The Search for a Voice*, 75.

<sup>240</sup> See Stradling, 112. He argues that despite his criticisms of the P.O.U.M. line in the book he comes out in their favor by the end, denouncing the Communists in the process.

lost his “misanthropy” and never written his book.<sup>241</sup> All this does not take into account that before he left for Spain, Orwell did try to join the Brigades, but was rejected by Henry Pollit, the British Communist leader who oversaw their recruitment. Pollit hated Orwell and so refused to consider him.<sup>242</sup> Even after joining the P.O.U.M militia, Orwell did not cease trying to move to the International Brigades, but as Jeffrey Meyers has pointed out, it is probably good that he did not. Given the acrimony and hatred between the two Marxist groups, Orwell would have been labeled as a spy.<sup>243</sup> The point to all this is that during his stay in Spain, Orwell could not have been totally convinced of the arguments of the P.O.U.M. if was still considering and trying to join the military units controlled by their main rivals. But he did not join them; he stayed with the militia and saw their party crushed by persecutions and distortions. This is the rub; Orwell’s politics, as taken from *Homage to Catalonia*, are damning to the Communists and this is what matters to critics like Stradling and Alexander.<sup>244</sup>

This issue is political, as Orwell's text correctly points out. His book is an endorsement of the view of the P.O.U.M discourse over that of the Communists. These positions were critical since men and women were being asked to die for the Republic. Thus what kind of Republic were they going to die for in the first place? The text cuts to the heart of the matter. During the generals’ coup in July 1936, the people rose and stopped Franco’s coup, in most places, not to simply keep the status quo, but for a revolutionary change. This is an invocation of the apparatchik’s discourse of the

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<sup>241</sup> Alexander, 90.

<sup>242</sup> Meyers, *Wintry Conscience*, 140. Pollit disliked Orwell’s negative portrayal of the working classes in *The Road to Wigan Pier*.

<sup>243</sup> Meyers, *Wintry Conscience*, 148.

<sup>244</sup> Alexander himself was an International Brigade member. Both writers’ articles come from *Inside the Myth*, which is published by Lawrence & Wishart, the publishing arm of the British Communist Party.

P.O.U.M., which combines a state discourse of revolution over the existing status quo with an institutional discourse of immediate revolt. “The Government had made little or no attempt to forestall the rising; one step that could save the immediate situation, the arming of the workers, was only taken unwillingly and in response to violent popular clamour” (*HTC*, 49). In Orwell’s text, in light of what he saw in Catalonia, the people used the opportunity of fighting the coup for true change, workers’ control instead of bourgeois democracy. This included carrying out the apparatchik’s discourse of the P.O.U.M. seizing of factories and farms, collectivization and so on. The text states that, “...to fight Fascism on behalf of ‘democracy’ is to fight against one form of capitalism on the behalf of a second which is liable to turn into the first at any moment. The only real alternative to Fascism is workers’ control” (*HTC*, 60). Orwell’s text thus neatly sums up the discourse of the P.O.U.M. and he seems to be endorsing it.

This outlook goes hand in hand with Orwell’s descriptions of the situation going on behind the front line. By and large the anarchists were in control of Barcelona and their spirit permeated the place. “It was the first time that I had ever been in a town where the working class was in the saddle” (*HTC*, 4). Orwell gives examples of what he means. “Waiters and shop-walkers looked you in the face and treated you as equal...Nobody said ‘Señor’ or ‘Don’ or even ‘Usted’; everyone called everyone else ‘Comrade’ and ‘Thou’” (*HTC*, 5). Orwell also notes that everyone sported working class dress, a lecture he got from a hotel manager for trying to tip the lift boy, and the distinct lack of unemployment or begging in the streets (*HTC*, 5-6). In the countryside, he witnessed similar things. The peasants had taken over the landed estates and were cultivating the fields. More significant, from Orwell’s view, was the friendliness of the peasants to Orwell and his

men, despite the centuries' old hatred by peasants of troops being quartered on their soil (*HTC*, 79). Thus, the text gives us many details to show the application of the apparatchik's discourse of the P.O.U.M. Revolution and war appeared to go together, at least in anarchist/P.O.U.M. areas.

The discourse of the Communists, others outside of Catalonia, Orwell's critics, and even for a time Orwell himself, upheld the state discourse of the Spanish republic and repudiated revolution. What is interesting is that none of the critics contradict the details given above; only that it was a distraction. This gives more credence to the claims of the P.O.U.M. Orwell's narrator sums up the counter argument fairly well quoting them that "...this is not the moment to talk of pressing forward with the revolution. We can't afford to alienate the peasants by forcing collectivization upon them, and we can't afford to frighten away the middle class who is fighting on our side. Above all for the sake of efficiency we must do away with revolutionary chaos" (*HTC*, 59). Bill Alexander echoes this view. Being an International Brigade veteran he too thought the war was paramount in importance. The revolution in Catalonia was a sideshow, which weakened the war effort. "Franco was stopped on the streets of Madrid. Meanwhile the Aragon front was dormant."<sup>245</sup> His discourse upholds the war; liberation of all of Spain had to come before any revolutionary change. Although Alexander agrees with Orwell, that although it was the people and the militias, which forestalled the July coup, they could not win the war. The discourse of Revolution got in the way of the discourse of victory.<sup>246</sup>

Orwell's text echoes the same view consistently and through much of *Homage to Catalonia*, which was published before the war ended in 1939. "What cinched everything

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<sup>245</sup> Alexander, 87.

<sup>246</sup> Alexander, 86-87.



was that the Communists- so it seemed to me – were getting on with the war, while we (P.O.U.M.) and the Anarchists were standing still?” (*HTC*, 62-63) The Communist International Brigades were the heroes of the defense of Madrid and the fact that Orwell wanted to join them shows that this view stayed with him for quite some time. In describing the war on his front, the book notes the complete lack of any significant military activity (*HTC*, 23). There were shortages of every conceivable material needed for war, ammunition, uniforms, guns, maps, charts, and so on (*HTC*, 34-35). Orwell only saw action on two distinct occasions, the latter of which sent him to the hospital with a wound to his throat. The text describes a comic opera type of war for the most part, at least where Orwell was, but despite it does not hold to Alexander’s view. One reason was that in the militia system, he saw the same revolutionary equality he had met in Barcelona. Everyone had the same food and was treated the same way. There were officers but no badges, saluting or heel clicking (*HTC*, 27). The early militias were undisciplined mobs, but this was simply due to their inexperience. The text does not subscribe to the simple formula that a militia is inherently undisciplined, as does Alexander.<sup>247</sup> Instead it argues that, “In practice the democratic ‘revolutionary’ type of discipline is more reliable than might be expected. In a workers’ army discipline is theoretically voluntary...It is based on class-loyalty, whereas the discipline of a bourgeois conscript army is based on fear” (*HTC*, 28). This kind of army though would seem impractical and, in Alexander’s view, of limited military value. In contrast the text says that, “Revolutionary’ discipline depends on political consciousness – on an understanding of *why* orders must be obeyed; it takes time to diffuse this, but it also takes

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<sup>247</sup> Alexander, 96. He argues that all the militias, even Durruti’s were unpredictable. He makes no qualification in this statement, just a blanket condemnation.

time to drill a man into an automaton on the barracks-square...And it is a tribute to revolutionary discipline that the militias stayed in the field at all. For until about July 1937 there was nothing to keep them there, except class loyalty” (*HTC*, 28-29). Orwell adds that there was never a time he had trouble with his men, getting them to obey orders or volunteer for a special mission (*HTC*, 28). Despite all this praise for the militia’s in the text, Orwell really did consider leaving them for Madrid, even if this meant signing up with the Communists. What he saw in Barcelona and at the front did not shake the conviction that the Communist discourse was correct. So why then did Orwell end up not going to Madrid and instead eventually leaving Spain to praise the P.O.U.M. and denounce the Communists?

In April 1937, Orwell was behind the lines, recuperating from his wound. He had been in Spain for months now and despite his experiences, or because of them, he still thought well of the Communist view. This changed, however, with the events in Barcelona in May 1937. Orwell was on leave in the city when a battle broke out between the ‘Civil Guards’ and the C.N.T. (Anarchists) at the telephone exchange, which was controlled by the latter.<sup>248</sup> In chapter ten of *Homage to Catalonia*, Orwell’s narrator gives his own version of the events, based on what was seen and heard. In the next chapter the narrator examines the press reports of the event. Both chapters show a determined effort to pry the truth as much as possible from the information known. Here the empirical stance of the text works well since Orwell’s ideological background was remote from the Spanish political scene. It is important to remember that before these events, Orwell had

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<sup>248</sup> C.N.T. (Confederación Nacional de Trabajadores), the “National Confederation of Workers”, was a syndicalist organization of many unions totaling approximately two million members in all. Its political organ the F.A. I. (Federación Anarquista Ibérica) was the main organization of anarchists in Spain. They stood distinct both from the Communists and the P.O.U.M.

not clearly made up his mind on the factional dispute behind the lines. Lynette Hunter points out that "...there is continually present the knowledge that the earlier narrator favoured the Communist line, therefore appealing to Communist readers...."<sup>249</sup> Hunter goes on to suggest that this earlier past narrator and his remarks of support makes a liar out of Orwell's later attacks on the Communists. It is true that Orwell was still considering going to the International Brigades and considered the Communists to have a better idea of what to do, but this does not invalidate a change of attitude as a result of the May events. As Ricoeur points out in *Soi-même comme un autre*, innovation can cause a change in habit. If the habit is kept up, it will create a new trait and alter the character of a person.<sup>250</sup> While the effects of the innovation may have been delayed and not revealed fully until he began to write, it does not mean that what he experienced did not affect his thinking in a serious way.

The events of May Third in Barcelona and their aftermath altered the balance of forces on the Republican side and also changed Orwell's mind about the relative merit of the factions and their discourses. Throughout most of that day, the narrator seems to have been in the dark about what was going on. He relied on what others could tell him. His first informant was an unidentified American doctor, who led him to safety at the Hotel Falcon when the shooting started. The narrator states that the hotel was a boarding house for the P.O.U.M. militia. The doctor told him, "The P.O.U.M. chaps will be meeting there (the hotel). The trouble's starting. We must hang together" (*HTC*, 122). The doctor disappears, but then the narrator gives a summary of what he heard happened. "It appeared that he had been in the Plazade Catalunya when several lorry-loads of armed

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<sup>249</sup> Hunter, *George Orwell: The Search for a Voice*, 78.

<sup>250</sup> Ricoeur, *Soi-même comme un autre*, 146.

Civil Guards had driven up to the Telephone Exchange, which was operated mainly by C.N.T. workers, and made a sudden assault upon it” (*HTC*, 122). Orwell added a footnote to his book, which states that the Civil Guards were in fact Assault Guards and that he was confused due to the different uniforms between Civil Guards and Assault Guards from Barcelona and those from Valencia, not to mention the Spanish habit of saying merely “la guardia” (*HTC*, 122). This may seem a small point to make, but it is telling. Details are the enemy of speculative formulas as they are fixed, permanent and difficult to move in order to create another story. Furthermore, the admitted confusion of the narrator is crucial. “It will never be possible to get a completely accurate and unbiased account of the Barcelona fighting, because the necessary records do not exist. Future historians will have nothing to go upon except a mass of accusations and party propaganda” (*HTC*, 150). It is notable that the text does not exclude itself from this. The narrator appears aware of the Communist apparatchik’s discourse and its many formulas about the event. The narrator’s discourse is notable, however, more for his confusion and his open admission of bias and the possibility of making mistakes.<sup>251</sup>

By determining the ideological bias of the narrator in the text and how it affects the reporting of events, it shows not simply a facile formula that explains nothing. Stradling’s article, for example, harps on Orwell’s use of the term “Civil Guards” in both the book and his correspondence as proof of Orwell’s prejudice and his error in reporting. He argues that Orwell had a prejudice against the Civil Guards, which is traditional in working class Spain.<sup>252</sup> This is in fact nonsense. Orwell corrected his mistake on the identification of the police at the Telephone Exchange and there is no evidence in the text

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<sup>251</sup> Singh, 84.

<sup>252</sup> Stradling, 114.

that Orwell harbored a hatred of the Civil Guards. What Stradling cannot deny is that there was hatred between the anarchists and the Asaltos (Assault Guards) who now were the Catalanian government's main police. He even cryptically admits this: "If the Generalitat (Catalonian government), or its Communist members did want to provoke a showdown in May (and the case is not proven) the Asaltos were the obvious instrument."

<sup>253</sup> This issue, like Stradling's earlier claim that Orwell's Spanish was so bad he could not possibly understand the political situation there, shows a person trying to discredit the author in small unproven details.<sup>254</sup> Stradling's remarks are in fact formulas against Orwell's account. The difference between Civil and Assault Guards is not unimportant, but to treat one misidentification as reason to doubt the account and then cryptically add that if the government wanted trouble, it would have used Assault Guards is absurd. As the text points out, no account can be completely accurate. Orwell's Spanish may have not been perfect either, but he was there for over a year and had the chance to talk with both Spaniards and non-Spaniards. Stradling wants absolutes, but the text shows a closer understanding of the reality of things than someone insisting on perfection. The Stalinist apparatchik's discourse, as we saw in Serge, claims a perfection by the state and tries to put this into practice but Orwell's account is disavowing it, thus making Stradling's criticisms pedantic and irrelevant. Stradling uses the criteria that suggests he considers Orwell's account flawed because it does not fulfill the expectations of the apparatchik's discourse.

Orwell's narrative of the events of May 1937 deserves more credit than some critics will allow. It is true that Orwell's account accords with a number of historians of

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<sup>253</sup> Stradling, 115.

<sup>254</sup> Stradling, 108-109, see also Newsinger, 57.

the Spanish war.<sup>255</sup> The account, however, is a detailed statement that works against any apparatchik's discourse:

All I could gather was that the Civil Guards had attacked the Telephone Exchange and seized various strategic spots that commanded other buildings belonging to the workers. There was a general impression that the Civil Guards were 'after' the C.N.T. and the working class generally. It was noticeable that, at this stage, no one seemed to put the blame on the Government. (*HTC*, 123-124)

The idea that men in uniform would attack without some official approval may seem absurd, but the narrator is reporting what the people were saying at the time. Moreover, there are enough details in his statement to check the veracity. First of all he notes the general hostility between police and proletariat, which is perhaps the source for Stradling's claims. This is the kind of information that could be checked. Also the narrator is not shy in giving his own ideological bias, "I have no particular love for the idealized 'worker' as he appears in the bourgeois Communist's mind, but when I see the actual flesh-and-blood worker in conflict with his natural enemy, the policeman, I do not have to ask myself which side I am on" (*HTC*, 124). In Lynette Hunter's view, this is Orwell's present voice commenting on the event related by his past narrative voice.<sup>256</sup> In other words, Orwell is trying to make new formula to explain his past in order to justify his view of the May events in Barcelona. Now the narrator had spoken many times of his views while in Spain, and there is no mention of a particular political party. Also at that time the above scenario seemed correct. The chief of police in Barcelona was arrested after the fighting – so it was reported – giving credence to the idea that an attack without orders had occurred (*HTC*, 126-127). Neither Alexander, nor Stradling, nor Williams,

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<sup>255</sup> Newsinger, 43, 50.

<sup>256</sup> Hunter, *George Orwell: The Search for a Voice*, 83.

nor Hunter can give anything like the detail or healthy sense of uncertainty that Orwell's text gives.

Orwell's account shows the contrast between attempts at empiric reconstruction of past events and formulas common to the apparatchik's discourse. The issue of arms stocks is a good example of this. After the fighting broke out in Barcelona, the narrator states that he wanted to find a weapon. "I had heard it said so often that all the rival parties, P.S.U.C., P.O.U.M., and C.N.T.-F.A.I. alike, were hoarding arms in Barcelona, that I could not believe that the two principal P.O.U.M building contained only fifty or sixty rifles that I had seen" (*HTC*, 126). A search turned up two-dozen "obsolete" rifles of various manufacture. Also there was no ammunition. He was stuck having to make do with crudely made anarchist bombs, which he admitted could go off at any moment, with which to defend himself and his friend (*HTC*, 126). One can accept or reject these statements, but the number of details is too large for any formula to use Orwell's account. It would need something simple and not easy to disprove. Orwell's narrator gives specific numbers and precise descriptions. Moreover, there were other P.O.U.M. survivors who could corroborate whether there was or was not ammunition, for example George Kopp, who is mentioned in the narrative and escaped from Spain. The narrator's details defeat any stereotyping common to the formulas of the apparatchik's discourse. He appears in the text as a frightened and confused man responding to a touch-and-go situation. Some, like Hunter, argue that this is a pose and as Ricoeur has pointed out, the effect of time on memory can be drastic.<sup>257</sup> The account seems plausible given the situation: that of a man suddenly discovering fighting going on, with gunfire and trying to make sense of it, while also trying to assure his own safety. But we need to examine more closely the question of

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<sup>257</sup> Ricoeur, *Soi-même comme un autre*, 141-142.

a pose as it relates directly to our topic.<sup>258</sup> To do this let us compare Orwell's account of the May fighting with that of Alexander.

Orwell's report on the arm stocks situation and the fighting on May Third contrasts with that of his critics. Alexander's article, for example, states, "The government ordered the surrender of all arms which had been held back in Barcelona in the hands of the political parties. On 3 May they took steps to control the Central Telephone Exchange – still held by the C.N.T. Then elements of the C.N.T. (their leaders were generally opposed) and the P.O.U.M. took to the streets with arms they had hidden, and fighting began."<sup>259</sup> Alexander concludes his account with the information that the central government sent Assault Guards from Valencia and used "its armed police forces" to regain control after four days of fighting.<sup>260</sup> At least he spared us Stradling's pedantic discussion about Assault Guards versus Civil Guards and so on, yet there is little to commend in this account. Alexander's text employs a tactic we saw with Ammianus, putting two separate episodes together, suddenly shifting from one to the other. He starts his paragraph with a discussion of the arms situation and then immediately moves into the battle of May third. Orwell's account too mentions the government's order for private arms to be surrendered, but it also mentions the government's buildup of a non-union "non-political" police force, and these two events set everyone in Barcelona on edge. Orwell also says there was surprise that there was no rioting over the order before the fighting began in earnest (*HTC*, 150). Alexander mentions "hidden" arms when he

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<sup>258</sup> See Hunter, *George Orwell: The Search for a Voice*, 78-79. Hunter argues that the use of both narrative voices in the description of the May events point to Orwell's attempt to encourage his readers to sympathize with his own past self, and its political awakening in the civil war. Ms. Hunter clearly ignores the circumstances of Orwell writing the book in the first place. Orwell was trying to counter other books on Spain; especially books from the Communist controlled Left Book Club. See also Newsinger, 56.

<sup>259</sup> Alexander, 92.

<sup>260</sup> Alexander, 92.



describes the fighting. This combined with the first sentence about the government's order for weapons to be surrendered makes the anarchists and P.O.U.M. look like criminals. But it begs a question. Why after issuing an order for arms, would the government then try to take "steps to control" the Telephone Exchange? Alexander's article makes the anarchists/P.O.U.M. responsible for the fighting, but then uses the vague "steps to control" to describe what Orwell discovered was an attack. He also tries to discredit the C.N.T. by saying its rank and file acted without the authority of its leaders. This invocation of nomenclature is an ironic criticism to be made of an anarchist organization, but shows the concern for title and order in the apparatchik's discourse of the Communists. Orwell's text, on the other hand, describes the attack on the Telephone Exchange as causing the anarchists to come out almost spontaneously. Leader intervention did not occur for a few days and by then many were leaving the barricades due to a lack of food and a dying down of the action (*HTC*, 151-152). Most important, throughout this lengthy account of these events, after giving all the information, the narrator discusses it and tries to come to the most accurate statement that he can. For example, he recounts the numbers given in killed and wounded from the days of fighting. "Four hundred killed is probably an exaggeration, but as there is no way of verifying this we must accept it as accurate" (*HTC*, 152). Most importantly, he considers carefully the origin of the conflict in Barcelona, including the theory that there was a plot or coup in the works. Despite his sympathy for the P.O.U.M. however, he says, "My own opinion is that the fighting was only preconcerted in the sense that everyone expected it. There were no signs of any very definite plan on either side" (*HTC*, 153). Unlike Alexander, Orwell's narrator mentions too many details for disputation. Also the refusal to find fault with any

camp is certainly less an example of the apparatchik's discourse than Alexander's subtle blaming of the P.O.U.M. All this appears to contradict Hunter's notion that Orwell is putting on a pose for his readers. The account is too long and too messy, in contrast to Alexander's, which is too succinct given the complexity of the situation.

Alexander sounds very much like Claude Cockburn, a Communist journalist reporting from Spain. In an article entitled, "Pitcairn Lifts the Barcelona Veil", Cockburn writes, "Catalonia is full of German and Italian agents working desperately to reorganize the rebellion against the People's Front government, which was crushed last week by the forces of the People's army, cooperating with the people of Catalonia."<sup>261</sup> First, again like Alexander's account and unlike Orwell's, Cockburn shows no hesitancy or confusion. This is remarkable about an event about which Burnett Bolloten in his groundbreaking work on the Spanish conflict said, "No historical episode has been so diversely reported or defined...Few of these accounts were reconcilable, which partially explains why the May events, despite numerous attempts to clarify them, are still, after fifty years, shrouded in obscurity."<sup>262</sup> Cockburn's article is full of formulas labeled with Stalinist jargon. "German and Italian agents" is a code for anyone opposing the Communists. Otherwise, how can you tell just who is a German or Italian agent and just how many are there if Catalonia is "full" of them? It could only be full of them if all the anarchists and P.O.U.M. people, who dominated Catalonia at the time, are the enemy. "People's Front" is another example. It is a reference to the electoral alliance between Communist, Socialist and middle class parties. It is also jargon for the good guys in the

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<sup>261</sup> James Pettifer, ed. *Cockburn in Spain: Dispatches From the Spanish Civil War*, (London: Lawrence & Wishart, 1986), 182-183.

<sup>262</sup> Burnett Bolletín, *The Spanish Civil War: Revolution and Counter-Revolution*, (Chapel Hill, University of North Carolina Press, 1991), 429-430.

text. A “People’s” government is contrasted to the “German and Italian agents”. This simple formula is part of the Stalinist apparatchik’s discourse, which sees all other leftist group as being enemies. Cockburn is reducing whole groups of people. There are other formulas in the text, for example, how did an attack by police forces on a Telephone Exchange become a “rebellion” against the government? There is no differentiation except the obvious one. It is not aimed at the head but the heart and as Orwell’s narrator points out would only be believed by people outside of Spain. Orwell’s writing by contrast avoids such formulas. The uncertainty, the admitted bias, and the use of detail and of specific numbers point to a text that is plausible and might be checked for veracity. The text concludes the account and analysis of the May events as follows:

I have tried tried to write objectively about the Barcelona fighting, though, obviously, no one can be completely objective on a question of this kind. One is practically obliged to take sides, and it must be clear enough which side I am on. Again I must inevitably have made mistakes of fact, not only here but in other parts of the narrative...I warn everyone against my bias, and I warn everyone against my mistakes. (*HTC*, 159-160)

In this statement, we see the narrator coming to same conclusions that Serge had come to in his early days with the Bolsheviks. He had to choose sides in a civil war and this would affect his writing. Serge understood this and his novels have a multi-dimensional view of Bolshevism. Orwell too had to choose sides, and we get a multi-dimensional view of the P.O.U.M., from their pedantic, Lenin-quoting propaganda, which irritated the narrator, to their honesty in their positions, to their victimization by the Communists. His account comes in part from others who share also the same ideological view, fellow P.O.U.M. militia. The text also acknowledges the effects that time may have had on memory as Orwell wrote *Homage to Catalonia* some months after the Barcelona events.

Ricoeur, as we have seen, understood too that time has a disruptive effect on memory.<sup>263</sup>

Orwell's account is not perfect, and he is saying so. It is simply one piece of a much larger puzzle.

Neither Alexander's nor Cockburn's articles show any trace of uncertainty or admission of bias in their much more brief reports of the Barcelona fighting. This may not seem significant save that neither was in Barcelona at the time, while Orwell was, and if he cannot be sure, despite being an eye-witness, how can these other two be sure when all they had were second hand reports? They are no better than Diderot's blind man. The difference between the two is much like the flow of Ammianus' narrative. When Ammianus's text was at its most partisan and especially when reporting about events that he did not witness, Gallus' alleged antics for example, the account was one-sided and complete in detail with no admission of uncertainty or error. When, on the other hand, the text was reports about events not so dear to the author, the first part of the Silvanus affair, for example, we get an account closer to that of Orwell. In other words, Ammianus' history showed more detail of events when the text was not directly narrating events involving Ursicinus.

The formulas of the apparatchik's discourse must appear perfect, simple, easy to understand, and hard to refute. Orwell, however, manages to do this in the second half of chapter eleven in *Homage to Catalonia*, in which he dissects articles from the left wing press, both foreign and Spanish, on the subject of the May events in Barcelona. The narrator notes first that in the Communist press, "...the entire blame for the Barcelona fighting was laid upon the P.O.U.M." (*HTC*, 160). He goes on to say that spontaneity in the event was not considered, but instead some deep laid plan or conspiracy. This is

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<sup>263</sup> See Ricoeur, *Soi-même comme un autre*, 141-142.

similar to Ratchevsky's "théorie du complot" in *L'affaire Toulaév*. To assuage the conscience of the party, the killing of Toulaév was made into the formula of a plot and not simply, as it was a random killing. This makes the party members feel threatened and want to close ranks, and will persuade them to sanction reduction and repression of its enemies. Shortly after the Barcelona fighting ended, the P.O.U.M. was suspended and the manhunt and oppression began. No one would understand why that would be necessary unless they were to read the *Daily Worker's* May 11, 1937 article, which labeled the P.O.U.M. a Trotskyist organization which caused "...disorder and bloodshed" in order to facilitate a German/Italian amphibious landing in Barcelona" (*HTC*, 160-161). This is similar to Cockburn's story of Catalonia being "filled" with German and Italian agents. Both stories are similar in portraying an imminent threat being made possible by traitors. There is no uncertainty in this account, but instead a statement designed to cause fear and then arouse anger and thus legitimize violence against the perceived offenders. The Soviet press had been condemning Trotsky as a fascist agent. By using this formula, the P.O.U.M. is tarred with the same brush, and reduced in turn.

Orwell's narrator contradicts this article with three points. First he says that the P.O.U.M. was too weak to influence events. It lacked sheer numbers and had no influence in the trade unions. He does admit that the leadership may have helped in prolonging the fighting, but still he says there was no evidence of conspiracy. Secondly, he says that he saw no German or Italian ships in the Barcelona harbor, and that the P.O.U.M. was not a Trotskyist group.<sup>264</sup> Lastly, he points out that there was no disturbance or treason at that part of the front line held by the P.O.U.M. militia or at their

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<sup>264</sup> The only common factor between the P.O.U.M and the Trotskyist movement was a common hostility to Stalin and the Russian leadership. The two groups in fact differed on many issues. Trotskyism was virtually negligible in Spain.

party stronghold in Lerida. He also claims to have even verified that no sabotage of any kind went on (*HTC*, 161-162). As we saw earlier, the narrator's statements are directly opposed to those of the press articles. While they appear very certain, he even admits some responsibility by the leadership of the party, but saw no evidence of a plot and makes a number of sensible statements based on his intimate knowledge of the situation. Still Orwell's refutation may not be completely accurate. Alexander, for example, cites a French historian, supposedly sympathetic to the P.O.U.M, who says that two units, the 29<sup>th</sup> (P.O.U.M) and 35<sup>th</sup> (C.N.T.) did withdraw from the front line during the May crisis.<sup>265</sup> Here Alexander's text is presenting a concrete fact that can be apprehended, confirmed or denied. This, like Orwell's details, can work against the apparatchik's discourse, by refuting its formulas. A fact, anchored on specific information, the unit numbers, for example, is fixed and cannot be changed without appearing to have been changed. Time has not destroyed this evidence in memory as it has been written down and made permanent. The press article, like Ratchevsky's plot, must be malleable and therefore cannot have hard fact, which constricts the construct and its ability to change in response to its audience.

Orwell's narrator examines other examples of constructs used by the Communist press. By changing a story over time, it is possible to confuse people as to the details, but still leave the same general formula in their head. The key is to repeat specific themes albeit with different jargon each time. For example, on May 6, 1937 the *Daily Worker* reported, "A minority gang of Anarchists on Monday and Tuesday seized and attempted to hold the telephone and telegram buildings and started firing into the street" (*HTC*, 163). This is a reversal of roles, Orwell points out, since it was the anarchists who held

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<sup>265</sup> Alexander, 92.

the Telephone Exchange at the start of the fighting. The phrase “Minority gang” reduces the anarchists, making them appear opposed to the people at large. Then on May 11, 1937 another *Daily Worker* article reported that the Left Catalan Minister of Public Security and the United Socialist General Commissar of Public Order had to arrest C.N.T. employees at the Telephone Exchange (*HTC*, 163). This does not agree with the first report; there is no admission of error, but despite the different details there is a common formula, the C.N.T. (anarchists) are acting in a criminal manner, either attacking the building or being arrested. The appearance is of a criminal group. This is the formula of both articles and the label that the paper is trying to fix on the anarchists. The details are fleeting and change from article to article while giving a reason that is easy to understand and remember. The anarchists become criminals even though the *Daily Worker* cannot resolve just what they actually did. The image is simply repeated until it becomes a common “fact”, explaining nothing and everything at the same time.

Having read much of the *Daily Worker's* output, it is not surprising that Orwell knew of Claude Cockburn. The text quotes a May 17, 1937 article by him, which accuses the P.O.U.M of not merely hoarding small arms but other kinds, “...such as tanks...scores of machine guns...” (*HTC*, 165). Orwell’s narrator answers:

Mr. Pitcairn does not tell us how and when it became clear that the P.O.U.M. possessed scores of machine guns and several thousand rifles. I have given an estimate of the arms which were at three of the principal P.O.U.M. buildings – about eighty rifles, a few bombs, and no machine guns...It seems strange that afterwards, when the P.O.U.M. was suppressed and all its buildings seized, these thousands of weapons never came to light; especially the tanks and fieldguns, which are not the kind of thing that can be hidden up a chimney. But what is revealing...is the complete ignorance they display of the local circumstances. (*HTC*, 165-166)

Cockburn, who used Pitcairn as a pen name, gives a story of generalities mixed with hyperbole. His entire document is aimed at people not familiar with the local conditions. Unlike Orwell's account, which gave specific numbers and types of weapons that he found, Cockburn, uses formulas, "thousands of rifles", "stealing for months" that are easier to grasp and retain against the ravages of time than Orwell's specifics (*HTC*, 165). As with the C.N.T., the image is of a bad group of people who steal and hoard when there is a war going on. Orwell's narrator challenges him on the details, giving us specific numbers and demonstrating the illogic of Cockburn's claims. Despite this, Cockburn's efforts do seem to have been successful. To this day many people believe him over Orwell and the confusion over the May events owes itself in part to the fact that so many people wrote about an event without even being there, but simply to persuade an audience outside Spain and convince them of a discourse so that when the crackdown on the P.O.U.M and the anarchists began, it would be accepted as necessary.

*Homage to Catalonia* is a very personal work. It is one man's version of a very complex war, written in the heat of passion after he had discovered what lies were being told about the war. The work is a personal anchor of Orwell's own self, his *ipse*, and regardless of its accuracy stands against the Stalinist apparatchik's discourse, for unlike Alexander, Stradling, Hunter, or Cockburn, Orwell's text acknowledges its bias, while giving credence to the discourse of the Communists, when it made sense, despite writing the book in "white hot anger". The fact that his narrator also on occasion mocks the attitude of the P.O.U.M and the state of the war on his front ensures that the book is not a work of party or faction. The text does not uphold a party line consistently through the book. More than in any other work here the text truly upholds an empiric outlook..



Despite this many on the English left did not like the book when it was released.<sup>266</sup> It was rejected for publication by the Left Book Club, while its publisher, Victor Gollancz, published many books on Spain that upheld the line we saw in Cockburn, including Frank Jellinek's *The Civil War in Spain*, which argues that the May events were caused by agents of Franco, and J.R. Campbell's *Soviet Policy and its Critics*, which not only justifies Stalin's purges, but accuses the P.O.U.M. of spying for Franco and betraying the Spanish republic.<sup>267</sup> In contrast, Orwell was thought to be anti-Communist due to his support for the P.O.U.M.

This is ironic. It is true that while the book defends the P.O.U.M., this is more because of their victimization by the Stalinist Communists. He did not seem to be their partisan during most of his time there, and he himself admits this with regret. "I myself never joined the party – for which afterwards when the P.O.U.M. was suppressed, I was rather sorry" (*HTC*, 71). This is not an endorsement of the party's policies or discourse, but an expression of sympathy and regret over its fate. The spirit of this remark seems similar to the motivations for writing *Burmese Days*. In both Burma and Spain, Orwell personally participated in the tragedy that was present, but he did not take sides clearly and in the end he ran, although to be fair in the latter case, he was forced to run for his very life. Of course, he did not narrate his own experiences in Burma, as he did in Spain. He had far less reason to be proud of what he did and fiction allowed him to express his first hand views without bringing up a lot of bad memories. Still, as we saw before, Orwell's personal ideology of empiric detachment is compromised. In Burma, this is less evident. In *Homage to Catalonia*, on the other hand, the narrator openly takes sides. This

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<sup>266</sup> Meyers, *Wintry Conscience*, 176.

<sup>267</sup> Newsinger, 55.

actually made his remarks and criticisms seem more real and genuine, but it makes one wonder that if it took the violent denunciation and persecution of a minor political party for Orwell to take sides and openly take on an ideology, would he now take that ideology and make it his own and fight for a non-Stalinist form of Communism that the P.O.U.M. seemed to espouse? In *Burmese Days*, we saw that the failure to commend some sort of alternative path for Burma away from colonialism led Orwell right back to it. A similar process will now occur as his brush with Communism in its Stalinist variant, in Spain, would condition his two most famous works: *Animal Farm* and *Nineteen Eighty-Four*.

#### *ANIMAL FARM: ORWELL ON LENINISM*

Both *Animal Farm* and *Nineteen Eighty-Four* address the concerns of totalitarian regimes in fantastic, non-historic settings. Despite their differences, both share common attributes in regards to the apparatchik's discourse. *Animal Farm* is clearly an allegory of the Russian revolution and the subsequent Soviet regime, while *Nineteen Eighty-Four's* Oceania has many Communist aspects, right down to the fact that Big Brother resembles Stalin. Both books were published in the post-war period, 1946 and 1949 respectively, and have consequently exercised a powerful influence on the thinking about totalitarianism, becoming key texts in the arsenal of the anti-Communist right. This irony, that the works of an independent leftist should be prized by such groups as the John Birch Society, points, to the ideological confusion that we have seen in Orwell.<sup>268</sup> This confusion as we saw comes from the discrepancy between Orwell's statements, often accurate enough, and the underlying ideology, which is that of a detached critic. We saw, however, that this pose was just that, a pose, and that it reflected on Orwell's own

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<sup>268</sup> The Washington D.C. branch of the John Birch Society used "1984" as the last four digits in their phone number. See Newsinger, 122. See also Patai, 203.

inability to first see his role in an ideological manner and further to appropriate a new ideology to replace the one he had ostensibly cast aside. Orwell may dislike colonialism and what the Communists do to the P.O.U.M., but in the end there is no alternative, and so Orwell seems to be merely underwriting the status quo. *Burmese Days* and *Homage to Catalonia* are at least based on Orwell's personal experiences. Despite the blinkered ideology, Orwell still can see an amazing amount of detail in the world around him and notes it in his works. With *Animal Farm*, Orwell is depending on what he has read about Russia and of course his own brush with totalitarianism in Spain. Orwell thankfully did not face the full brunt of Stalinism, thanks to his timely escape. Still, he had to therefore imagine what the full impact of a totalitarian regime would hold for people, which gives us a dramatic and colorful portrayal, but with even a more confused message than in Orwell's earlier works. The distortions between Orwell's *ipse* and the *idem* of his narrators are even more apparent and the result is that despite the melodramatic condemnation of Bolshevism, one is still left wondering where Orwell stands on the Russian revolution.

*Animal Farm* is a very thinly disguised retelling of the Russian revolution and the rise of Stalin in the form of a fable. All the animals on the farm are representatives of either famous persons or social groups. While pigs like Napoleon and Snowball represent Stalin and Trotsky, the horses Boxer, "universally respected for his steadiness of character and tremendous powers of work..." and his mate Clover represent the Russian factory proletariat.<sup>269</sup> Mollie, another horse, is on the other hand, "foolish, pretty" and represents the Russian bourgeoisie who still want the Tsar, represented in the book by the

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<sup>269</sup> George Orwell, *Animal Farm*, (New York: Harcourt Brace & Company, 1946), 26 (hereafter cited in text as AF).

farmer Mr. Jones (*AF*, 27). Another supporter of Mr. Jones, the tame raven Moses, represents the Orthodox Church (*AF*, 37). Only the pigs, which represent the Communists, portray individual historical characters. Old Major, for example, the “Middle White boar” who has strange dreams is Marx (*AF*, 25). Napoleon is a “...rather fierce-looking Berkshire boar...not much of a talker, but with a reputation for getting his own way.” Snowball, on the other hand, was “more vivacious”, “quicker in speech”, “more inventive”, but without the “same depth of character” (*AF*, 35). The last pig introduced is Squealer, a younger pig “...with very round cheeks, twinkling eyes, nimble movements and a shrill voice” (*AF*, 36). Unlike the other pigs, Squealer represents *Pravda* and thus is the pigs’ main propaganda outlet.

The characters in *Animal Farm* do not have much detail. Jeffrey Meyers attributes the “weak and the flat symbolic animals” to Orwell’s decision to write a beast fable in the first place. In his view all fables have two-dimensional characters, and besides Orwell was simply trying to provide a preliminary education for people on what was going on in Russia.<sup>270</sup> Stephen Sedley, on the other hand, notes that unlike Beatrix Potter’s “multi-dimensional characters”, Orwell’s are “flat”. He attributes this to his English upper class view of the working class, particularly in the case of Boxer and Clover.<sup>271</sup> Christopher Small notes that as in *Burmese Days*, a narrator tells us more about the animals as a group than as individuals. They have no interior life. Small admits this is common for a fable, but nevertheless finds it similar to Orwell’s other fiction.<sup>272</sup> Lynette Hunter argues that a straight reading of *Animal Farm* as an allegory of the Russian Revolution misses the

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<sup>270</sup> Meyers, *Reader’s Guide*, 130

<sup>271</sup> Stephen Sedley, “An Immodest Proposal”, in *Inside the Myth, Orwell: Views from the Left*, (London: Lawrence & Wishart, 1984), 158.

<sup>272</sup> Small, 104-105.

underlying point, namely the need for open political participation to thwart dictatorship.<sup>273</sup> All four critics agree on the two dimensional nature of the characters, but disagree on the motive. In retrospect the motive is less sinister than Sedley would contend, but it does point to our discussion on the apparatchik's discourse.

When Orwell wrote this fable, the Soviet Union's prestige was at its height in Great Britain. World War Two was ending and the tremendous role played by the Red Army in defeating Germany made Russia popular and hard to criticize. Orwell had already been disillusioned by Stalinism after his Spanish experience and saw in all the Russiophilia the state discourse that portrayed Stalin's Russia as a workers' state. In order to resuscitate true socialism, the "Soviet Myth" had to be exposed.<sup>274</sup> This meant trying to show what happened between 1917 and the late 1940s.<sup>275</sup> Orwell's solution was the beast fable so that he could present an unpopular theme, as well as a complex one, to the general public.<sup>276</sup> Public opinion was pro-Soviet and despite the use of animals, Orwell had difficulty in getting it published. The use of pigs to designate the Bolsheviks was found to be offensive, though it was based on his own experience with such animals at a farm in Wallington.<sup>277</sup> The question before us is whether the portrayal of the Bolsheviks as pigs itself constitute a use of the apparatchik's discourse and if so how? The answer is yes, in part because Orwell is using formulas based on the state discourses and institutional discourses of the Soviet Union. Despite this he was using second-hand information.

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<sup>273</sup> Hunter, *George Orwell: The Search for a Voice*, 167-168.

<sup>274</sup> Meyers, *Wintry Conscience*, 245.

<sup>275</sup> Singh, 95.

<sup>276</sup> Meyers, *Wintry Conscience*, 130-131.

<sup>277</sup> Meyers, *Wintry Conscience*, 131. See also Patai, 204.

Whatever emotional distress Orwell may have felt for the anarchists and the P.O.U.M., he never did stop his praise of the Communist ability to wage war efficiently. Throughout *Homage to Catalonia*, the text contrasts the stagnation at his front in Aragon with the real fighting at Madrid. Orwell may hate the Communists for what they did, but he could not hide his admiration, and in his own way adopted their discourse. This comes across more clearly in *Animal Farm*. At the start of the book, old Major gives a speech to all the assembled animals. The speech is based on his life experiences and also on a dream he had (*AF*, 27-28). In this section Orwell tailors Marx's message into a farmyard setting, with the animals representing the oppressed proletariat and the farmer as the exploiting bourgeoisie. The animals do all the work; they give everything and the man only returns the minimum to keep them alive and working. At the end they face the knife for all that they do. Like Marx, old Major's discourse is simple: unite the animals, get rid of the humans, and never adopt their habits. Old Major is very emphatic and builds on this. His state discourse is that the animals and man are separate and must have nothing in common. Man is naturally an oppressor and any animal who adopts his ways will become one. "Even when you have conquered him, do not adopt his vices" (*AF*, 31). He then creates an institutional discourse so that the state discourse can be applied, saying that whatever goes on two legs is bad, an enemy; whatever goes on four legs or uses wings is good, a comrade (*AF*, 31). This schematization by old Major is a satire of the formulas of the Communist apparatchik's discourse. He lumps all members of the farm into one or the other category and it seems to work, given the two dimensional nature of all the characters. The use of the number of legs to denote a friend or enemy is a clear use of nomenclature. The text, however, shows the unreality of this arrangement via the two

renegade animals, Moses and Mollie, who clearly prefer farmer Jones, and Orwell may be poking fun at Marx's tendency towards dualistic class schematizing.<sup>278</sup> The fact that Old Major persuades the farm animals, via a vote, to include wild animals such as the rats points to a negative commentary on Marx's ideal.<sup>279</sup> On the other hand, there is no lack of clarity as to the meaning of old Major's speech. He spells out clearly the need for animals to unite, overthrow farmer Jones and run the farm for themselves and not act like man, lest they become corrupt. Most importantly old Major addresses all the animals equally. Even though he is a pig, he looks beyond his own kind to all animals. At the end of his speech he describes his dream and then leads the animals in a song that resembles the Communist hymn, *l'internationale*. Then three nights later, old Major dies.

Between old Major's death and the revolution that overthrows farmer Jones, we have three months of activity. During this time, the other pigs, acting as successors to old Major, try to take control of the animals and wield them into a revolutionary group via an apparatchik's discourse taken from old Major's thought. This at first seems surprising. Old Major did not say anything about one type of animal leading the rest, but after his death, the differences between the animals and their appreciation of his message becomes apparent,

Major's speech had given to the more intelligent animals on the farm a completely new outlook on life. They did not know when the Rebellion would take place, they had no reason for thinking that it would be within their lifetime, but they saw clearly that it was their duty to prepare for it. The work of teaching and organizing the others fell naturally upon the pigs, who were generally recognized as being the cleverest of the animals. (*AF*, 35)

Old Major's discourse of the animals as being an equally oppressed group seems to be unrealistic. Divisions appear in their ranks. These are based on natural intelligence, with

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<sup>278</sup> Meyers, *Wintry Conscience*, 250.

<sup>279</sup> Hunter, *George Orwell: The Search for a Voice*, 169.

the pigs coming out on top as the leaders and teachers of the movement. We are not told what other intelligent animals also better understood old Major's ideas, but the monopolization of his ideas parallels that of the Bolsheviks with Marx's thought in 1917. Russia had many leftist groups, some like the Bolsheviks, Marxist in outlook, which sought to lead Russia in revolution. The pigs represent the Bolsheviks and the duty of teaching and organizing fell "naturally" to them since they were "generally recognized" as the smartest of the animals. Most important, they are the best at language and this becomes a key to their power.<sup>280</sup> This sounds like an endorsement on Orwell's part. We read in the text no statement to the effect that other animals with different ideas opposed the pigs. Aside from the obvious renegades, all the animals accept the pig leadership, even though old Major warned that no animal "...must ever tyrannize over his own kind. Weak or strong, clever or simple, we are all brothers" (*AF*, 31). The casual manner in which the pigs violate this teaching seems to indicate that old Major's discourse is more far-fetched than it seemed.

The description of the pigs' work as teaching and organizing is very similar to Lenin's own discourse. Lenin's vision for his own group mirrors that of the pigs. Lenin did not view the Bolsheviks as proletarians, but as the most radical of bourgeoisie. There is no "independent ideology" by the working class; they must choose either bourgeois or socialist ideology from, of course, bourgeois thinkers, radical or not.<sup>281</sup> Given that it was a pig, old Major, who first brought the ideas of liberation to the animals, and that the pigs are the best able to lead them, the text seems to endorse Lenin's discourse. Without the pigs, the animals cannot achieve liberation since they cannot teach or organize

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<sup>280</sup> Hunter, *George Orwell: The Search for a Voice*, 170.

<sup>281</sup> V. Lenin, *What is to be done?*, in *Collected Works* vol. 5, (London: Lawrence & Wishart, 1961), 384.



themselves. This is pure Lenin. “At the same time, we have no people, because we have no political leaders, no talented organizers capable of arranging extensive and at the same time uniform and harmonious work.”<sup>282</sup> For Lenin a revolutionary society did not exist without a cadre to organize them. This is the apparatchik’s discourse. Lenin is advocating a particular state discourse of leadership and its institutional role in society. The text seems to agree. When the pigs later try to teach old Major’s thought, the animals are originally apathetic and hostile, claiming the farmer Jones feeds them and so forth (*AF*, 36). Old Major himself did not distinguish among the animals in his speech, but the pigs now emerge, after his death, as a distinctive group, leading the animals, but being like man in their intelligence. Thus they mirror Lenin’s view of the relation his group had with the masses at large. The text, however, does not have an uncritical view of Leninism. In many ways Leninism is like colonialism in *Burmese Days*. It enables but it also corrupts. As the Burmese picked up the bad habits from the British, so will the pigs pick up the habits of human beings.

After the pigs begin organizing and teaching the other animals, Orwell introduces us to Napoleon, Snowball, and Squealor, the pig leadership. The first two of course represent Stalin and Trotsky, and while later these two pigs would quarrel as their real life counterparts, here in the early stages they act in a united fashion. Working with Squealor, we are told that these three “...had elaborated old Major’s teachings into a complete system of thought, to which they gave the name of Animalism” (*AF*, 36). This is the apparatchik’s discourse of the book, but the text does not immediately define “Animalism”. Later we learn that many of the animals, especially Boxer and Clover have a difficult time understanding it. The animal’s understanding progressively improves and

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<sup>282</sup> Lenin, *What is to be done?*, 468.

“...having once accepted the pigs as their teachers, they absorbed everything that they were told, and passed it on to the other animals by simple arguments” (*AF*, 37). Only after the rebellion had succeeded and farmer Jones was gone that we read that the pigs under Napoleon and Snowball’s direction had “...succeeded in reducing the principles of Animalism to Seven Commandments” (*AF*, 42). These commandments would be the law of the new Animal Farm:

1. Whatever goes upon two legs is an enemy.
2. Whatever goes upon four legs, or has wings is a friend.
3. No animal shall wear clothes.
4. No animal shall sleep in a bed.
5. No animal shall drink alcohol.
6. No animal shall kill another animal.
7. All animals are equal (*AF*, 43).

Snowball reads these commandments aloud to the other animals and writes them down for all to see. The episode ends with the animals agreeing with the new commandments and the “cleverer” ones beginning to learn them by heart (*AF*, 43). Before looking further at the pigs and their running of the farm, we must look at their creation of Animalism more closely. We have already seen that the text sees merit in the Leninist position. Is he parodying here the creation of Marxism by schematizing intellectuals or is he noting a necessary translation of old Major’s thought for the animals? Either way we must look at this version of the apparatchik’s discourse.

Three pigs create a new world for the animals on the farm. They have taken old Major’s thought and distilled it into seven salient points, creating the discourse of the farm. We should first look at these commandments and compare them with old Major’s speech. What immediately is noticeable is that all of the commandments are in fact quotes from old Major’s speech. More importantly they are from a specific part of his

speech, his conclusion before telling the animals about his dream (*AF*, 31). The first two are the founding formulas of this apparatchik's discourse. They combine the state's discourse of an animal rebellion against humans and an institutional discourse for application in the farm. The animals must be reminded of the reason for the new state and have a means of applying this understanding in an easy fashion. The next four elaborate the point with various forms of nomenclature, actions that distinguish a friend from an enemy. The quotes, however, are not complete. For example, the prohibition against trade is not included in the commandments, nor is the prohibition about living in houses. This is a small point; what seems large however is that the individual vices listed by old Major were simply examples of man's vices to be avoided by the animals. The seven commandments do not have a general prohibition against adopting the ways of man, just a select list of specific nomenclature. Old Major wanted a complete separation between man and animal, but the seven commandments seem less than that. Also the last commandment of equality, a part of the new state's discourse seems to pale before old Major's repeated assertions that, "All animals are comrades" and "...we are all brothers" (*AF*, 31). Given the difficulty that some animals, such as Boxer, had with understanding old Major's thought, this distillation may seem necessary. On the other hand, it seems to fall short of the vision in the old pig's speech. Since the pigs are the cleverest and are the natural organizers and teachers, they control language and discourse. This is the key point for Lynette Hunter. By controlling language, the pigs hold a monopoly on government. Most significant, other animals without their mastery of language cannot oppose the pigs with arguments. They cannot even quote Old Major against them.<sup>283</sup> Thus, The Seven Commandments are the discourse that defines the ideological limits of Animal Farm and

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<sup>283</sup> Hunter, *George Orwell: The Search for a Voice*, 171.

they become the only element of old Major's thought that most animals can say, let alone understand.

Victor Serge had seen such things as a virtue in Bolshevism. The fact that he had been an anarchist and had later joined the Communist party testifies to this.<sup>284</sup> He saw that their discipline, organization and realism were key abilities with which to withstand the counter-revolution and hopefully lead Russia into a socialist paradise. In *Ville Conquise*, we saw the debate between Ossipov and Kirk, which exemplifies this concept. Despite the validity of Kirk's charges of corruption and other abuses as a result of the Bolsheviks' monopolization of power, Ossipov argues that some pains are necessary in creating a new society. He can justify, for example, keeping the venal Zvéreva on his staff. She may be corrupt, but is an efficient policewoman, which is what the party needs. Bolshevism may not uphold all the high ideals of Marxism and revolution, but this is due to the need to make tactical sacrifices in order to overcome obstacles. Serge does not glorify Bolshevism, but he does see its practicality in the pursuit of revolution. Is Orwell agreeing with Serge, in his portrayal of the pigs' creation of Animalism? Are the pigs simply modifying old Major's thought as needed in order to make the revolution work? Farmer Jones is gone and the animals have the farm for themselves. The question now is the familiar one in the sociology of revolutions. Just how much will the new regime represent a change from the old one?

After promulgating the Seven Commandments, Snowball turns to the animals and says, "Now comrades...to the hayfield! Let us make it a point of honour to get the harvest in more quickly than Jones and his men could do" (*AF*, 43). This spirit of socialist

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<sup>284</sup> Few anarchists or syndicalists joined the Bolsheviks. Although there were some who made their peace and joined the party, such as Bill Shatov and of course Serge himself, such defections were rare, given the ideological gulf between Marxism and anarchism.

cooperation, however, is overshadowed by another event. The cows on the farm are uneasy as they have not been milked all day. The pigs respond by getting buckets and doing the milking themselves, which seems to accord with Snowball's earlier call. The cows yield five buckets of milk, which excites the notice of many animals. They start to debate the use of the milk as farmer Jones had previously used it in their food, but Napoleon stops the debate and directs them to follow Snowball and gather in the harvest. When the animals return from their work, they find the milk to be gone (*AF*, 44). Orwell allows this mystery to fade from view and instead turns to describing the work on the farm, but it is in our interest to look ahead at the conclusion of the milk mystery and what it has to say about Orwell and Lenin.

Later we discover that the pigs themselves had sequestered the milk and were having it mixed in with their food. Furthermore with the ripening of the apples in the orchard, and their falling off the trees, the pigs order the animals to collect them for use by the pigs, and we are told that all the pigs, including Napoleon and Snowball, agreed on this policy (*AF*, 52). The other animals of course murmur and complain about this obviously unequal distribution of the tastiest food on the farm. Old Major had never indicated that the animals would be unequal, but inequality was necessary before because the animals had different capabilities. Squealor tries to justify the pigs' monopoly on apples and milk. "You do not imagine, I hope, that we pigs are doing this in a spirit of selfishness and privilege? Many of us actually dislike milk and apples...Our sole object in taking these things is to preserve our health...We pigs are brainworkers. The whole management and organization of the farm depends on us...Do you know what would happen if we pigs failed in our duty? Jones would come back..." (*AF*, 52). This last

argument is all the animals need to hear, as they do not want Jones back and so agree to the decision. The pigs do not simply monopolize certain foods, but also the revolution itself. The essence of Squealer's discourse is two-fold: that the extra food is a necessity, not a luxury, and that without the pigs, the other animals are doomed. Squealer uses nomenclature to distinguish the pigs from other animals via their better food. This is similar to Ossipov's remarks in *Ville Conquise* about the privileges of the Cheka. He is also invoking a formula: the success of the farm depends on the pigs. Thus Squealer repeats the Leninist apparatchik's discourse. As we saw, Lenin equated the success of the revolutionary enterprise with the strength of the leading organization. Without them, he said, there is no people. But is this true? When we turn back to Orwell's description of the revolution that drove out Jones, for example, the pigs are not even mentioned. It was hunger that caused a cow to start things by breaking open a store shed with her hooves. The animals as an undifferentiated group drive out the Jones, his wife and Moses (*AF*, 38-39). But it was old Major who inspired the rebellion in the first place and it was the pigs who taught his message, albeit in a modified form, to the other animals. Of course, one could argue that the revolution was spontaneous, but Lenin would argue that hunger alone would not lead to revolution. It was the discourse of old Major's thought disseminated by the pigs, which gave the animals the will and commitment to drive out Jones for good. Would the pigs still be necessary in the more detailed work of running the farm and ensuring that Jones did not return? The text is clearly pointing out that Leninism did have a role in translating Marx's view via its own discourse. The key question is legitimacy. Serge found his and reflects this clearly in his novels. Does Orwell

do the same? We should now turn back to Snowball and the animals bringing in the harvest.

The harvest turns out to be a huge success and the animals had to work very hard without farm implements, since they were not made for animal use. “But the pigs were so clever that they could think of ways round every difficulty. As for the horses, they knew every inch of the field, and in fact understood the business of mowing and raking far better than Jones and his men had ever done. The pigs did not actually work, but directed and supervised the others” (*AF*, 45). This direction appears in the text comic if not sad. A pig walks alongside a Boxer and Clover who are harnessed and shouts at them as they move along, “Gee up comrade!” or “Whoa back” (*AF*, 45). What is the need of the pigs directing the horses if they already know the job and the field even better than the humans? Orwell’s narrator tells us that the pigs are clever, but we do not see how this benefits the animals on the farm. Boxer, for example, who seems the hero in this part of the text, uses his strength to push and pull the carts with the harvest. The other animals are described as treading the grain and blowing away the chaff, ancient style. For the pigs we have the following statement “...-but the pigs with their cleverness and Boxer with his tremendous strength always pulled them through” (*AF*, 46). The pigs’ oversight seems perfunctory at best and one wonders if they are as necessary as Squealor indicated. It appears as if the animals are now just working for the pigs as they did for farmer Jones, only they are driven now by the apparatchik’s discourse rather than coercion. The pigs do no manual labor and they reap the best of the food the farm has to offer. This seems too close to the previous regime to go unexamined. Old Major may have been unrealistic in animal equality, but did he mean this?

The pigs do seem committed to making life better for the other animals, but Orwell's narrator does not seem to think that such projects really improve things, but just ensure pig control over everything. For example, the pigs organize reading and writing classes to improve the education of all the animals. First we must recognize again that the pigs' plan goes against what old Major said. "All the habits of Man are evil" (*AF*, 31). But old Major did not mention reading and writing specifically, and as we have seen the pigs under Snowball and Napoleon have already redefined old Major's thought into seven neat commandments. The classes seem to be a success and soon all the animals on the farm are literate, but the degree varies considerably. This reminds us of Benveniste's work on animal and human language. The differences between the two would indicate that there would be a difference between the languages of different animals as well.<sup>285</sup> The dogs read well, but only want to read the seven commandments; Benjamin could read as well as the pigs but remained apathetic and never did so. Clover learned the whole alphabet, but Boxer could not get past the letter D (*AF*, 49-50). This inequity in education seems amazing. On the one hand we see that other animals aside from the pigs can read and write, but they are apathetic (Benjamin), or not organized (Muriel) and cannot exercise power over others that the pigs do.<sup>286</sup> Furthermore despite Boxer's limited vocabulary, we saw that he and the other horses knew more about harvesting and the fields than any other animal. Thus on the one hand we have what seems a noble effort at education, but in reality makes a mockery of old Major's exhortation at equality and

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<sup>285</sup> Benveniste, 60. He points out that the physical differences between animals and humans conditions the differences in their respective languages. Bees, for example, cannot vocalize and must use movement. Therefore they dance to communicate.

<sup>286</sup> Hunter, *George Orwell: The Search for a Voice*, 173.



only serves to keep the pigs on top, since they are the only group of animals fully conversant with reading and writing.

Some of the animals cannot even master what Boxer has learned and the pigs find that many cannot even recite the seven commandments. So Snowball, "...declared that the Seven Commandments could in effect be reduced to a single maxim, namely: 'Four legs good, two legs bad.' This, he said contained the essential principle of Animalism. Whoever grasped it would be safe from human influences" (*AF*, 50). Again the pigs demonstrate their control of the farm by defining its discourse. The sameness of all animals lies simply in their four legs. Remembering this will keep them from human influence. The pigs having failed to create an equality based on their strength – the ability to read and write, create a false one based on a formula. The apparatchik's discourse has been reduced to one point and will in turn reduce the animals. This seems ironic from a pig noted for his reading of books by humans, like Julius Caesar (*AF*, 57). When the birds, for example, object to the new slogan, Snowball tries to explain that their wings are like legs, organs of propulsion not manipulation. Though they do not understand, the birds accept Snowball's explanation. The wide variety of animals on the farm is being reduced to an undifferentiated group with a formula of equality based on the state's original discourse of separating humans from animals. The text has already demonstrated that the animals all have different strengths and weaknesses, but the pigs are determined to run things by their lights. Thus in the aftermath of the revolution the animals no longer work for farmer Jones and no longer face the knife at the end, but they now work for the pigs, who appropriate the best food, and their world is defined by the pigs who have made language, which they know best, as the supreme form of intelligence. To free the

animals from human bondage, the pigs became like humans. Perhaps the book is stating that a similar metamorphosis occurs with revolutionaries who claim to represent the poor and down-trodden of the world. In gaining control of the farm the pigs have become like its previous owner, Mr. Jones, albeit with some major differences. Orwell's disagreements with Leninism, however, do not stop here. In following this trend, we must look at another issue often raised about *Animal Farm* in the context of ideology.

The best endorsement of the pigs to be found in *Animal Farm* is of course to be found in the actions of Snowball, the analog to Leon Trotsky. Not only did he play a clear role in the formulation of Animalism, try to teach the animals reading and writing, and try to create committees to encourage their input in day-to-day affairs, but he is also the hero of the battle of cowshed. Farmer Jones was not content with the loss of his farm and rallying other farmhands tried to retake the farm. The ensuing battle between animals and humans of course resembles the civil wars that plagued Russia after the Bolshevik revolution. Snowball played an important dual role; he planned the defense of the farm and came up with the winning tactic of drawing Jones and his men into the cowshed by feigned flight and then having the animals attack from all sides. Moreover, Snowball himself joined in the fighting. He hurled himself at farmer Jones, and was shot twice in the process. Only Snowball and Boxer, who also fought very well, were awarded the decoration "Animal Hero, First Class" (*AF*, 57-58). The battle ends with Jones and his men fleeing from the farm. This ends the threat of humans retaking the farm, but all is not happy, and we soon see there is more trouble from within that threatens the new regime.

The heroic and active role in *Animal Farm* could be seen as an endorsement of Leon Trotsky, especially in chapter five where Snowball has his confrontation with

Napoleon (Stalin) and chapter six where Napoleon begins his new totalitarian course. A close reading of the text will reveal I think that nothing is further from the truth. Of course from Orwell's own comments it seems that he did not rate Trotsky better than Stalin. In his view the rejection of democracy by the Bolsheviks ensured a Stalinist-like regime regardless of the personality in charge.<sup>287</sup> We should, however, look at these two chapters, for the question of *Animal Farm* as a Trotskyist novel is pertinent to our examination of Orwell's view on Leninism. After the battle of the cowshed, Napoleon and Snowball start to disagree on every conceivable issue. Snowball, for example, argues to build a windmill in order to supply electric power to the farm. "Snowball conjured up pictures of fantastic machines which would do their work for them while they grazed at their ease in the fields or improved their minds with reading and conversation" (*AF*, 64). Snowball's pictures and words astound the animals, but they hardly understand it. More important, Napoleon is dead set against the project from the start. He gives no reason except that the windmill will not work and proposes no alternative solution. This issue divides the farm and it would seem that Snowball's brilliance with words would carry the day, but Napoleon had been keeping and raising dogs since the start of the new regime and by the time of the debate on the windmill, these dogs were adult and quite devoted to their caretaker. Napoleon calls the dogs to his aid, after Snowball gives a speech on the windmill. The dogs arrive and attack him, causing the poor pig to flee for his life. Snowball gets away, but now Napoleon is completely in charge (*AF*, 64-68). On the surface, Napoleon is clearly a villain in the way he treats Snowball, but the text is not that simple.

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<sup>287</sup> Newsinger, 112.

Before the expulsion of Snowball, the new pig government was partially democratic. “It had come to be accepted that the pigs, who were manifestly cleverer than the other animals, should decide all questions of farm policy, though their decisions had to be ratified by a majority vote” (*AF*, 62). The narrator goes on to say that the arrangement “would have worked well enough” but for the constant disputes between Snowball and Napoleon. Their disputes polarize the farm and Snowball’s oratory is balanced by Napoleon’s silent canvassing. Only later when Napoleon introduces the dogs is he able to drive out Snowball and assume complete control. After the expulsion, Napoleon puts an end to all the meetings and committees established by Snowball. He goes on to say, “In future all questions relating to the working of the farm would be settled by a special committee of pigs, presided over by himself...there would be no more debates” (*AF*, 68). The loss of debate is accompanied by open terror and Squealer’s new apparatchik line. Any animal that voices support for the departed Snowball is threatened by Napoleon’s dogs and those who question the expulsion, given all of Snowball’s obvious contributions, such as his leadership at the battle of cowshed, are confronted by Squealer’s new take on events. As in Serge’s novels, the formula for defining who is a friend and who is an enemy of the state is narrowed more and more. Squealer attacks Snowball’s *ipse*, “...I believe the time will come when we shall find that Snowball’s part in it (the battle) was much exaggerated” (*AF*, 70). Snowball had planned the battle and delivered the critical blow to farmer Jones, but Squealer simply suggests that all this may not be true. He doesn’t challenge the record directly but hints at discrepancy. It opens room for doubt but with a suggestion for a line of thinking that leads to Snowball’s life being rewritten. Squealer then shifts from the topic shouting “Discipline!” and reminding

the animals to be vigilant, as they do not want farmer Jones back. Neither formula has anything to do with Snowball's record, but by linking the issue with the idea of discipline and the return of the Jones, Squealor is creating a new apparatchik's discourse for the animals. Snowball brings debates to the farm and that in turn brings indiscipline, which will bring the return of the farmer. These unrelated concepts are now a unified reality that the animals cannot easily challenge. In the end, led by Boxer, they rally to the new line, "Napoleon is always right! I will work harder!" Thus there seems to have been a complete revolution as Napoleon takes control of the farm and the animal's mind. Given Snowball's accomplishments mentioned earlier and now the obvious tyrannical behavior of Napoleon, one might rightly see in *Animal Farm* a Trotskyist text.

Napoleon's new measures surely represent a push towards greater dictatorship by the pigs, or those pigs loyal to Napoleon, but the process, as text has shown, lay at the very start of the pigs' revolutionary role. Stalin was not an aberration but the natural consequence of Leninism in Orwell's view. It was Snowball in fact who first gave expression to the overtly negative aspects of the new regime. When before the revolution Mollie the horse asked him if there would still be sugar available after the revolution, Snowball's response was instant. "We have no means of making sugar on this farm. Besides, you do not need sugar. You will have all the oats and hay you want" (*AF*, 36). His response to Mollie's question about ribbons was the same and the effects on the horse were obvious. "Mollie agreed, but she did not sound very convinced" (*AF*, 37). Mollie would later desert the farm over the lack of sugar and ribbons, but not before being questioned by her fellow horse, Clover, and having her stall searched for sugar cubes and ribbons (*AF*, 62). Some would of course justify the responses of Snowball and Clover, as

Mollie did represent the Russian bourgeoisie who missed the rule of the Tsar. But this goes back to the issue of dictatorship. Old Major had told the animals never to tyrannize their own and that is what they are doing with Mollie. Who is to say if sugar is necessary or not after the revolution? This is ironic given that the pigs had reserved all the other sweet food, milk and apples, for themselves. Snowball and the other pigs have already assumed leadership despite no clear mandate from anyone. Moreover, by denying her need for sugar and ribbons, Snowball is trying to destroy Mollie's own *ipse* in favor of the new *idem* of the model revolutionary animal. All of Snowball's animals will eat oats and hay and like it.

Snowball, as we saw, was the main agent in the creation of Animalism and its Seven Commandments. He was thus the main agent of reducing old Major's discourse to an apparatchik's discourse that was not intended by the old pig in the first place. Moreover, he also later reduced the discourse further to the one maxim, "Four legs good, two legs bad." Ironically, in the later debates between himself and Napoleon, the sheep would repeat this phrase during Snowball's speeches to disrupt him (*AF*, 63). Thus the methods of tyranny were being turned on its creator. While it is true that Napoleon had made himself and his committee of pigs the sole arbiters of the farm after Snowball's flight, even before the situation was not democratic. The pigs still made all the important decisions for farm policy, the other animals merely voted up or down on the pigs' motions. A pig monopoly already existed before Napoleon seized power for himself, and just as Snowball would reduce Mollie to his ideal *idem*, Napoleon and Squealer did the same with Snowball's *ipse*, as we saw above. Even Snowball's windmill project, scorned by Napoleon, would be revived by the latter and used to reduce the animals to slave labor

at a time when the harvest was not as good. Snowball made his contribution to the new dictatorship and more than his fair share to its discourse. He also became its first prominent victim.

It is useful to contrast Snowball to Diderot's Seneca. Snowball is doomed trying to make something inherently corrupt better. Diderot in his presentation of Seneca could not have agreed less with this assessment. His Seneca seemed equally doomed at Nero's court. Seneca's role, however, in overturning Claudius' legislation, his tactful handling of Nero's excesses, his blocking of Agrippina's ambitions and the overall five years of peace he gave Rome, validated his life. Diderot had boasted that he had his own way of reading history where Seneca was concerned. He knew he was creating a construct, creating his own discourse. But the point was that Seneca could point to something greater in the future. Snowball, by contrast, appears in the book as a failure in that he did not ultimately succeed. He is neither a figure to learn from nor a figure to champion. His efforts to defend and improve the farm and the animals are cancelled out by his own dictatorial methods and his eventual fall from power. Orwell's text in fact does not champion any character in *Animal Farm*. Much like *Burmese Days*, we have a collection of characters all marked in one way or another by a flaw, which seems to be the dominant construct in their lives. Snowball is arrogant; Napoleon is sneaky; Mollie is corrupt, Boxer is not very bright and so forth. In the end the whole revolution ends up as a failure and things do not seem to be different from the days of farmer Jones. Diderot saw a hope in learning from Seneca, but Orwell cannot do the same from the examples of the Russian revolution. He does not appropriate any of its constructs, but what lesson does he draw, if any?

Under Napoleon's control things get worse for the animals, greater hunger, execution of animals as accomplices of Snowball, deals with human farmers and other breakings of the Seven Commandments of Animalism. By the end of the book with most of the original animals dead, most notably Boxer, whom Napoleon had hauled off to be slaughtered, there is the sense that nothing had changed from the time of farmer Jones. Boxer more than any other animal, had been the analog to the Russian worker. The pigs as a group used him and then sent him to be killed when he was no longer useful. (*AF*, 123-124) Along with all the other human trappings of the pigs, sleeping in beds, dealing with human farmers, we have come around in a complete circle; the revolution changed nothing. The pigs' initiative and discourse was critical for the revolution's success, yet in the long run the pigs were merely continuing to ape their former human masters. This ambivalence seems to be the position of Orwell himself and is reflected in one of the characters of the book, Benjamin.

Benjamin the donkey reflects the pessimism and realism that seems to mark all of Orwell's writing. Throughout the novel he appears intermittently, rarely talking and if so, cryptically. He stays by himself though he does graze in the company of Boxer, who seems to be the only one the donkey might count as a friend. In all the great debates and questions, he remains aloof. He can use language as well as the pigs but he doesn't. He sided with neither Snowball nor Napoleon and in the end when most of the animals are dead; he is still alive just as he boasted earlier, "None of you has ever seen a dead donkey" (*AF*, 47). In short Benjamin is not involved except to do his work as needed. Orwell's narrator sees things in the same fashion. He could understand the role of the pigs in organizing and leading the revolution. The pigs, especially Snowball, provided



organization and leadership that was needed. Their role, however, became overstated. The lack of democracy among the animals as a whole led to a dictatorship, mild at first and later hellish, but most important in order to position themselves as the leaders of the new farm, the pigs had to rewrite the discourse of old Major. The Seven Commandments of Animalism and the slogan of “Four legs good, two legs bad”, was the creation of Snowball that defined the world of the animals after the revolution. In themselves they were distortions of old Major’s thought. His discourse emphasized the animals being themselves and not aping human behavior. Snowball reduced this to an apparatchik’s discourse of seven specific prescriptions, which of course allow the pigs to engage in other human behavior. Later under Napoleon and Squealer the distortions become so grotesque as to make old Major’s ideas completely unrecognizable. On the one hand the pigs seem necessary and yet on the other they doom old Major’s dream of an animal farm. The text does not explore the other revolutionary traditions in Russia at the time.

In *Burmese Days* the apparatchik’s discourse appeared both in the ideology of the colonialists and in the nationalists. The text condemns both. This, however, was a pose. One cannot be neutral and by not supporting any new ideological trend, Orwell’s criticisms lose force and one ends up backing colonialism since there is no other effective alternative. The same happens in *Homage to Catalonia*. the emotional attachment to the P.O.U.M due to their plight, and revolutionary honesty cannot mask the narrator’s admiration for the Communists. He can see their lies and tyranny, but he cannot find an alternative to them and so in the end while the downfall of the P.O.U.M is regrettable, he cannot see them as a viable alternative to Stalin. Orwell could not look at another figure, like Trotsky, or indeed any of the other revolutionary currents in Russia at that time.

*Animal Farm* is merely restating the lesson of *Homage to Catalonia*. The revolution clearly brought benefits to the farm that would not have happened had Jones remained in charge: the windmill, more efficient harvesting, and smart deals with other farms, and the revolution and the end of Jones would not have happened without the pigs. But just as the Communists who defended Madrid also became the Communists who hunted down the P.O.U.M., so the pigs that orchestrate a better harvest and a windmill bring a yet more efficient tyranny to the farm.

Benjamin the donkey relates well with Orwell. He does not approve of what he sees but he does not communicate an alternative. As we noted before the only animal Benjamin seems to like is Boxer. Benjamin does not, however, offer the animals something better. He was the only animal to exceed the pigs in reading and writing, yet he did not use his talents for the farm and thereby possibly disrupt their monopoly. Benjamin showed the lie in the pig monopoly, yet he did not act on it and thus confirmed the status quo with his silence, his misanthropy notwithstanding. Orwell did not like what he saw either. But unlike Serge, he did not have his own ideological vision to measure against the ones presented. Thus his characters in *Animal Farm* do have one of two choices: that of Mollie and that of Boxer: live like a slave or die like a hero and nothing changes in the process. Orwell's novel simply becomes a circle from which there is no escape.

#### *NINETEEN EIGHTY-FOUR: ORWELL AND THE FUTURE*

Many claims are made about *Nineteen Eighty-Four*. This work about a futuristic totalitarian society is Orwell's most famous novel and a subject for much controversy by commentators. Some see it as a masterpiece, an epitome of Orwell's political thought and

a timely warning to all about the lurking dangers of totalitarian thinking.<sup>288</sup> Others prefer to use the book to demonstrate the dangers that intellectuals, like Orwell, fall into in an overly conformist society.<sup>289</sup> The book is also examined as a species of science fiction that simply explores one of many possible futures for humankind.<sup>290</sup> Lastly some see it as a shameless and exploitative novel that does nothing but feed on the illusions of the conservative right about Soviet Russia.<sup>291</sup> This diversity of thinking shows *Nineteen Eighty-Four* as is one of the most often analyzed novels. From the perspective of the apparatchik's discourse, however, it will become clear that this novel is simply the continuation and termination of Orwell's consistent attempt to examine repression from an objective standpoint. As with *Burmese Days*, *Homage to Catalonia*, and *Animal Farm*, here too Orwell cannot break free of the ideological circle created by repression. Moreover, unlike the previous works, which were based on Orwell's own observations of history, Orwell is now projecting his own version of the future in his book. While Oceania has elements of contemporary Britain and Russia in its makeup, it is still a discourse and a product of Orwell's own blinkered ideology.<sup>292</sup> The result is the most extreme refutation, in all of Orwell's work, of any hope of revolutionary change or of defeating the apparatchik's discourse. Despite this, his writing does, as with the earlier novels, contain some of the most stunning, if melodramatic, expositions on the apparatchik's discourse, especially in the character of O'Brien. Orwell could see what the

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<sup>288</sup> See Meyers, *Wintry Conscience*, 279.

<sup>289</sup> See Woodcock, 56. See also William Steinhoff, *George Orwell and the Origins of 1984*, (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1975), 57.

<sup>290</sup> See Michel Guay, "1984: De la science-fiction à l'histoire", in *Orwell a-t-il vu Juste? Une analyse sociopsychologique de 1984*, (Québec: Presses de L'Université du Québec, 1986), 105.

<sup>291</sup> See Issac Deutscher, *Heretics and Renegades and other essays*, (London: Hamish House, 1955), 36. See also Stuart Hall, "Conjuring Leviathan: Orwell on the State", in *Inside the Myth, Orwell: Views from the Left*, (London: Lawrence & Wishart, 1984), 219.

<sup>292</sup> See Meyer, *Wintry Conscience*, 281 for more information on contemporary influences of *Nineteen Eighty-Four*.

apparatchik's discourse could do in a negative sense, but he could not see its importance in a positive vein.

The main character Winston Smith buys a diary and henceforth he is a dissident in Oceania. He is also, however, an apparatchik in the Ministry of Truth (Minitru) where he corrects the past issues of the Party's main organ, *The Times*, so as to ensure Big Brother's continuing reputation of infallibility. Smith serves both Oceania's apparatchik's discourse, and he opposes it with his own discourse. The difference, as we have seen in Orwell's writing, is that in Smith the two are diametrically opposed. When Smith is engaging in one of the discourses, he does not engage in the other. By contrast in an author like Serge, the apparatchik's discourse of the state and that of the dissident are both confrontational and interdependent. Ryjik, for example, can use the discourse of the same revolutionary ideology that his captors use. Ryjik's own convictions and knowledge of the apparatchik's discourse enables him to resist and win a moral victory over his enemies, albeit at the cost of his life. Ryjik understood where Smith did not, that the battle is not over objective reality, but over one's own mind. Winston, on the other hand, attempts to rebel by exploring objectivity, both via his diary and his experiences with Julia. These are, however, incomplete and leave him vulnerable in the hands of O'Brien. What plagues both Smith and Orwell is their failure to perceive the need for discourse, regardless of objectivity.

Winston's diary becomes his discourse of reality against the unreality of the party's apparatchik's discourse. Winston moves back and forth between the two, editing old articles of the news, thus aiding party's apparatchik's discourse, and then going home to write what he saw in his diary. He neatly parallels the life of John Flory who would

submit to the colonial discourse while at the club with the other whites, and then go to Dr. Veraswami's bungalow to express his true views. The first thing we see in his diary is his report of a film and the audience's reaction to it.<sup>293</sup> It is a war film, and he includes many details, such as that of a fat man swimming, trying to escape a helicopter and the audience being "much amused" by it. When the fat man dies, the audience roars with laughter. Later the helicopter drops a "20 kilo bomb" on a ship full of refugees and a "prole" woman starts complaining that such things should not be shown to children, but her complaints are dismissed by the other non prole audience members and she is hustled out of the cinema by a policeman (1984, 11). The "prole" woman, of course, belongs to the underclass of Oceania and is therefore not a party member. Thus, she, like all "proles," deserves no notice. These facts form part of Smith's diary entry. They are objective statements made by a witness and are by their nature working against Oceania's apparatchik's discourse. By noting both the fat man's death and the audience's reaction, Smith is standing as an outside observer when he should have been laughing with the others. Smith does not know the man, so he cannot record his *ipse*. Instead, he changes the *idem* to that of a victim of war, a person struggling to survive. However, the audience rejects this characterization in favor of the apparatchik's discourse, which uses its own formula for the man: the fat man deserved to die; rejoice in his death. In other words, Smith identifies more with the fat man than with the audience. The recording of the "prole" woman's objection is also significant. As a "prole", her opinions should not count for a party member. Moreover, her objection is at variance with the expected reaction. Instead of rejecting and ridiculing it as the audience did, Smith records it, giving it an

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<sup>293</sup> George Orwell, *Nineteen Eighty-Four*, (New York: Harcourt, Brace Jovanovich, 1949), 11. (hereafter cited in text as 1984.)

independent state, separate from the others. By writing down these observations, Smith challenges the state's discourse of society and in effect begins his new role as a dissident. The state's discourse legitimizes itself by creating categories of people, through social division and war, whether "the proles" or the fat man. The apparatchik's discourse, using films, teaches the people this discourse by having them laugh at foreigners killed in war and ignoring the woman's objections. Smith opposes this. By writing these things, he was also giving his subjects and himself a new *idem*, via the *ipse* of his act of writing. The act of writing in the diary was an innovation that led to a new habit. As Ricoeur points out, habits are the means of defining character.<sup>294</sup> Buying the diary and writing in it was Smith's innovation and eventually the *ipse* of writing would become an *idem* via habit making Winston into a thought criminal. The problem in the meantime was to reconcile the two, the party ideology versus empiric reality as observed by Smith.

The state's solution to Smith's dilemma is doublethink. It knows that people will see things that are at variance with the apparatchik's discourse. The party knows about objective reality. The key lay not in controlling reality per se, but rather the human mind. When one is confronted with the discrepancy between the two, one denies the event and in their mind re-affirms the party's construct that explains the event. Using the events at the film for an example, a party person hearing the woman's objections about the film would dismiss them since the party wants the children to be exposed to all sorts of violence to condition them for constant war and surveillance.<sup>295</sup> Even, if like Smith, they were to agree with the woman's stated objection, they would simply invoke the state's

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<sup>294</sup> Ricoeur, *Soi-même comme un autre*, 146.

<sup>295</sup> The children of Mrs. Parsons are a good example of how children are expected to behave in Oceania. They are aggressive, addicted to violence (they pester their mother to take them to see a hanging), and sneaky. All their games revolve around war or denouncing someone as a traitor. Winston compares them to tiger cubs that will one day become monsters (1984, 22-23).

discourse of infallibility in their head and denounce the woman anyway. They certainly would not buy a diary and note the objections. The key is to give constant advantage to the party's apparatchik discourse over empiric reality, no matter what one encounters. A similar phenomenon appears in *L'affaire Toulaév*. Erchov's police instinct and understanding of the facts of the case led him to the correct conclusion that the assassination was a one-man job. His assistant Gordéev, however, uses doublethink and focuses on the party's directive to investigate Matvei Titov and a possible conspiracy in the Security branch. Erchov's assessment was correct but in the end he was arrested. He did not use doublethink. Thus, doublethink is a form of schizophrenia, in asserting the party's fantasy over what the character sees and hears. It requires discipline since characters must reject what their senses are telling them. It is a description of what Orwell saw as a common trait in people, especially in politics where they were more likely to vote on the basis of manufactured wishes or fears instead of their own weekly budget.<sup>296</sup> Unlike the good party person who dismisses the woman's objections to the film, Smith restored the *ipse* and *idem* to their respective roles when he wrote down both the woman's comments and the audience reaction. The woman's outburst was an innovation in the middle of the usual goings on in the cinema. By making an open comment on the objectionable nature of the film for children, she was expressing her true opinion. This outburst marked her out and distinguished her from the other crowd, even from the other proles, so much so that the police had to remove her. Smith's text records this event thus preserving against time the "prole" woman's *ipse*. He also records the *idem* of the crowd, which responds uniformly to her outburst. They are acting out of a

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<sup>296</sup> See William Steinhoff, *George Orwell and the Origins of 1984*, (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1975), 165.

collective habit of the mind, to disregard the woman, to object to criticism of a good war film. This collective habit is the *idem* of the party, which is known in Oceania as doublethink.

The problem with the text of *1984* is that there is no perception of the contrast between *ipse* and *idem*. Instead the distinction exists between the empiric reality that Smith records and the party's discourse which ignores what is going on. It is easy to see why he would make this mistake. Smith's life involves daily alternation between writing his own true observations and suppression of facts and the creation of "delicate pieces of forgery" to uphold the party's infallibility. His work is like that of Dynamius, who erased and altered the letters of his superior Silvanus. Dynamius' work turned the unfortunate general into a rebel. Smith's work involves the same thing. When he comes to work, he is given the following order:

The reporting of Big Brother's Order for the Day in the *Times* of December 3<sup>rd</sup> 1983 is extremely unsatisfactory and makes references to non-existent persons. Rewrite it in full and submit your draft to higher authority before filing (*1984*, 40).

There is nothing in this terse order that indicates how Smith is to rewrite the article or what part is offensive. Smith must, detective-like, use what information he has and his own intuition and powers of deduction to create an article that will be an acceptable replacement for the previous one. The original article, for example, referred to a certain Withers, an inner party comrade who had been given awards and praise by Big Brother. Also the order referred to "unpersons", which Smith knew to refer to people already dead, though he was not completely sure in each case. Deciding that the original subject matter was too dangerous and that other story ideas would be too complicated, Smith decides to write a totally new and completely fabricated story of Big Brother eulogizing a



fallen hero, comrade Ogilvy. This would be the story of December Third rather than Big Brother decorating and congratulating the now unperson Withers. The narrator states that “It was true that there was no such person as Comrade Ogilvy, but a few lines of print and a couple of faked photographs would soon bring him into existence” (1984, 42). Smith knows that he may not be the only one trying to rewrite the December Third story, but he is amazed at his ability to construct a dead man and make him as authentic as Charlemagne or Caesar. Once his forgery was complete all three would have the same amount of documentary evidence (1984, 43). This is a perfect example of the apparatchik’s discourse use of different formulas to keep up the discourse of the state’s legitimacy. It is clear in the text that Smith is a veteran of altering articles to make Big Brother look good. Since Big Brother cannot be infallible, the apparatchiks at Minitru must try to make it appear as if he were infallible. To do this they use the same formula, that of rewriting past articles. Smith’s expertise allows Big Brother's mistake regarding Comrade Withers to be disregarded and forgotten.

The contrast between Smith’s earlier diary entry and his later manufactured article for the *Times* clearly reveals the dilemma inside Smith. The former was written in secret, in a panic and with no control of mind, “...only imperfectly aware of what he was setting down” (1984, 11). It is the text of a man trying to find another view of life beyond that of the apparatchik’s discourse, hence the rambling, seemingly all encompassing nature of the text. It is, however, not a purely objective statement. Smith selected as his topic the events in the cinema and he chose to record the audience reaction to the fat man and the "prole" woman. He may have not been “perfectly aware” but he was aware in some sense. As Ricoeur has pointed out in his work on historical writing, selection of

documents, events and so forth constitutes a subjective element in the work of the historian.<sup>297</sup> By taking out a number of events and recording them in his diary, Smith was creating a discourse. This does not discredit the text, for despite its subjectivism it is seeking to explore reality outside the confines of the party's *idem*. By contrast the newspaper text, calculated in its nature and designed to cover Big Brother's error, is an excellent example of the apparatchik's discourse as it seeks to uphold the state's discourse as correct in people's minds. He actively creates a false text to cover another so that people will not view Big Brother in a negative light.

Orwell's novel best shows in naked form the method and thinking behind the apparatchik's discourse. Smith's composition is paralleled by O'Brien's torture and conversations with Smith later in the novel. O'Brien does not berate Smith, asserting over and over again that the party is right, instead he engages in a tricky discussion about the nature of truth and reality. He quotes the party's slogan: "Who controls the past controls the future; who controls the present controls the past" (*1984*, 204). Ricoeur pointed out that the past is never uniform due to the disruptive effects of time on human memory. The only permanence that can be found in human memory comes from character traits that provide "uninterrupted continuity".<sup>298</sup> O'Brien and the party understand this well. The apparatchik's discourse here is both fixed and flexible to meet Ricoeur's argument. The details, names, places, wars and so forth are not important and change with each writer, each revised version of the *Times* and if they are lost the party loses nothing. The party allows "reality" to change constantly but the key point remains: Big Brother and the party are never wrong and they never fail and that they will take care of everything. The

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<sup>297</sup> Ricoeur, *L'Histoire et Vérité*, (Paris: Éditions du Seuil, 1955), 25-26.

<sup>298</sup> Ricoeur, *Soi-même comme un autre*, 142.

state's main discourse is the uninterrupted continuity and all of its ramifications constantly bombard the people of Oceania. It doesn't matter that the details seem to change or that what Big Brother said last week seems to contradict what he says this week. Since the party controls all information, it alone can ensure the "uninterrupted continuity" that Ricoeur saw as being victimized by time's effect on the human mind. It is the continuity of Big Brother and the party and nothing else.

Smith, while under torture, tries to challenge this continuity, this construct, by using empirical knowledge of the details to reveal the party's claim as a lie. O'Brien, however, is not moved. He shows Smith a photo of three party members, Jones, Aaronson, and Rutherford, who were tried for treachery against the party and executed. The photo, however, shows proof of the three's innocence. After showing the photo, O'Brien commits it to flames down the memory hole. Smith argues that it did exist; he saw it and so he knows that those three were innocent of the charges brought against them. O'Brien counters, "I do not remember it" (1984, 204). This negative assertion demonstrates that empiric knowledge alone cannot refute the formulas of the apparatchik's discourse. It is true that he destroyed the photo, but the physical record is no better than Smith's own eyewitness testimony. The key lay in O'Brien's own response. He saw the photo; he produced the photo for Smith, yet he denies it, thus conforming to the discourse of the state, that Jones, Aaronson, and Rutherford are guilty of treason. Since Smith is relying on empiric knowledge, O'Brien can deny what he saw and there is nothing to challenge that, especially as Smith is under restraint. To illustrate further Smith's problem, O'Brien then holds up his hand showing four fingers. Repeatedly he asks Smith to tell him how many fingers he is holding up. Smith answers

four; it is what he sees, but O'Brien points out that if the party says there are five fingers, then five it is. Smith keeps countering that he sees four fingers and O'Brien responds by torturing his subject. Smith remarks, "How can I help seeing what is in front of my eyes? Two and two are four" (1984, 207). O'Brien responds saying that the number by itself does not matter. The trouble with Smith, according to O'Brien, is that he will not discipline his mind; he will not submit to the apparatchik's discourse as the arbiter of reality and truth (1984, 205). It would be better to argue that O'Brien is only partly correct. The trouble with Smith is that he does not see the power in discourse. To defeat O'Brien's formulas, his apparatchik's discourse, Smith needs his own discourse. As it stands he is merely recalling facts, but they do not challenge the party since the facts belong to no one and can be interpreted and twisted by anyone. Smith does not have his own vision, discourse. Serge's Ryjik, on the other hand, could damn his tormentors and say that one day a proletarian bullet will find their heads. This is a dissident's version of the apparatchik's discourse, that a true socialist revolution would overthrow the Stalinist clique. He does not catalog the errors or lies of the regime, but only says that it will fall too and that his tormentors will follow his footsteps. Smith cannot do this in his confrontation with O'Brien and as a result is quite vulnerable to the apparatchik's discourse.

Scholars have noted this problem in Orwell's character. In her essay on *1984*, "A Defense of Poesy (The Treatise of Julia)", Elaine Scarry, points out, in the guise of Julia, that Smith's main problem was his inability to understand the "counterfactual". By simply pointing out the factual, as he does to O'Brien, Smith is merely acting as a copymachine, repeating what we all see. "But just as primary as the factual reflex of the

mind is the counterfactual reflex; and while the factual keeps our thoughts stuck in this world, the counterfactual keeps us unstuck.”<sup>299</sup> This recalls Benveniste’s distinction between human and animal language. Bees could only communicate physical phenomenon in the natural world.<sup>300</sup> Smith is also confining himself to empiric reality. The counterfactual, on the other hand, underlines the mechanism that allows speculation and imagination to interact with the factual. It creates alternatives and also allows facts to be separated and penetrated.<sup>301</sup> Oceania suppresses not only the factual, but also the counterfactual. One could argue that Smith could never have a chance to respond to the party, as Ryjik did to his, because of the pervasive nature of Oceania’s control. Smith had no history except in Oceania, unlike Ryjik who lived before and during the Russian Revolution. Thus he was not able to develop his counterfactual sense, his own constructs and ideology. Instead, O’Brien, who has his own counterfactual sense guided by the apparatchik’s discourse, is able to reconfigure reality as needed, including turning Jones, Aaronson, and Rutherford into traitors. Scarry’s notion of the counterfactual recalls Ricoeur’s concept of character. The *ipse* part of character’s identity resembles the counterfactual in that one can shape their identity with their own imagination, their own discourse. For Ricoeur, the *idem* of society also shaping one’s identity balances this. Smith cannot appreciate the counterfactual, but is there another dissident in Oceania who does?

Julia challenges the party’s control in a completely different way and counterbalances Smith. Unlike Smith’s cerebral approach to rebellion, Julia’s rebels in

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<sup>299</sup> Elaine Scarry, “A Defense of Poesy (The Treatise of Julia)”, in *On Nineteen Eighty-Four: Orwell and our Future*, (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2005), 14.

<sup>300</sup> Benveniste, 61.

<sup>301</sup> Scarry, 17.

her sex life. As with many other aspects of life, the party also has discourse of and control over sex. “The aim of the Party was not merely to prevent men and women from forming loyal ties which it might not be able to control. Its real undeclared purpose was to remove all pleasure from the sexual act. Not love so much as eroticism was the enemy, inside marriage as well as outside it” (1984, 57). Love is a state of mind, which the party can interpret or gloss over, as it wants. It can seem honorable, treacherous, or heroic. Sexual intercourse itself is another matter. It is an *ipse* like event, singular and very basic and it does not need much in terms of re-interpretation. Moreover eroticism, as a primal instinct seemed the one thing that could defeat the apparatchik’s discourse on a consistent basis. Hence the party's aim was "... to kill the sex instinct, or, if it could not be killed, then to distort it and dirty it” (1984, 57). Julia embodies this sexual instinct that the party wishes to suppress, just as Smith represents the empirical world that the party tries to shut out.

While Smith opposes the state’s attempt to control reality as a whole, Julia’s challenge is smaller and more focused: she challenges the attempt to control basic instincts. Like Smith, she lives a double life. She appears to be a good party member, wears the sash of the Junior Anti-Sex League, and attends meetings, volunteers for work. She also secretly buys chocolate on the black market and engages in promiscuous sex with lower level party members. She sees herself as a rebel, but does not challenge the state openly. She calls herself “corrupt” and this seems to thrill Smith when they have their first sexual encounter (1984, 104-105). In Patai’s view Julia herself is just another Orwell stereotype, “...that of the apolitical, private-minded, egocentric female.”<sup>302</sup> This would of course indicate that her sex is not rebellion. Smith, however does see it as

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<sup>302</sup> Patai, 241.

rebellion against the party, "...the animal instinct, the simple undifferentiated desire; that was the force that would tear the party to pieces" (1984, 105). The sex was an individual act that could not be easily reinterpreted into some discourse. Julia has her own reality, outside the party, and she brings Smith to it, but she is no revolutionary herself and she does not think about the ramifications of what she does or why. While she can select good points of rendezvous for their sex, she cannot envision this as a step toward overthrowing the state or completely escaping it. She simply exploits its weakness and tries to circumvent it rather than fighting it.<sup>303</sup> The two are in essence trying to reclaim their humanity, which is subversive, from the party's point of view, but is not rebellion.<sup>304</sup>

Julia is simply living the life similar in some aspects to the "proles", who make up almost eighty percent of Oceania's population. They live apart from party members in slums; they work, have families, and can drink, have sex and live a life more basic but less restricted than party members. Still they are exploited by the party and do most of the manual labor in Oceania. Smith's description of the "proles" is hardly flattering. They are politically quiet and pose no trouble to the party. He sees them as useless for overthrowing the current regime. The "dangerous" ones are usually picked up by the Thought Police and besides their complaints are always on specific grievances, never the whole situation. In true Leninist fashion, Smith derides their lack of ideological consciousness, "Until they become conscious they will never rebel, and until after they have rebelled they cannot become conscious" (1984, 61). This self-defeating statement epitomizes the whole of 1984. Much like the animals on Jones' farm, the "proles", who

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<sup>303</sup> Meyer, *Reader's Guide*, 284.

<sup>304</sup> Woodcock, 69.

are the only ones with the manpower capable of overthrowing Big Brother, need a revolutionary discourse injected into them from the outside. This is the only way that they would rebel and break the vicious circle described by Smith. This is the Leninist formula we saw in *Animal Farm*. Old Major and the other pigs provided the discourse, the ideology that turned the cows' rebellion over not being fed into a revolution driving Jones from the farm. In Oceania, there is no old Major or Snowball to do this. As we saw earlier, Smith, despite his criticism of the "proles" has no concept of discourse either, beyond his knowledge of the party line. Neither he nor Julia is able to imagine something different from the current situation. However, that reality does not make them any less dangerous to the party, so they are eventually picked up by the Thought Police.

Some critics have seen in Orwell's Julia and the "proles" examples of Orwell's own prejudices. Beatrix Campbell, for example, attacks Orwell for portraying the working class in both *Animal Farm* and *1984* as a non-thinking one. In her view, Orwell's views are those of a "...self-confessed snob."<sup>305</sup> She compares the "prole" washer woman that Smith meets with Boxer from *Animal Farm*, "all brawn...no brain."<sup>306</sup> The fact that Julia also seems non-thinking and lives like a "prole" when she is not posing as a zealous party member brings out the charge of misogyny as well.<sup>307</sup> For Patai, all of Orwell's female characters are depicted primarily by negative traits that only advertise his view of women.<sup>308</sup> In truth, Julia is the only party member we get to know well besides Smith. The only other major character of the novel, O'Brien, represents the party and Big Brother, while other characters like Mrs. Parsons or Smith's friend Syme

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<sup>305</sup> Beatrix Campbell, "Orwell – Paterfamilias or Big Brother?", in *Inside the Myth, Orwell: Views from the Left*, (London: Lawrence & Wishart, 1984), 127.

<sup>306</sup> Campbell, 132.

<sup>307</sup> Newsinger, 47.

<sup>308</sup> Patai, 242.



serve plot functions, the former to illustrate the horrific effects the party has had on children, the latter to serve as an exposition on Newspeak.<sup>309</sup> As with *Burmese Days* and *Animal Farm*, only a few characters are fleshed out while the rest inhabit the background. Whether or not these characterizations are functions of Orwell's dislike of women or poor people is irrelevant to our discussion. *1984* is another demonstration of an almost Leninist belief in the need for leadership to provide ideology, yet an inability to see how to construct a discourse that can be used for revolution. Orwell illustrates this vicious circle with one of the most radical features of Oceania, the attempt to supplant the English language with Newspeak.

Early in the novel, Smith has a lunchtime discussion with his friend Syme who works in the Research Department. He and other experts are working on the Eleventh Edition of the Newspeak Dictionary (*1984*, 43). It is here that the text portrays another form of tyranny by the party, that over language. Syme says, "We're getting the language into its final shape – the shape it's going to have when nobody speaks anything else... You think, I dare say, that our chief job is inventing new words. But not a bit of it! We're destroying words – scores of them, hundreds of them, everyday" (*1984*, 45). Syme goes on to describe in detail some of this destruction. Two categories slated to go are synonyms and antonyms. Syme explains:

After all, what justification is there for a word which is simply the opposite of some other words? A word contains its opposite in itself. Take 'good,' for instance. If you have a word like 'good', what need is there for a word like 'bad'? 'Ungood' will do just as well – better, because it's an exact opposite, which the other is not (*1984*, 45-46).

Newspeak sprang from Orwell's own disgust and protest at the "debasement" English underwent at the hands of propagandists who were in his view, "... always insincere and

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<sup>309</sup> Newsinger, 9.

exploiting people's fears, grudges, and neurosis.”<sup>310</sup> With its large vocabulary and relatively simple grammatical structure and syntax, English was vulnerable to bad use and being turned into jargon or office-speak. Steinhoff thinks that the B.B.C.'s news bulletins in “cablese” might have been a source for Newspeak.<sup>311</sup> At first glance this might seem an example of the apparatchik's discourse, changing the language to reflect the party's thinking and thereby excluding any other form of thought. After all, Newspeak seemed aimed at making the practice of doublethink into a conditioned reflex. The lack of true dualities, as evidenced by Syme's enthusiasm for replacing ‘bad’ with ‘ungood’, would restrict a person to simply validating the party's point of view.<sup>312</sup> A person would be left simply with the party's view ‘good’ or no view ‘ungood’. But Syme and his colleagues seem more interested in the future than in the present.

Syme makes a prediction that by the year 2050 “Oldspeak”, the current manner of English used by most people in Oceania, will be obsolete. In that year he boasts, no one could understand the conversation he now is having with Smith (*1984*, 47). Newspeak, in Syme's view, seems to look past a need for the apparatchik's discourse. Since the discourse tries to refute reality in favor of the state's discourse, it works in the very shades of meaning provided by an abundance of words, including many words Syme wishes to eliminate. By reducing language to a jargon that simply parrots the state's discourse and leaves no other alternative, the apparatchik would not have to use circumlocution or rewrite a person or situation, utilizing words for obscurity or subtlety,

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<sup>310</sup> Steinhoff, 167.

<sup>311</sup> Cablese was a form of discourse used by language reporters when they send cables to their newspapers, Steinhoff, 169.

<sup>312</sup> Philip G. Zimbardo, “Mind Control in Orwell's *1984*: Fictional Concepts Become Operational Realities in Jim Jones' Jungle Experiment”, in *On 1984: Orwell and our Future*, (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2005). See also Steinhoff, 166.

in order to conform to the party's *idem*. Philippe Barbaud called it a regressive form of Esperanto that would gradually incarnate the power of Big Brother into everyday language of the ordinary people.<sup>313</sup> The total number of words is reduced and those that survive have only one meaning. "All ambiguities and shades of meaning had been purged from them. So far as it could be achieved, a Newspeak word...was simply a staccato sound expressing *one* clearly understood concept" (1984, 247). Words that express intangible or debatable concepts are even more restricted to one certain meaning. For example, 'liberty' becomes 'crimethink' and 'rationality' becomes 'oldthink'.<sup>314</sup> Thus the language itself is locked on the state's discourse and there would be no way of expressing an alternative except to deny it. For example, you could say that Big Brother is good or 'plusgood' or 'doubleplusgood'. This just confirms the party's view. If you disagreed, you would have to say that Big Brother is 'ungood' which, as Syme pointed out, is the opposite of good. You would either have to support the party position or directly oppose it, which of course would condemn that person. An appeal for liberty from Big Brother would just be 'crimethink', and, thus, one is immediately targeted. There would be no need for the kind of manipulation we have seen with the apparatchik's discourse. At this point one would imagine the whole of Oceania would either be partisans of Big Brother or on the run or dead, since you could no longer hide in language.

Smith tries timidly to disagree with Syme's claims. He argues that the proles will not be speaking Newspeak. Syme dismisses the argument, "The proles are not human beings" (1984, 47). This seems to settle the argument for Smith, who does not want to

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<sup>313</sup> Philippe Barbaud, "La fiction orwellienne de la langue ou la robotisation du langage", in *Orwell a-t-il vu Juste?: Une analyse sociopsychologique de 1984*, (Québec: Presses de l'Université du Québec, 1986), 73.

<sup>314</sup> Zimbardo, 132.

appear to be unorthodox, but it does point out the unreality of Syme's notion. Perhaps the text is making a gesture towards the hubris in Syme's claims, but given the disparaging attitude that Smith manifested toward the proles earlier it is hard to say. Interestingly enough, Stalin himself, an analog for Big Brother, argues against such a drastic change in language in such a short period of time. In a question on whether language was just part of the cultural, political, religious "superstructure" of an economic base, Stalin argues that language is much more grounded. He says that despite the Russian revolution the Russian language is largely the same.<sup>315</sup> The issue of the "proles" is significant in Stalin's reasoning, since a language must serve all levels of society, as it is the most important "means of intercourse" in human society. Syme tries to exclude the "proles", just like the people in the cinema who disregarded the prole woman. Syme seems to disregard everyone but himself. As a language expert he sees himself as the one to direct language's course, an attitude, which Smith notices, will one day ensure his disappearance. Stalin argues that language is a product of centuries of development, through various economic bases and their social superstructures. Words may drop out and new ones may come in, but the society at large and not a team of experts make the decision. After all, despite over one hundred years, wars and a major revolution, the Russian language had not changed much from that of Pushkin.<sup>316</sup>

Newspeak seems to be an example of Leninism as Smith's own earlier mentioned comments about the "proles". While Smith did mention them as a possible challenge to Syme's linguistic dystopia, he later, as we saw, sees no hope in them as an agent of change. While Newspeak does seem like an unreal dream, even perhaps to Orwell, its

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<sup>315</sup> Stalin, 9.

<sup>316</sup> Stalin, 10-12.

inclusion is significant. As Newspeak eliminates all the shades of meaning and changes the definitions of so many words reducing them to one meaning alone, not only does the apparatchik's discourse become obsolete but so does discourse itself. It is another example of the text, through the character Syme, disregarding Scarry's "counterfactual" ability. We have already noticed that Orwell's texts show ideology as merely a tool of the oppressor in his works. The one exception that of the P.O.U.M., in *Homage to Catalonia* is ridiculed and only looks better compared to that of the Communists (*HTC*, 63). Against the apparatchik's discourse his characters, including Smith use reason and empiric evidence, and in the end they fail. Thus reason and empiric evidence appear to be no better than the apparatchik's discourse, which itself will become obsolete by 2050. If Syme is correct in his forecast, what does this say about the party's ideology and its relation to both party members and "proles"?

One could dismiss Syme as an eccentric, but one cannot dismiss the essential message of *1984*. Ideology and the apparatchik's discourse is merely a tool for those in power who wish to deny the world around them. Moreover, their lies and distortions are powerless without the apparatus of state terror. The threat of Newspeak, however, pales before the torture that O'Brien administers to Smith, in the earlier discussion on the number of fingers that O'Brien was holding up. Whenever Smith answered "four", which was objectively correct, O'Brien would turn a dial and cause pain to race through Smith's body. Later Smith capitulates and says, "I don't know" to the question; then, a needle slides into his arm and administers an analgesic, which removes the pain (*1984*, 207-208). It is O'Brien's torture apparatus and his willingness to use it that settles the argument between the state's discourse and Smith's empiricism. Later, after he has been

broken, O'Brien brings Smith to the infamous Room 101, where supposedly the "worst thing in the world lay". This is Smith's last experience with torture. This one, however, is uniquely geared to terrify Smith. As O'Brien explains, "The worst thing in the world...varies from individual to individual. It may be burial alive, or death by fire, or by drowning, or by impalement, or fifty other deaths. There are cases where it is some quite trivial thing, not even fatal" (1984, 233). O'Brien must use an empiric reality that is specific to Smith. Smith's fear, in this case of rats, is an *ipse*, a fact peculiar to him alone and something that distinguishes him from all others who have visited Room 101. Again we see the factual, objective power in the hands of O'Brien, driving the objective believing Smith into the party's world of unreality. When O'Brien asks Smith, "How does one man assert his power over another...", Smith can only answer, "By making him suffer" (1984, 219). For O'Brien, pain and suffering are essentials along with obedience. He tells Smith, "If you want a picture of the future, imagine a boot stamping on a human face-forever" (1984, 220).

O'Brien explained the party's method of ruling minds via doublethink, he is now explaining what the party wants to do with the power it has. As Issac Deutscher has remarked, the supreme motivation for power in the novel is not economic exploitation, but simply "power hunger, sadism, and hardness."<sup>317</sup> Power for O'Brien seems totally negative and destructive, "Power is tearing human minds to pieces and putting them together again in new shapes of your own choosing...A world of fear and treachery and torment, a world of trampling and being trampled upon" (1984, 220). There is nothing in the speech to indicate that O'Brien sees all the torture, state terror and so forth as a means to a greater good, simply the pursuit of power and further degeneration of the world.

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<sup>317</sup> Deutscher, 41.

Orwell's description of his power lust seems like a throwback to the denunciations we saw in the texts of Ammianus and Diderot. In both writers eunuchs and freedmen are described as being driven by an inhuman greed. Never did either author give a reason for this trait. The result was a one-dimensional portrayal that did not seem credible. This same effect occurs in the case of O'Brien. One might speculate that this is a statement about the nature of totalitarians, that at their root there is simply a lust for power, but what about the O'Brien's ideology and the apparatchik's discourse? It seems easy to dismiss his statements as hyperbole and sadism and Orwell's own misguided understanding of the minds of totalitarians. It is more instructive to compare O'Brien's ideology and vision with another totalitarian from Victor Serge's novel, *L'affaire Toulaév*.

When O'Brien articulates the party's outlook and the virtues of power, he seems to be unconcerned about convincing Smith of the virtues of his position. In fact he is quite contemptuous of this victim and seems to rely more, as we have seen, on physical suffering, which he claims is the ultimate goal of the future. A contrast to this approach and attitude is found in *L'affaire Toulaév* where Ratchevsky, as we saw earlier, articulated the "theory of the plot" to the assembled N.K.V.D. people. The death of Toulaév caused a crisis in the minds of many party members. They needed an explanation to ensure that they remained in the party and continued to do their work. (*AT*, 806) The arrests and creation of a plot all point to the need to remind the apparatchiks that the revolution and the state are still legitimate. Ratchevsky's plot theory corresponds directly with Smith's rewriting of the article for the *Times*. The people of Oceania had to be reminded of Big Brother's legitimacy. Smith was ensuring good consciences, as was

Ratchevsky's plot. Neither is trying to convince someone that four upheld fingers are really five. The apparatchik's discourse does not address simple empiric matters. It tries to explain complex issues in a simple to understand form that corresponds to the prevailing discourse. Despite this, Ratchevsky's party still claims to be improving Russia and thus improving humankind. Even if Stalin is an avuncular mass murderer, there is no sense in Serge's novels that he saw himself as one and gloried in it as O'Brien does. In *S'il est minuit dans le siècle*, we saw Serge's Stalin as a victim of his own paranoia, an embattled defender of the socialist revolution (*SMS*, 602). He manipulates, crushes and so forth because he sees an abyss if he fails: the counter-revolution will win. There is in Serge's Stalin, something missing in Orwell's O'Brien, a sense of fallibility, fear, a man more out of control. The apparatchik's discourse was essential as the party could not always be successful and since counter-revolution was lurking behind every corner ready to take advantage of mistakes and errors. O'Brien's party does not appear to be under such pressure, and while the apparatchik's discourse appears earlier in the novel, in the torture chamber there is merely a contest of wills and power, which O'Brien is sure to win.

Smith, like Flory before him cannot win. All the material advantages lay with the oppressive society he is in and he has no resource elsewhere. As we saw earlier, he is the opposite of Serge's Ryjik, who, in *L'affaire Toulaév*, is able to wreck Ratchevsky's plot with his own suicide. But Ryjik had advantages that Smith never had. By contrast, Smith had just started to experience a reality outside that of party ideology, whether by writing down his own thoughts or having sex with Julia. He does try to be defiant and assume an ideological position superior to that to O'Brien. He argues that the party's goals are



unreachable and that they are contrary to the “spirit of Man”. This is the closest statement we have that Smith is developing a conscious discourse himself, to which he adds a defiant reply to O’Brien, “Yes, I consider myself superior” (1984, 222). O’Brien, however, counters by showing Smith himself in a mirror. After weeks of detention, torture and deprivation, he looks a shell of his former self and it shocks him. He breaks down sobbing and accuses O’Brien of bringing him to this state, but the torturer counters, “No, Winston [Smith], you reduced yourself to it. That is what you accepted when you set yourself against the Party. It was all contained in the first act. Nothing has happened that you did not foresee... We have beaten you. Winston [Smith]” (1984, 225). After this, Smith formally capitulates. The torture ends and his physical life does improve, but as O’Brien tells him, “In the end we shall shoot you” (1984, 226). Smith’s fate is similar to that of Flory, who is driven to suicide over the shame of his affair with Ma Hla May being made known to Elizabeth Lackersteen. Smith’s shame is in his body and later in his betrayal of Julia, in order to avoid the rats in Room 101. In both cases, seemingly omnipotent villains, U Po Kyin or O’Brien, use the unique *ipse* like qualities of the characters against them. The ideas that the main characters represent go by the wayside and their own selves are assaulted and destroyed.

As O’Brien noted, Smith knew what to expect once he decided to break the rules. Nothing did happen that he could not have foreseen. In spite of all the propaganda and apparatchik’s discourse, Smith knew the reality of the regime long before he took up his pen or met Julia. He knew that his stories were fakes designed to make Big Brother look good. He knew Syme well enough to know that he was doomed to be vaporized by the party because of his obvious intelligence and attitude. He knew to hoard his razor blades

and other small items because there was always a shortage of one or other such item at any given time. Smith knew Oceania as well as Flory knew Burma. More importantly in his own work he supported the party, Big Brother and the whole apparatus of Oceania. It would then be a mistake to think of Smith as some autonomous thinker struggling against the state. Neither he nor Flory truly act against the regimes they profess to hate, nor do they propose any sort of alternative, and in the end, they support that which they profess to despise. Whether as a writer for the *Times*, or as a heretic who has surrendered to the party, Smith will show his love for Big Brother. Ideology does not matter; Smith merely operates out of his own logic and observation. There is no ideal, just the “reality” that he sees.

#### ORWELL AND THE APPARATCHIK’S DISCOURSE: A SUMMARY

Critics hostile to Orwell have seen in his novels and their characters an unrelenting refusal to consider the role of discourse in politics and human affairs in general. The “objective” standpoint, they argue, is false. All persons operate out of a discourse, which gives but the illusion of independence and at the same time inserts oneself into an established social order. In the case of Orwell’s characters, a man like Flory or Smith is merely acting out a role predetermined for them by the society’s ideology.<sup>318</sup> There is some merit to this argument, especially in regards to the apparatchik’s discourse. It is clear that Orwell himself recognizes the discourse. In both *Burmese Days* and *1984* we see, through the narrator’s comments and from the characters themselves a frightening look at how the apparatchik’s discourse can be used to destroy a person’s identity and life. Both Flory and Smith are examples of this. Furthermore, the texts show a large gulf between the regime’s discourse and the reality of the situation.

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<sup>318</sup> Norris, 246.

Orwell in fact was very aware of the role of ideology in political discourse and human affairs. The problem is that he viewed it completely from a negative end.

Orwell cannot see the apparatchik's discourse as a means for good. Unlike Serge's characters or Diderot's Seneca, Flory and Smith cannot challenge a tyranny or see another potential future beyond it. Although they and the narrator criticize, they do nothing themselves to change things and in fact often retain some of the attitudes of the hated discourse. Flory keeps Burmese servants and a concubine, whom he treats as a sex object. Smith writes false stories for the newspaper and is contemptuous of the "proles". Thus, alongside the criticism of the regime and its discourse is a recognition of its power and the inability of ever changing it. Orwell's novels thus attack and maintain the status quo at the same time.

One could argue thus that Orwell himself, in the end, was trapped by ideology in his refusal to embrace it. He grew up a privileged lad, went to Eton and then to Burma and then decided to abandon that life and become a writer instead. In Ricoeur's theory this would constitute an innovation, a break in habit towards the creation of a new *ispe* and *idem*. However, in leaving the old life and its ideology, Orwell did not embrace a new discourse to match the new identity. In *Homage to Catalonia*, for example, the ideology of the P.O.U.M. appears unacceptable, and in the end the narrator only sympathizes with them because of their plight. Throughout the work, he praises the sensibility of the Communist program although he would later denounce them for their lies and distortions. Thus Orwell could really accept none of discourses from the Spanish Civil War, leaving his audience only his criticism and praise of the Communists on one hand, and his mourning for the P.O.U.M. on the other. It is no wonder that both

supporters and opponents of Communism could find the book valuable. Perhaps Orwell was not ever able to break from the ideology of his upbringing and his life in Burma. In *Burmese Days*, we read that the power of racist colonialism ultimately rested on British military power. Orwell could never overlook the logic of the big guns, or the deep pockets. Despite his opposition to what he saw, he could not escape “objective” power of might making right. Thus in all of his works we see criticism alongside the inevitable victory of the regime at hand, be it colonialism or Stalinism. While Orwell himself may have escaped from Burma or Spain, none of his characters will. Orwell’s discourse is that of Thucydides’s Melian dialogue. Characters like Flory and Smith avoid a worse fate and benefit their oppressors in the bargain by submitting.<sup>319</sup> Orwell does not like this seeming inevitability, but he certainly cannot see a way around it, and unlike Serge or Diderot, he will not entertain other ideologies. In Orwell’s view, other ideologies appear to lack the power to become a reality.

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<sup>319</sup> Thucydides, V, 93 in *Readings in Ancient History*, Nels M. Bailkey ed., (Lexington: D.C. Heath and Company, 1987), 187.

## CHAPTER 6: SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

Political discourse is a fact of daily life. The apparatchik's discourse allows the institution's discourse to systematize the state's discourse for the society. The four authors presented, Victor Serge, Ammianus Marcellinus, Denis Diderot, and George Orwell, have detailed the apparatchik's discourse and are thus invaluable guides in determining where the discourse moves from fact to fantasy in its use of jargon, nomenclature, asymmetrical speaking roles and most commonly, formulas. Marx's model of the speculative construct is similar to the formulas of the apparatchik's discourse, but our authors have also shown that sometimes this discourse does rely on some fact as well as fantasy. Reading these authors does give us a rule of thumb: more detail usually means more fact in a discourse. Ammianus' history of the Silvanus affair, Diderot's detailed description of Seneca's youth and education, and Orwell's description and analysis of the events of May 1937 in Barcelona, and the press reports of those events that followed are all good examples of discourses that are based primarily on fact. These expose other discourses based more on fantasy. This comes across best in works of Serge. In all three novels we have studied we see in detail the degeneration of the Bolshevik discourse from one of necessity in the middle of present hardship and the promise of future reward to one of a grotesque cult of personality, which ascribes God-like attributes to the party at large and Stalin in particular. More and more in the text, the formulas of the party's discourse retreat further from reality as the party itself seems to retreat from its original revolutionary goals.

The collapse of a revolutionary dream is not the only baleful consequence that occurs when the apparatchik's discourse turns more to fantasy than fact. The collapse of

an individual's identity becomes a tragedy in miniature to the larger one in the whole country. To this day there are those who believe that Leon Trotsky was a traitor to the Soviet Union, though they may have stopped thinking that he was in the pay of both Hitler and Hirohito.<sup>320</sup> Throughout both *S'il est minuit dans le siècle* and *L'affaire Toulaév*, the reduction of many individuals' self-identity in favor of the state's label is common. Kostrov and Erchov were just two examples examined here. The same thing happens also to Smith in *1984* where he is tortured and stripped of his own critical view of Big Brother and is turned into a reformed character, a cipher of the state. Most remarkable about this is that the reduction appears driven by the need of the party, whether in Oceania or the Soviet Union, to cover up its apparent fallibility. In *L'affaire Toulaév*, for example, there was apparently much consternation and fear among the cadres after news of Toulaév's murder came to light. Ratchevsky's plot theory indicated that several arrests, confessions and executions were needed to reassure the consciences of these rank-in-file party members that the murder was not due to any fault of the state, but because it was under siege by the forces of counter-revolution. That people's identity, not to mention lives, would be sacrificed to bolster the state's legitimacy seems chilling, but it appears in the other works as well. The Silvanus affair, for example, shows that Dynamius was able to turn him instantly from a loyal general to a rebellious rogue. What makes the whole episode more horrible is that Ammianus completes the character assassination by fabricating a story of Silvanus actually rebelling in order to make his hero, Ursicinus, look good. Both Ammianus and Diderot, in addition to describing the apparatchik's discourse also used it as a polemical device to reduce their enemies in turn.

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<sup>320</sup> Both examples come from the press of the Progressive Labor Party, a Stalinist party that is still active today in the U.S. See "Lessons of the People's War in Spain 1936-1939" *Progressive Labor* 9 (1974): 106-116 and "Trotsky: Just Another Right-Winger" *PL Magazine* (1974), 25-35.

Constantius and his eunuchs, or Claudius and his freedmen become targets for denunciation and ridicule. Their respective courtiers fare no better. To this day, the reductive barbs of these two authors who could not afford to be honest with their own perceived villains, shape the identities of these two emperors.<sup>321</sup>

The apparatchik's discourse can be a weapon in political warfare. Ammianus and Diderot freely used it. Serge, on the other hand, saw another role, one that was more positive, a means to inspire rather than mislead. This is in fact a continuation from the discourse of necessity we saw in *Ville Conquise* carried into the later two novels as the state's discourse goes further and further into a fantasy. As a member of the Left opposition, who was deported and jailed throughout Russia in the 1930s, Serge was no doubt impressed with the ability of these left Communists, oppositionists and anarchists to continue the struggle while incarcerated, believing that a genuine revolution would sweep away the Stalinist regime. This is the apparatchik's discourse, which informs the dissidents in Tchernaya and later allows Ryjik to hold his own against the Zvéréva. This version of the discourse seems as fantastic as that of the Stalinists, but not only does it enable resistance to tyranny, it also does not try to mislead but inspire and educate for the promise of a better future. Such a belief also underlines Diderot's portrayal of Seneca at Nero's court. This discourse of necessity, or of sacrifice, portrays Seneca as giving five good years to Rome. Diderot hoped that it would inspire future generations on the need for "good men" that will replace the corrupt rule of monarchies. The American Revolution seemed to indicate, to Diderot, that this promise would come true. That this promise, like that of the oppositionists in Stalin's jails, did not materialize does not discredit the discourse, though it may be the reason that Orwell, by contrast, saw no

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<sup>321</sup> For the standard view of Constantius, see Jones 116. For the traditional view of Claudius, see Starr, 576.

positive benefit from the use of discourse. In his works, the apparatchik's discourse is always a means of his evil communication that reduces people and brings corruption and tyranny, whether in colonial Burma, Republican Spain, or in some future nightmare world like Oceania. His heroes, who struggle with these tyrannies, armed only with their own logic and observations are helpless before the all powerful discourse, not to mention the physical power, of the state they inhabit. Discourse then becomes in Orwell's literary world, another means of tyranny. It does not offer a hope of liberation.

Whether positive or negative, the apparatchik's discourse remains a part of political discourse in our society. Given the range in time among the authors in this study, it appears that it has been in our political discourse for centuries. The works of Serge, Ammianus, Diderot, and Orwell are testimonies to the presence, activity, and effect of the apparatchik's discourse. From the authors above, readers can learn to discern more when reading, watching, or hearing political discourse. The apparatchik's discourse in any text will always point to a marriage of the state's discourse with that of its institutions. This is because, as was stated above, the apparatchik's discourse is the systematization of political discourse to create a worldview, regardless of the manner used to support it. Above all the apparatchik's discourse should remind us that the challenge of finding objective truth in political discourse lies within ourselves as hearers and readers of political discourse.



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