"Down with the Racist Pig Power Structure"– Aspects of Populist Rhetoric in Eldridge Cleaver's *Post-Prison Writings and Speeches*

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Yhdysvalloissa 1960-luvun jälkimmäinen puolisko oli suurten yhteiskunnallisten ja poliittisten mullistusten aikaa. Ensin väestöä jakoi suhtautuminen rotuerotteluun ja sen lopettamiseen, ja myöhemmin Vietnamin sota, jonka epäsuosio vain kasvoi 1960-luvun loppua kohti. Konservatiivit vastustivat heidän mielestään liian nopeasti ja liian pitkälle meneviä yhteiskunnallisia uudistuksia, kun taas radikaalit olisivat halunneet uudistuksia mahdollisimman nopeasti. Kansalaisoikeus- ja sodanvastaisen liikkeen kohtaama vastustus järjestäytyneen yhteiskunnan taholta (poliisiväkivalta kyynelkaasuineen ja pamppuineen) osaltaan myös varmasti johti kahtiajaon syvenemiseen ja yhteiskunnallisten aktivistien radikalisoitumiseen. Näille radikaaleille ei riittänyt jo olemassa olevan syrjintää estävän lainsäädännön toteutuminen ja noudattaminen, vaan he halusivat enemmän ja pidemmälle menevää muutosta.

Tämä on se yhteiskunnallinen konteksti, jossa Eldridge Cleaver (1935-1998) tuli tunnetuksi, kun hänen kirjansa *Soul on Ice* (suom. *Sielu jäässä*) julkaistiin vuonna 1968. Myyntimenestykseksi osoittautuneen teoksen ilmestyessä Cleaver oli ehdonalaisessa ja toimi Mustat Pantterit -puolueen tiedotusministerinä, kunnes joutui lähtemään maanpakoon myöhemmin samana vuonna. Tässä pro gradussa käsitellään Cleaverin seuraavaa kirjaa *Post-Prison Writings and Speeches* (suom. *Musta pantteri*), joka ilmestyi vuonna 1969. Alkuperäiskielisen nimensä mukaisesti kirja sisältää Cleaverin kirjoituksia ja puheita, joissa pääasiassa kritisoidaan Cleaverin ja hänen puolueensa poliittisia vastustajia. Tässä pro gradussa tutkitaan ja analysoidaan Cleaverin retoriikkaa näissä teksteissä, keskittyen kahteen pääasiaan: 1. Miten Cleaver konstruoi ja esittää Mustien panttereiden viholliset retoriikassaan? 2. Miten Cleaver turvautuu populistisen retoriikan keinoihin teksteissään?

Eldridge Cleaver oli ensisijaisesti populisti poliitikko, joka pyrki käännyttämään niin mustia vähänkoulutettuja ghettoasukkaita kuin yliopistokampusten valkoisia radikaaleja osallistumaan Mustien panttereiden johtamaan vallankumoukselliseen luokkataisteluun ”rasistista, sikojen [=poliisi] valtarakennetta” vastaan. Olipa Cleaver täysin tosissaan tai ei, niin joka tapauksessa hän oli vähemmistön ääni, toisinajattelija, joka vaati yhteiskunnallista muutosta ja sai huomattavasti mediajulkisuutta omaperäisillä lausunnoillaan. Cleaverin retoriikalle ominaista olivat erilaiset puhetavat. Hänen kirjoituksensa ja puheensa sisältävät samanaikaisesti uskottavaa argumentaatiota, populistisia yksinkertaistuksia, sekä poliittisiin vastustajiin kohdistuvia pilkallisia hyökkäyksiä ja suoranaista uhkailua. Cleaver oli lukenut mies, mutta käytti puheissaan usein puhekieltä ja etenkin kirosanoja sanomaansa tehostaakseen. Hän tarjosi monimutkaisiin asioihin yksinkertaisia ratkaisuja, ja pyrki tekemään naurunalaiseksi ne, jotka eivät olleet hänen kanssaan samaa mieltä. Cleaver maalasi mustavalkoisia viholliskuvia ja uhkaili sisällissodalla ja tuomiopäivällä, mikäli Mustien panttereiden vaatimuksiin ei suostuttaisi. Asioiden yksinkertaistaminen ja vaihtoehdottomuus, tyyliin ”joko olet puolellamme tai meitä vastaan”, oli Cleaverille tyypillistä.

Avainsanat: Eldridge Cleaver, Mustat Pantterit, vastarintakirjallisuus, populistinen retoriikka.

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1. Eldridge Cleaver – The Minister of Information

The latter half of the 1960's was a time of great political and social upheaval not only in the United States of America, but all over the Western world. While the Civil Rights Movement was advancing in the US, the Vietnam War was growing increasingly unpopular, leading to widespread opposition and protest against it. The year 1968 was the most tumultuous of the decade: for instance, in the US, Martin Luther King Jr. and Robert Kennedy were assassinated, and the anti-war demonstrators and the police clashed at the Democratic National Convention in Chicago. In Europe, students rioted in Paris, and Soviet tanks rolled into Czechoslovakia. The social unrest and national disunity in the US reached a boiling point when the Civil Rights and Anti-War Movements were met with conservative resistance and repression. The conservatives' response paved the way for more radical groups and movements who were seeking more thorough changes in society than the extension of civil rights to apply to all Americans.

This is briefly the context in which Eldridge Cleaver (1935-1998), a former convict and a prominent Black Panther, became widely known as a writer in the US. A collection of his essays written in prison, *Soul On Ice*, was published and became a bestseller in 1968, selling two million copies by 1992. Instead of *Soul on Ice*, however, this thesis concentrates on his subsequent book, *Post-Prison Writings and Speeches,* published in 1969. During the course of this thesis, I will analyze and examine Cleaver's rhetoric in the said book, concentrating on two main issues: 1. How are Cleaver and the Panthers' enemies, both the white majority and the ethnic rivals of the same African American background, constructed and subsequently represented in Cleaver's rhetoric? 2. How does Cleaver resort to populist rhetoric in his text?

In order to help the reader fully understand and appraise the contents of *Post-Prison Writings and Speeches*, I will shed some light on the events of 1967-1968, which are the

crucial context of the book. In addition, I will cover Cleaver's personal background and how he embarked on a literary career.

Eldridge Cleaver had been in and out of correctional facilities for minor infractions since the age of twelve, but in 1958 he was sentenced to one to fourteen years for rape, and subsequently served nine years of his sentence before he was granted parole.[1] Much in a similar vein as Malcolm X before and George Jackson after him, Cleaver used his incarceration to his advantage by reading and writing extensively, thus making up for an earlier lack of education.[2] Cleaver's parole was made possible when his white female lawyer, Beverly Axelrod, smuggled some of his writings out of prison and had them published in the liberal/leftist, San Francisco-based *Ramparts* Magazine. The publication of these writings and the subsequent job offer as a staff writer, along with a book contract, then enabled Cleaver to obtain parole in 1966. After his release, Cleaver not only worked at *Ramparts*, but also established and directed the Black House, a meeting place for the black artist community in San Francisco where, among other things, poetry readings took place. Through both *Ramparts* and the Black House, Cleaver came into contact with the revolutionary nationalist Black Panther Party for Self-Defense ("for Self-Defense" was later dropped from the Party's title), which had been formed in the fall of 1966 in Oakland by Huey P. Newton (1942-1989), Secretary of Defense, and Bobby Seale (1937-), the Party Chairman. At the time, the Party consisted mainly of its two founding members, along with a loose band of ten to twenty of their friends. In April 1967 Cleaver joined the Party and was named Minister of Information. In this capacity, he started editing the Party newspaper, with the first issue of the weekly published paper seeing the light of day that same month.[3]

[1] Scheer, pp. vii-ix.
[2] For further information on Malcolm X and George Jackson, see *The Autobiography of Malcolm X* (1965), and *Soledad Brother: The Prison Writings of George Jackson* (1970).
[3] Scheer, pp. ix-xiv; Pinkney, pp. 99-101.

When *Soul on Ice* came out in February 1968, Cleaver was considerably busy in his capacity as the Minister of Information of the Black Panther Party, his time consumed mostly between speaking engagements, editing the Party Newspaper, and, perhaps most importantly, organizing the "Free Huey!" campaign, the objective of which was to obtain the best possible legal defense for the Panther leader Huey P. Newton, who had been imprisoned and indicted for the murder of a police officer in October 1967. Cleaver organized huge rallies, arranged coalitions with groups of white radicals, and succeeded in enlisting various wealthy white, liberal supporters to aid Newton's cause. All these activities along with the added publicity contributed to the growth of the Party, and by June 1969, there were forty-two BPP[4] chapters around the US.[5] The actual Party membership never exceeded 5000, but the Party Newspaper reached a circulation of 125 000 copies per week by 1970.[6] In conclusion, Cleaver was not only instrumental in formulating and articulating the ideology and platform of the Black Panther Party, but he was the *de facto* leader of the Party from Huey Newton's imprisonment in October 1967 to his self-imposed exile in November 1968 (Cleaver returned to the US in 1975).

In Cleaver's absence, the *Ramparts* editor-in-chief, Robert Scheer, compiled Cleaver's magazine articles, public speeches and a *Playboy* interview into a book which was released in January 1969 under the appropriate title of *Post-Prison Writings and Speeches*. The fact that the book was edited by someone other than the writer/speaker himself is perhaps of minor significance: if anything Scheer, as Cleaver's employer and friend, had a stake in the book, and naturally wanted to present Cleaver in a favorable light, to advance his career and see him do well. (In fact, isn't that the motivation behind any selection/anthology; to establish the author by presenting their best/most essential work?) Moreover, there is no way of knowing

[4] The abbreviation BPP will mainly be used from now on when referring to the Black Panther Party.
[5] O'Reilly, p. 298.
[6] Seale, p. 179.

whether Cleaver, although in exile, in fact participated in the selection of the texts for the book, given the personal relationship he had with Scheer.

The earliest piece in the book is a *Ramparts* article dating from January 1967, and the latest a public speech given just five days before November 27, 1968, the date set for Cleaver's return to jail. During the period between 1967 and November 1968, Cleaver's life basically revolved around little else than the BPP in particular and the black liberation struggle in general. In fact, Scheer, in his introduction to *Post-Prison Writings and Speeches*, states that, "Cleaver's politics so dominated his two years of freedom that his printed works must be judged as polemics, with the critical stress placed upon the concepts advanced rather than on literary style. He wrote these pieces to meet specific political problems; they were written on the run."[7] In other words, Cleaver's writings and speeches had a political agenda, they were rhetoric which was meant to persuade and influence people. When Scheer asks the reader to place the critical stress "upon the concepts advanced rather than on literary style", he seems to be saying that the end justifies the means, or that Cleaver's righteous political goals should make up for any possible lapse of literary eloquence. In the light of Scheer's statement, I will now seek definitions as to which literary genre Cleaver's *Post-Prison Writings and Speeches* possibly belongs, and how it relates to, and can be seen in comparison with, other literary works of similar nature.

Scheer described Cleaver's *Post-Prison Writings and Speeches* as "polemics…written on the run." In fact, if *Soul on Ice* had been written in prison, much of the contents of its follow-up were spoken, addressed to audiences by a soon-to-be fugitive. Another significant difference is the fact that *Soul on Ice* had been written by a private individual, whereas the majority of its follow-up consists of political rhetoric spoken and written by a public persona representing the Black Panther Party and its objectives. Thus this book is full of political rhetoric which warrants closer inspection and study: who is the rhetoric aimed at, how are the

[7] Scheer, p. xxix.

enemies and opponents constructed and represented, and what are its stylistic traits? These are questions that this thesis attempts to answer.

Post-Prison Writings and Speeches also contains a few autobiographical qualities, for it is typical of Cleaver to refer to his own experiences as well as to history in general to explain the current situation. In fact, similar approach was employed by others beside Cleaver in a genre which might be loosely termed "Panther literature" or "Panther autobiography". This genre can be generally divided into two phases. First there are the original, contemporary, polemic books published in the late 1960's and early 1970's by Cleaver, Bobby Seale, George Jackson and Huey P. Newton, all of which are highly political and practically portray the BPP as righteous freedom fighters hell bent on achieving social, political and economic justice for the oppressed black minority by any means necessary.[8] Behind these books, in addition to their propaganda value, also lies the added twist that book contracts and consequent royalties helped the BPP to obtain much needed funds. Second, there are the later memoirs and autobiographies of former Panthers such as David Hilliard, Elaine Brown, Assata Shakur, Geronimo Pratt, and Earl Anthony, all of which appeared in the 1990's. The biggest difference between these two phases is that the first books were written and published to further a common cause, i.e. they represented a collective interest of the Party, whereas the latter ones from the 1990's are more personal and reflective accounts which represent a mainly subjective interest. The books in the latter category help balance the picture by revealing a wealth of new, and sometimes even critical, information on the workings of the Party, as well as people that were involved in the "struggle".

What is common to these two waves of Panther literature is the fact that only Cleaver's *Soul on Ice* is included in the African American canon presented in the *Norton Anthology of African American Literature* (1996). This is all the more interesting considering that the

[8] See Cleaver (1968, 1969), Seale (1970), Jackson (1970, 1971), Newton (1972, 1973). Both of Newton's books are out of print and hard to find, but much of their content can be found in *Black Panthers Speak* by Foner (Ed.) 2002 [1970]), and *Huey Newton Reader* (Hilliard & Weise 2002).

anthology is not by any means limited to highbrow fiction, but, on the contrary, contains a significant amount of oral tradition, lyrics, autobiography, and slave narratives. In this light, the fact that Cleaver receives minimal coverage, and the likes of Huey P. Newton and George Jackson are not covered at all, despite the publicity and healthy sales they enjoyed in the early 1970's, is nothing short of bewildering. While the books in question may not be examples of the highest imaginable literary accomplishment, they are nevertheless autobiographical, political narratives which, for better or for worse, represent the era in which they were written, and as such should be viewed as important cultural and historical documents – just like the slave narratives of the 19th century. If this comparison seems farfetched, I would like to argue in favor of at least some similarities. First of all, both narratives were politically motivated: the publication of slave narratives helped spread anti-slavery sentiment and obtain funds for the abolitionists, whereas the Panthers welcomed book-deals as an opportunity to introduce their politics to the general public, tell the Panthers' side of the story (as opposed to the mainstream media onslaught directed against them), and raise badly needed funds for the Party. In addition, although the status of the African American minority in the US today can hardly be viewed as analogous to slavery, they are still undoubtedly in a position of a disadvantaged minority (and were even more so in the 1960's), a situation which can be quite convincingly explained and argued by their peculiar history.[9] Finally, the Panther literature in general consists of autobiographical texts (by both sexes) in which the protagonists start to take action once they become aware of their roots and the history behind their current predicament – just like the slave narratives.

I can think of two possible explanations as to why the black critics have ignored Panther narratives; either they dismiss them as populist, embarrassing, outdated Leftist nonsense, or view them as too recent to be included in the present canon. Perhaps these narratives in fact

[9] For instance, see Feagin (2001), or Franklin (1988).

are too recent, and their historical value will not be properly acknowledged until later when there will be more perspective.

In addition, Cleaver's later exploits have undoubtedly contributed to what can be seen as a mixed legacy. First, in 1970, the BPP split into two factions, one led by the Party's founder and theorist, Huey P. Newton, and the other by Cleaver. As a result Cleaver, clearly at a disadvantage to start with since he was staying overseas at Algiers at the time, mainly lost the subsequent public relations war to Newton and his cohorts who did their best to smear Cleaver's reputation. Thus a former revolutionary hero became a traitor overnight when Newton declared him an "enemy of the people" in the very same Party newspaper Cleaver had been in charge of only a couple of years earlier. Among other things, in the following years Cleaver was labeled as a no-good rapist, wife-beater, criminal thug, militant lunatic and a coward.[10] Cleaver's popularity among his former followers and admirers did certainly not rise to new heights either when, in 1975, he returned to the US to face the criminal charges he had fled – this time as a born-again Christian.[11] Moreover, the late 1970's in the US was generally a time of disillusionment and disappointment for former radicals and revolutionaries, and the BPP was no exception. The Party slowly withered away and disbanded, leaving most former members with nothing to fall back on, with many of them seeking solace in alcohol and drugs.[12]

In addition to his conversion to Christianity, Cleaver also became a Republican and, in the 1980's, endorsed the very same Ronald Reagan whom he had some ten years earlier publicly challenged to a duel and threatened to "beat him to death with a marshmallow"(*Post* p. 133).[13] And as if that had not been enough, he also managed to get arrested for possession of crack

[10] Rout, pp. 150-155.
[11] Cleaver (1979), pp. 216-217.
[12] This is a common sentiment in the autobiographies of former Panthers.
[13] From this point onwards, *Post* and the corresponding page numbers will be used in parenthesis when referring to and quoting from *Post-Prison Writings and Speeches*.

cocaine during the same decade. When Cleaver passed away in 1998, he was employed as a lecturer and diversity consultant at LaVerne University in California.[14]

In my opinion, Cleaver's colorful personal history has definitely contributed to what I perceive to be his current status: a somewhat persona non grata, an embarrassment who has not been a subject of neither literary nor historical study since his early success and fame. After the critics' initial enthusiasm, Cleaver's voice has gradually been silenced by his work not having been granted much more than an occasional passing reference in black literature journals and anthologies over the years. Perhaps this unfortunate development owes more to the fact that most people want their heroes and leaders to be infallible super humans who simply cannot do wrong, rather than complex and irrational individuals whose views and ideals may change over time. Thus Cleaver's actions, and the subsequent disillusionment caused by them in some circles, may have overshadowed his abilities as a writer because of an inability – or reluctance – to separate the individual from their work.

Cleaver's fall from grace to obscurity is all the more interesting considering that he was a household name in the United States due to his commercial success and his role as the spokesman for the BPP, in which capacity he caused controversy with the outrageous, profane language of his public speeches. From a Scandinavian perspective, some interesting details concerning Cleaver and the BPP are worth mentioning. First, both *Soul on Ice* and *Post-Prison Writings and Speeches*, as well as Bobby Seale's book, *Seize the Time*, were translated into Finnish, Swedish and Danish, and biracial Black Panther Solidarity Committees were active in at least Denmark and Sweden. Second, because of the war in Vietnam, more than 400 American deserters and resisters (25 to 50% of them black) had found a safe haven in Sweden by June 1970. Third, in 1969, when Cleaver was already in exile, the BPP Chairman, Bobby Seale, and Minister of Education, Ray "Masai" Hewitt, visited Scandinavia on a

[14] <www.cnn.com/US/9805/01/cleaver.late.obit/>

lecture tour which included Finland.[15] The point I am trying to make with these examples is that both Eldridge Cleaver and the Black Panthers' fame and recognition – or notoriety, depending on one's point of view – was not limited to the US alone, but that they were in fact somewhat famous here in Scandinavia, too.

In my opinion, both *Soul on Ice* and *Post-Prison Writings and Speeches* are important cultural documents of the turbulent era of the late 1960's, regardless of whether or not one might perceive Cleaver favorably as an author – or as a person, for that matter. It is clear that Cleaver's writings and speeches were overtly political, powerful populist rhetoric, sometimes more or less outrageous and not always within the boundaries of good taste, but, nevertheless, often humorous and witty, and full of perceptive commentary. In chapters three and four of this thesis, I will examine and analyze how Cleaver's enemies, or simply the people and groups he did not agree with, are constructed and subsequently represented in Cleaver's rhetoric. In chapter four, I will concentrate on the populist and religious aspects of Cleaver's rhetoric. Before the actual textual analysis in chapters three and four, however, the theoretical framework of this thesis will be discussed in chapter two.

[15] Weisbord, pp. 480-482.

2. The Colonized and the Colonizer

In this chapter I will introduce and explain the key concepts, terms and theories applied in this thesis. I will also position myself further and argue why I consider Cleaver's rhetoric worth studying. In addition, I will discuss Frantz Fanon and Malcolm X's influence on Cleaver and the Black Panther Party.

2.1. Anti-colonialism, Resistance Literature, Discourse, and Social History

According to Robert J.C Young, Postcolonialism "seeks to combat the continuing, often covert, operation of an imperialist system of economic, political and cultural domination". In addition, he states that, "The global situation of social injustice demands postcolonial critique – from the position of its victims, not its perpetrators."[16] Although the black nationalists represent only a minority within a minority, and their goal of gaining independence from the USA does not seem realistic anytime soon, it can still nevertheless be argued that the African Americans as a whole have historically been victims of social injustice. Accordingly, black voices such as Cleaver's can be viewed as writing from the position of the victim; Cleaver and the BPP felt that they were on the receiving end of the economic, political and cultural domination of the WASP majority, and, consequently, they display a lot of characteristics in common with *post*colonial critique in their writing. No matter how colonized he might have felt in his own country, however, it is perhaps not adequate to consider Cleaver a postcolonial writer, at least not in a sense of, say, Frantz Fanon or Gayatri Spivak. Thus I will use the terms anti-colonial and anti-colonialism instead whenever I come across issues where Cleaver's output fulfills the criteria of Postcolonialism.

[16] Young, p. 58.

In addition, Cleaver's writing may be considered an example of *resistance literature*, a term used by Barbara Harlow in her book by the same title (1987). Harlow defines resistance literature as emerging within the national liberation movements in Africa, Latin America and Asia, and argues that since this 'resistance literature' has been excluded or ignored in the traditional, national literary studies, she intends to examine "certain representative aspects of that literature".[17] In a similar vein, this thesis on Cleaver is intended to examine certain aspects of Cleaver's rhetoric, mainly how his enemies are constructed and represented, and what kind of rhetoric devices he employs in his writing and speeches. When Harlow discusses Nigerian writer Chinua Achebe's most famous novel, *Things Fall Apart* (1958), she interprets the book to have a "clear" message, which is: "the language skills of rhetoric together with armed struggle are essential to an oppressed people's resistance to domination and oppression and to an organized liberation movement."[18] This of course sounds as if it were something Cleaver himself might have uttered; although it is arguable how serious Cleaver was in his push for armed revolution, he undoubtedly tried to convert and influence people by politically educating them as to who their enemies were.

In the light of everything mentioned above, I am aware of the fact that my approach is somewhat different from the traditional postcolonial practice of studying white, colonialist, imperialist works of literature to criticize and expose them for what they are; instead, I will be looking at how an anti-colonial author (someone writing from the position of a victim), Cleaver, constructed and portrayed what he considered his capitalist, imperialist class enemies. In that sense, I am going against the grain by trying to study and expose the possible strengths and weaknesses of Cleaver's rhetoric concerning his enemies and opponents: how solid and logical his argumentation is, and what can be said about the style and registers he

[17] Harlow, p. xv.
17 *Ibid*. p. xvi.

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employs in presenting his arguments. In addition, although the concept of "the other" is normally used to refer to the opposite of white, Western people and culture, I will study and show how Cleaver engages in a similar, but reversed practice of defining himself and the BPP by establishing the "racist pig power structure", i.e. the WASP capitalist, imperialist, racist mainstream culture, as their anti-thesis. Thus Cleaver presents this reversed 'other' as a huge, faceless, evil entity which will devour minorities and Third World countries in its insatiable capitalist greed.

In her book *Discourse* (1997), Sara Mills explains and elaborates her interpretations of Michel Foucault, and comes to the conclusion that reality is constructed in discourse; thus different people interpret different phenomena and events differently according to their world view and values. As a result, certain events or sequences of events are constructed into narratives which are later accepted and recognized by a particular culture as real or certain.[19] As real and certain as these events may in fact seem to those who first record and then remember them as they see fit, it is easy to overlook the fact that someone else might have a completely different point of view as to what is/was taking place. In the case of Cleaver and the Black Panthers, it is obvious and understandable that they did not agree with the type of US history which was recorded, interpreted and consolidated by first the 'Founding Fathers' (most of whom were slave owners) and later carried on by their descendants, likewise mostly white Anglo-Saxon males. This consolidation resulted in a historical narrative – not to mention a literary canon – which went largely unchallenged until the 1960's, and, as a result, may still in fact hold very much true to those who share the same WASP background and cultural values. As a descendant of slaves, however, Cleaver in his writings and speeches challenges, questions and attacks not only the aforesaid historical narrative, which had been imposed on him from above, but the whole 'racist pig power structure', something he sees as

[19] Mills, pp. 50-53

a plan masterminded to maintain an oppressive society where blacks and other minorities are systematically denied equal opportunities with the master race.

In conclusion, people's way of perceiving things, and, consequently, constructing them, depends on where they are coming from. Thus Cleaver and the BPP's rhetoric was very much a direct antithesis of the conservative WASP way of seeing things, and, as such, also had its far-reaching logic: if the US was nothing but a "racist pig power structure", all its enemies had to be benevolent, revolutionary, model states which were free of racism, police brutality and oppression. Accordingly, Cleaver and the BPP saw Cuba, Algeria, Vietnam, China, North Korea and any other Third World country opposed to US imperialism as their allies. This kind of black and white simplification where people are basically divided between progressives and reactionaries and there is no middle ground ("You're part of the problem, or you're part of the solution"…) was a regular feature in Cleaver and the BPP's rhetoric. As such, it is painfully close to the Manichean simplicity of separating and valuing people according to their skin color, a practice which Frantz Fanon discusses and criticizes thoroughly in his *Black Skin White Masks* (1952). Thus Cleaver and the BPP did not shy away from overt populism when it worked to their advantage.

Interestingly, the same kind of narrow-mindedness is apparent in the early feminism which refused to allow any variety in the female experience, insisting that all women should agree how they are equally and similarly oppressed, regardless of class, color, religion or sexual orientation.[20] The reason I bring this up is that obviously Cleaver carries out similar methods as the early feminists: he challenges the existing historical narrative and dominant discourse, the *normative order*, but, at the same time, is not very receptive to any different ways of perceiving things, mainly because his unwavering, fundamental sense of being right makes it impossible for him to do so. In other words, Cleaver sees himself as the spokesperson for basically everyone, even though he has no real mandate to act as such.

[20] Mills, p.86.

Historical narratives and discourses are of course human constructs, and while they may be imposed from above, not all subjects submit to them uncritically. Instead,

> Individual subjects are constantly weighing up their own perception of their own position in relation to these discursive norms against what they assume other individuals or groups perceive their position to be. In this way, the process of finding a position for oneself within discourse is never fully achieved, but is rather one of constantly evaluating and considering one's position and, inevitably, constantly shifting one's perception of one's position and the wider discourse as a whole.[21]

The point is that individuals are engaged in a dialogue with discourse (or different discursive structures, if you like); they comply with certain elements and actively oppose others.[22] In the case of Cleaver, he attacks what he sees as the oppressive system, the WASP dominated America and Western capitalism, but he is nevertheless a product of that same culture, a subject who employs the means and tools given to him by that very same oppressor. Although Cleaver was not as influential as say, Frantz Fanon or Ho Chi Minh, or Malcolm X for that matter, what he has in common with these other figures is that all of them received a Western education which enabled them to draw their conclusions, to make the political assessments and analyses which in turn led to their actions, whether writing, speaking or armed resistance. In conclusion, all these revolutionary figures adopted some forms and elements of the dominant discourse even though they simultaneously rejected or "actively opposed" others. Simply put, all the aforementioned figures used rhetoric which everyone with the same Western cultural background could understand.

Finally, discourse and discourse theory can be interpreted in various ways. Emile Benveniste defines discourse as:

> every utterance assuming a speaker and a hearer, and in the speaker, the intention of influencing the other in some way…It is every variety of oral discourse of every nature from trivial conversation to the most elaborate oration…but it is also the mass of writing that reproduces

[21] Dorothy Smith quoted in Mills, p. 97.
[22] Mills, p.85.

> oral discourse or that borrows its manner of expression and its purposes: correspondence, memoirs, plays, didactic works, in short, all genres in which someone addresses himself [sic] as the speaker, and organizes what he says in the category of person.[23]

Therefore discourse in itself can be basically anything, and Cleaver's rhetoric falls neatly into the category summed up by the above definition. To be more precise, however, it can be said that while Cleaver uses rhetoric to advance his and the BPP's cause, he simultaneously employs different discursive formations within his rhetoric. I will examine how Cleaver and the BPP's enemies are constructed, and, in addition, I will demonstrate features that his leftist populist rhetoric and the discursive formations inside it have in common with right wing conservative populism. Therefore I will later discuss Cleaver's rhetoric by comparing and contrasting it with some aspects of what Albert O. Hirschman presents in his book *The Rhetoric of Reaction* (1991), and Kenneth Burke in his essay *The Rhetoric of Hitler's "Battle"* (1939).[24] Interestingly, while Burke wrote his essay *before* Germany invaded Poland, it is still as valid an analysis of the reasons behind Hitler's success in the political arena as any that have been written since. Hirschman, on the other hand, covers and explains the main reactionary arguments against social change since the French Revolution.

Although social history in itself perhaps may have nothing to do with literary theory, I argue that its motives are very much the same as the ones used to justify multi-ethnic literary theory, and as such can be employed in the study of Cleaver's rhetoric: both social history and multi-ethnic literary theory aim at pluralism by giving voices to those who thus far have been overlooked, ignored or forgotten accidentally or on purpose. Thus the said approach may concentrate on ethnic, political, or sexual minorities, women, the marginalized and the different (criminals, prisoners, the sick), but it may just as well focus on the majority, the "ordinary" people and foot soldiers, and how their lives are affected by the decisions of the

[23] Emile Benveniste quoted in Mills, p. 5.
[24] The essay was first published in *The Southern Review* in 1939, and later as part of Burke's *The Philosophy of Literary Form* (1941).

ruling elites. The objective of presenting new points of view, however, is not a simplistic revisionism where everything is turned upside down and minorities, oppressed colonial or other subjects assume the status of heroes while the ruling elites are portrayed as cruel and inhuman monsters. Instead, giving voices to those who have not been heard before enables us to form a more balanced picture of any given historical event, period or phenomenon. As for the case at hand, Cleaver fits quite a few categories: on the one hand, he was a criminal, prisoner, dissident African American, but, on the other hand, he felt that if and when properly organized, the ethnic minorities together with the poor white working class and the wealthy liberals would surely constitute a majority which could overthrow the dominant "racist pig power structure" which he saw as the root of all evil.

And how does all this relate to English studies and this thesis? Perhaps it should be remembered how English studies came into being in the first place: in the 19th century Britain, the educational programs to civilize the masses were designated and overseen by aristocrats who wanted to win the middle and lower classes to their side by rooting in them a certain set of values. This process of establishing English studies in the academia also coincided with "the era of high imperialism in England."[25] In the spirit of the original English studies, literary canons continue to be decided upon and constructed by elites. Granted, the middle class White Anglo Saxon male -centered hold on both American literature and history has been challenged since the late 1960's by an increased emphasis on minorities and women, but, in the process, new exclusive literary elites have emerged. Not only has the American literary canon been gradually revised to include minority and female voices, but, in addition, a concept of African American literature as a separate entity from American literature has been created. A quite influential black literary canon was cemented when the *Norton Anthology of African American Literature* was published in 1996. In this colossal anthology (2776 pages), which includes 120 authors, Cleaver is granted nine pages which consist of a short biography

[25] Eagleton, p. 28.

and an excerpt from *Soul on Ice*. Thus Cleaver is a minority voice who, in my opinion, has been somewhat forgotten by not only the general public, but also by the African American literary intelligentsia. The latter, the ones who earn their living teaching Black/African American literature at American universities, are also naturally the ones who have compiled the African American canon found in the Norton anthology. This development presents an interesting contradiction: the black educated middle class seems to be after a cultural autonomy of sorts, or cultural segregation even, but, at the same time, they seem to be so integrated and content with their comfortable middle class lives in the academia that the likes of Eldridge Cleaver and other Black Panthers, populist leftist demagogues with their outdated revolutionary rhetoric, may seem too alien, perhaps even embarrassing, and, as such, are better left out. In fact, Cleaver's writings and speeches fit Barbara Harlow's definition of *resistance literature* in a sense that they are mainly ignored or excluded on purpose by the established literary circles. In addition, I would like to argue that Cleaver may also be seen as what Gayatri Spivak[26] has called a *subaltern*; an anti-colonial, dissident voice, who, in the case of Cleaver, did not agree with Martin Luther King and the nonviolent Civil Rights Movement – the ones who the establishment has since more or less accepted as the official, 'Black History Month'-figures of the 1960's struggle.

In conclusion, the aforementioned "double exclusion" of Cleaver by both the general public and the African American literary elite gives me all the more incentive to study Eldridge Cleaver's rhetoric in his *Post-Prison Writings and Speeches* from an anti-colonial, multi-ethnic/ social history perspective, as an example of *resistance literature*. I will approach Cleaver as a subaltern minority voice whose specific intention was to expose and overthrow what he considered the "racist pig power structure", an oppressive form of government which

[26] Spivak's article, "Can the subaltern speak?", can be found in *Colonial Discourse and Post-Colonial Theory* by Williams, Patrick and Chrisman, Laura (eds.). New York: Columbia University Press, 1994, pp. 66-111.

not only was exploiting minorities and workers at home, but which also, through its foreign policy, was standing in the way of Third World Liberation.

Finally, it must be noted that postcolonialism, discourse theory or any other schools or orientations advocate certain values just as much as the ideologies they attempt to criticize. Thus values and beliefs in themselves are human constructs which can be altered according to the needs of the status quo – or by anyone wanting to challenge it. Everyone has values and no-one is capable of being wholly objective. In the end the dominant values and beliefs are defined by the prevailing positions of power, namely by those who possess enough force to subdue others. Even our modern, Western societies, which are supposedly based on democratic and humane values, nevertheless would probably collapse and plunge into chaos without a justice system, police, prisons and armed forces to enforce and uphold those values. In other words, freedom and democracy are maintained and protected by coercive means.

2.2. Frantz Fanon and The Wretched of the Earth

Cleaver and the BPP considered the black community not only victims of social injustice, but a 'stolen people on a stolen land'; in Cleaver's view, blacks had been first stolen from Africa, then enslaved and colonized on foreign soil. Consequently, they were an oppressed *people* who should fight for their right to self-determination just like those of their Third World brethren who had either already liberated themselves from the yoke of colonialism and imperialism, or who were engaged in a struggle to do so. The most crucial influence which had led Cleaver to reach these conclusions was undoubtedly Frantz Fanon[27] (1925-1961), and especially his book *The Wretched of the Earth* (*Les damnés de la terre*), a treatise on colonial struggle for liberation which is based on the writer's experiences as he participated on the side of the Algerians in their struggle to win independence from France (1954-1962). The book is

[27] Fanon was born on the island of Martinique in the French West Indies, and educated in France. In the 1950's Fanon was assigned to Algeria where he worked as a hospital psychiatrist. Ultimately Fanon defected and joined the FLN (National Liberation Front, i.e. the Algerian rebels). He had finished writing *The Wretched of the Earth* shortly before he died of cancer in 1961.

perhaps most famous for its controversial stance of advocating violence as the best method to overthrow colonialism not only in Algeria, but in the whole of Africa, or in any colonized part of the world for that matter. Cleaver wrote a short review of *The Wretched of the Earth* which was published in *Ramparts* in January 1967 and later included in *Post Prison Writings and Speeches*, titled "Psychology: The Black Bible" (*Post* pp. 18-20). This is what Cleaver has to say about Fanon's book:

> What this book does is legitimize the revolutionary impulse to violence. It teaches colonial subjects that it is perfectly normal for them to want to rise up and cut off the heads of the slavemasters, that it is a way to achieve their manhood, and that they must oppose the oppressor in order to experience themselves as men. In the aftermath of Watts, and all the other uprisings that have set the ghettos of America ablaze, it is obvious that there is very little difference in the way oppressed people feel and react, whether they are oppressed in Algeria by the French, in Kenya by the British, in Angola by the Portuguese, or in Los Angeles by Yankee Doodle. (*Post* p. 20)

Thus, before joining the BPP (he did not join the Party until April), Cleaver had already adapted Fanon's decolonization theory (which Fanon developed mainly Africa in mind) to apply to the African American minority in the US. In the same review, Cleaver states that, "among the militants of the black liberation movement in America", *The Wretched of the Earth* was already known "as "the Bible."(*Post* p. 18). Cleaver felt that the divide and conquer politics employed by the colonizers in Africa were similarly used by the oppressor back in the US. In the review, Cleaver claims that the state of oppression itself gives rise to "an impulse to violence", which "develops in the collective unconscious", and results in "an uncontrollable desire" on the oppressed people's part "to kill their masters." (*Post* pp. 18-19). Cleaver goes on to explain how the oppressed are either not consciously aware of the reasons behind their impulse to violence, or scared to confront their more powerful masters even if they can correctly identify the oppressor as the reason for their predicament. As a result, the

violence turns inward and keeps the oppressed at each others' throats – which only makes it easier for the oppressors to continue to wield power over them.

Interestingly, this is what Richard Wright had already argued in his 1940 novel, *Native Son*, a piece of work which Cleaver discusses at length in *Soul on Ice*. It is no surprise that Cleaver identifies with Bigger Thomas since his personal history of crime and jail closely resemble the helpless and ignorant protagonist of Wright's novel, Bigger Thomas, someone whose only means of coping with the society around him is through violence. Wright was of the opinion that if the Bigger Thomases of America are not emancipated by means of education, equal opportunities and the eradication of racism, the American society as a whole will someday be facing more concentrated and disastrous violence instead of random criminal acts by individual perpetrators. It seems that Cleaver embraced Wright's argumentation and he thus willingly adapted Fanon's idea that the oppressed should organize and unify among themselves, and consequently direct the full force of their aggression and frustration against the oppressor.

Someone might disagree with the idea of violence as the way to 'achieve manhood', but, more than anything else, Fanon and Cleaver's shared view is only a reflection of the Western (and, in Cleaver's case, American) culture's traditionally violent values: from Imperial Rome to the United States of America, the representatives of Western Civilization have conquered and enslaved other peoples and cultures mostly by means of brute force (after which economic and cultural domination have followed), not to mention the centuries of fighting between the European nation-states themselves which most recently culminated in World War II. The point and the legacy of this development – well taken by both Fanon and Cleaver – is that the strongest, most ruthless, and most violent usually emerge as the winner. Moreover, anyone with even a passing interest in US history and culture must be aware how deeply violence is embedded in that nation's collective psyche.

In order to succeed in the struggle for liberation, Fanon considered it crucial to organize and politically educate the people he referred to as the *lumpenproletariat*: the starving peasants who had left the countryside for the shantytowns on the outskirts of urban centers in hope of a better life, only to find themselves forced to engage in petty crime, prostitution, and overall hustling to survive. According to Fanon, "the rebellion [would] find its urban spearhead" within this group who would constitute, "one of the most spontaneous and the most radically revolutionary forces of a colonized people." (*Post* p. 129). It is obvious that Cleaver and the BPP likened this *lumpenproletariat* to also refer to the American blacks who had migrated from the rural South to the industrial, urban North and West. Furthermore, Fanon argued that violence would rehabilitate the *lumpenproletariat* from the historical humiliation and submission at the mercy of the colonial masters.

Considering Fanon some kind of Pol Pot, however, would be way off the mark; although Fanon may have defined violence as a cleansing force and a way to restore self-respect, he also dedicated the last chapter of the book (titled "Colonial War and Mental Disorders*"*) to the negative psychological effects violence may have on both its victims and perpetrators. In addition, when Fanon states that colonialism is "violence in its natural state, and it will only yield when confronted with greater violence", he simply indicates that in order to successfully combat any oppression, the oppressed must use the tools and weapons of the oppressor since violence is the only language they understand.[28] Of course the distinction between freedom fighters and terrorists, the *legitimacy* of violence, is always defined by the prevailing dispositions of power. In other words, violence is good and justified when used by the colonial/imperial powers (France, Britain, USA), but evil when employed against them in attempts to gain national self-determination (Vietnam, Algeria, Ireland, Kenya, Cuba, Iraq).

On a smaller scale, Cleaver and the BPP also had to face reality from the position of the underdog: when the BPP called for the black community to arm themselves in self-defense,

[28] *The Wretched of the Earth*, p. 61

the US mainstream press immediately chose to portray the Panthers as violent, militant bigots, criminals and communists, although their "militancy" centered mostly on nothing more than extending the Constitutional rights to bear arms (and use them in self-defense if and when necessary) to apply to blacks. Thus the urban black community in the late 1960's was still practically being denied the same rights which had been self-evident to whites since the Declaration of Independence. In fact, any time the police carried out a raid on a Panther office, the press would emphasize the arrests made and the number of illegal weapons seized, but later, if and when it turned out that the charges had been dropped and the guns had been registered and legal, the press did not show similar enthusiasm. This is how a former New York Panther, Assata Shakur, describes the era: "Since we did not own the TV stations or newspapers, it was easy for the news media to portray us as monsters and terrorists. The police could terrorize the Black community daily, yet if one black person successfully defended himself or herself against a police attack, they were called terrorists."[29]

The Black Panther ideology, manifested in the party's Ten Point Platform and Program, applied Frantz Fanon's decolonization theory in a sense that Cleaver and the Panthers considered the African American population a separate black colony, "a stolen people held in a colonial status on a stolen land" (*Post* p. 61), trapped in the throes of a hostile, imperialist mother country, the United States. In fact, point number ten of the platform called for "a United Nations-supervised plebiscite to be held throughout the black community…for the purpose of determining the will of black people as to their national destiny."[30] Thus the BPP linked the struggle for black liberation in the US to all the anti-colonial Third World liberation movements, defining US imperialism as the common foe standing in the way of universal freedom.[31] Furthermore, Cleaver and the BPP adapted Fanon's concept of *lumpenproletariat*

[29] Shakur, pp. 222, 242.
[30] The BPP Ten Point Program and Platform can be found in its entirety at: <www.stanford.edu/group/blackpanthers/history.shtml>
[31] In hindsight, it is easy to criticize Cleaver and the Panthers for their blind admiration for China, North Korea, Cuba, Algeria and Vietnam, but, at the time, each one of these countries were examples of peoples' right to self-determination, and represented defiance and resistance to colonial masters and imperialism.

to apply to urban blacks. The BPP wanted to organize and politically educate “the brothers off the block”, the pimps, hustlers and small time criminals whom they saw as the potential revolutionary vanguard in the struggle for black liberation. Although it was this group of people that Cleaver’s rhetoric was mostly aimed at, on numerous occasions he also addressed white radical students on university campuses and at rallies held against the Vietnam War. He also enjoyed media celebrity because of the success of *Soul on Ice*, although that was short-lived because of his arrest and later exile.

Since at least Cleaver himself took seriously the idea of African Americans as colonial subjects fighting for decolonization, it is justified to say that he shares common characteristics with postcolonial authors. In the context of the US, however, it is perhaps more adequate to speak of anti-colonial or resistance literature, simply because the desired independence or autonomy has never materialized. Regardless of whether the positioning Cleaver adapted from Fanon can be seen as realistic or not, Cleaver was nevertheless a political voice which represented one faction of the black, oppressed minority in the US, and, in that sense, he was clearly writing and speaking from the position of the victim.

3. The Representation of Enemies

Perhaps the most common way to make sense of who we are is by defining who we are not, or who we do not want to be. Accordingly, Cleaver's categorization and definition of his and the BPP's enemies served the purpose of organizing and unifying the "lumpenproletariat" by rallying them against common foes. What Cleaver had also adapted from Fanon was the idea that ultimately any oppression was more a matter of class than color,[32] and, accordingly, Cleaver and the BPP had a long list of enemies who were not only restricted to what they saw as the white imperialist, capitalist power structure (including white well-meaning liberal Democrats), but which also included any ethnic rivals such as the black bourgeoisie who, much to the Panthers' dismay, also considered themselves spokespersons for the black community. In fact, of the black pressure groups and political movements, Cleaver disapproved of both the extremists (Nation of Islam, Cultural nationalists), as well as the Christian, non-violent reformists of the Civil Rights Movement (Martin Luther King and the Southern Christian Leadership Conference). In this chapter, I will look at how both the white "others" and the BPP's rivals in the black community are represented in Cleaver's rhetoric: how Cleaver constructs and defines his enemies, and what kind of terminology he employs in doing so.

3.1. "The Racist Pig Power Structure"

As the title of this thesis perhaps already implies, the biggest single enemy or the "other" in Cleaver's view was the monolithic 'racist pig power structure'. Even Cleaver and the Panthers' biggest single hero alongside Fanon, Malcolm X, had been content to refer to a "white power structure",[33] whereas Cleaver and the BPP took it up a notch and simply

[32] Fanon, pp. 148-205.
[33] Breitman, p. 46.

replaced "white" with "racist pig". This is just an example of how Cleaver and the BPP aimed to appeal to both people who had had little education, and, on the other hand, to white radicals and revolutionaries who seemed to show a liking for the "street credible", outrageous talk Cleaver often resorted to. In fact it was very typical of Cleaver to move between different registers according to the audience he was addressing (in both speeches and writing), and perhaps even more so when he himself got emotionally carried away. The most inflammatory examples of Cleaver's style in *Post-Prison Writings and Speeches* are "The Death of Martin Luther King: Requiem for Nonviolence" (pp. 73-79), "An Aside to Ronald Reagan" (pp. 108-112), and a speech[34](pp. 113-146) he held at Stanford University in October 1968, less than two months before he fled the country. A somewhat more articulate and thoughtful Cleaver comes across in both the affidavit he prepared for his own legal defense which opens *Post-Prison Writings and Speeches* ("Affidavit # 1: I Am 33 Years old", pp. 3-12), and the *Playboy* interview (pp. 163-211) which closes the book.

At the core of Cleaver's thinking was the idea of the US political system supposedly being run by a military-industrial complex for the protection of large corporations and their interests. What adds credibility to this notion and sets it apart from a mere conspiracy theory, is the fact that none other than president Dwight D. Eisenhower, upon leaving office in 1961, warned the nation of the increasing power of the "military-industrial complex".[35] To Cleaver and the BPP, the war in Vietnam, escalated and waged by the Johnson Administration, was ample proof of this development.[36] Furthermore, Cleaver saw the police as "the agents of the power structure" (*Post* p. 199) who were set out to systematically eradicate the BPP on both local and national level.

[34] According to Scheer, this speech was "typical" among the series of speeches Cleaver gave on California campuses at the time (*Post* p. 113).
[35] Schlesinger Jr., p. 534.
[36] Recently the idea of the significance of the military-industrial complex behind US foreign policy has been promoted by, for instance, Eugene Jarecki in his 2005 documentary *Why We Fight.*

One thing that appears repeatedly in Cleaver's rhetoric against the power structure is the idea of a reversed redemption where the sins or crimes of the oppressed underdog should somehow be redeemed, canceled out, or nullified by the far greater sins and crimes of the oppressor. Nowhere is this more evident than on occasions like the *Playboy* interview (*Post* p. 163) where Cleaver has to defend the BPP's demand that "all black men held in federal, state, county and city prisons and jails" should be released "because they have not received a fair and impartial trial" (point #8 of the Ten Point Program). Although it is hard to argue against the notion that many black inmates had not been judged by a jury of their peers, naturally the more logical solution to this injustice would have been granting them new, fair and impartial trials instead of simply liberating *all* black prisoners purely based on their skin color. When confronted with this in the *Playboy* interview, Cleaver replies as follows:

> All the social sciences–criminology, sociology, psychology, economics– point out that if you subject people to deprivation and inhuman living conditions, you can predict that they will rebel against those conditions. What we have in this country is a system organized against black people in such a way that many are forced to rebel and turn to forms of behavior that are called criminal in order to get the things they need to survive. Consider the basic contradiction here. You subject people to conditions that make rebellion inevitable and then you punish them for rebelling. Now, under those circumstances does the black convict owe a debt to society or does society owe a debt to the black convict? Since the social, economic and political system is so rigged against black people, we feel the burden of the indictment should rest on the system and not on us. Therefore, black people should not be confined in jails and prisons for rebelling against that system – even though the rebellion might express itself in some unfortunate ways. (*Post* pp. 179-180)

Thus Cleaver simply indicts the 'rigged' system as responsible for any possible criminal behavior, basically stating that the society owes more to the black convict than vice versa, that somehow the criminal nature of the system absolves any wrongdoing on the behalf of those who rebel against it. What is even more troubling, however, is Cleaver's way of considering *any* crime, be it rape, murder or incest for instance, as simply conscious or unconscious rebellion against the system. Accordingly, Cleaver reduces any possible crime as the rebellion

merely expressing itself "in some unfortunate ways". In other words, if the system is hideous enough, any kind of rebellion against it is acceptable. The idea of the end justifying the means is a common characteristic within any fundamentalist thought: if the objective is considered noble enough, the number of human casualties caused in the process of striving for it ceases to matter.[37] Next, when pressured further on the issue of the unconditional liberation of all black prisoners, Cleaver goes on to indict the then-President Lyndon B. Johnson for his active role in the war in Vietnam:

> We don't feel that there's any black man or any white man in any prison in this country who could be compared in terms of criminality with Lyndon Johnson. No mass murderer in any penitentiary in America or in any other country comes anywhere close to the thousands and thousands of deaths for which Johnson is responsible. (*Post* p. 180)

Although Cleaver's argument here is solid in a sense that Johnson clearly was responsible for more deaths than any "mass murderer in any penitentiary in America", it is hard to fathom why or how some mass murderer's (or rapist's, child molester's etc, take your pick) crimes – no matter what the skin color of the perpetrator – should somehow be absolved by the fact that someone else is responsible for even greater crimes. Cleaver's insistence that the bigger criminal, or the rigged system, absolves the small-time criminal is naïve and repetitive, especially when he seems to go back and forth between collective (the system) and individual (Johnson) responsibility: on the one hand, the rigged system/oppressive power structure is to be held responsible, while, on the other hand, he singles out Johnson as a mass murderer as if he and he alone were responsible for the policymaking which resulted in the escalation of the war in Vietnam. Besides the aforementioned 'reverse redemption', Cleaver argues that *any* criminal behavior on the blacks' behalf is always simply a reaction to white oppression.

In fact, it is hard to tell whether Cleaver always really believed what he said, or whether the pompous, hyperbolic, simplified, black and white rhetoric was more a means of calling

[37] Examples abound from the Russian Revolution to the recent US foreign policy of spreading democracy by force.

attention to and raising awareness on what Cleaver and the BPP considered important issues. Therefore it is more likely that the use of slogans and catchphrases served as rhetorical devices which, through constant repetition, made it possible for any potential convert to come to grips with the basic party line and program. Moreover, as I have stated earlier, Cleaver was in the habit of using different registers depending on who he was addressing; consequently, his choice of wording was probably different when facing a ghetto audience than it would be at an Ivy League campus such as Stanford.

At the core of Cleaver's dislike for the US political system was what he perceived to be its discriminatory nature; blacks had always been excluded or kept on the sidelines, as an oppressed minority, first as slaves and later as a cheap labor reserve who did not enjoy the same constitutional rights as the general population. Consequently, since Cleaver perceived the whole system to be to such an extent "rigged" against the blacks, it had to be overturned completely, preferably in a manner reminiscent of China, Cuba or Algeria.

3.2. "Degenerate Democrats"

Cleaver saw the Johnson Administration as well as Reagan, Nixon and the Republicans as racist, fascist warmongers, but he was not particularly impressed by the anti-war, liberal Democrats either. This sentiment becomes clear from "Robert Kennedy's Prison", a short piece written in May 1967 after Cleaver was witness to Robert F. Kennedy attending a hearing of social workers employed in the Johnson Administration's War on Poverty Program. Cleaver starts,

> Mounted on the tired back of that worthy steed, the War on Poverty, the fair-haired knight of the Liberal Round Table, Senator Robert F. Kennedy, swept through San Francisco today like a storm that doesn't exist. Watching him perform before his favorite audience, the class of social workers who have developed a vested interest in the existence of poverty, I sat in the press section of the Nourse Auditorium digging this cast. This was my first time ever seeing him in person and I was conscious of the millions of words that had gone to make up his

> image, and I felt sick in my stomach that I had waded through so many of the words written about him. (*Post* p. 21)

Typically of Cleaver, this short paragraph contains different registers, ridicule, sarcasm, and accusations, and it seems as if this reaction is at least to some extent fueled by disappointment and disillusion. First, Cleaver starts with a *Knights of the Round Table* parody of Kennedy, implying Senator Kennedy to be as real and effective in fighting the war on poverty as the imaginary King Arthur and his Knights of the Round Table were in liberating the oppressed masses of feudal England. Next, he takes a shot at the social workers, and, finally, mentions that he, "sat in the press section…digging this cast.", using contemporary colloquial lingo to finish the sentence. The fact that Cleaver admits he "had waded through so many of the words written about him" seems to imply that Cleaver had not always seen Mr. Kennedy in such a negative light. However, it is impossible to know whether it was this particular occasion which fueled Cleaver's resentment, or if he had already formed his negative opinion on Kennedy earlier. Behind Cleaver's critical attitude toward the Johnson Administration's War on Poverty Program was the fact that he saw it as just another handout, breadcrumbs from the master's table, as a quick-fix-solution which did nothing to correct the problems in the ghetto in the long-term. Cleaver thought that people in the ghetto needed jobs and education instead of welfare-checks, and that in its current form, the program was more helpful in creating more jobs for social workers than actually helping the inner-city poor.

Further in the article, Cleaver first compares Kennedy's face to those of the convicts he had seen in prison, and states that, just like the convicts, Kennedy seemed only to be doing what was "expedient for survival" (*Post* p. 22). To Cleaver, that had to be the reason for Kennedy's presence at the hearing since,

> why else would a young, intelligent man sit with a sometimes serious demeanor while a battalion of lackeys paraded before the committee to submit a bunch of bullshit statistics and reports couched in a gobbledygook that even they didn't understand. Rotten Republicans

> and degenerate Democrats, I thought to myself. There sits our Robin Hood, the hope of the poor. And how terrible is the situation of those in America with grievances against the functioning of the system. Our Robin Hood looked too greedy to be great, too white to be all right. (*Post* p. 22)

Thus Cleaver judges Robert Kennedy to be a fake, populist opportunist simply on the basis of his wealthy and privileged background. At the same time, Cleaver dismisses the social workers involved in the War on Poverty Program as "lackeys" whose efforts do not amount to more than "a bunch of bullshit statistics and reports couched in a gobbledygook". Although it may be reasonable to assume that Kennedy probably could not grasp what life was like for a black ghetto dweller, it is nevertheless equally dubious to label Kennedy as a greedy opportunist without any evidence to support that argument. The idea of Kennedy as "too white to be all right" is also somewhat ambiguous: does Cleaver mean that simply being white is enough to discredit Kennedy, or is "too white" more of a reference to his privileged background, his class position? Be it as it may, Cleaver constructs Kennedy as a class enemy through 'othering', by indicating that the combination of his wealth, privilege, and skin color are enough to strip Kennedy of any credibility as "the hope of the poor".

Interestingly, Cleaver's dismissal of the social workers and the whole program is not entirely different from the traditional right wing conservatives' approach to welfare. In his book *The Rhetoric of Reaction* (1991), Albert O. Hirschman has divided the arguments of conservative opposition to reform in three categories: perversity, futility, and jeopardy. Perversity argument states that well-meaning efforts to effect positive change will only result in the opposite of what was desired, making matters worse than they were before the supposedly corrective measures. The reasoning in the second category is that any reform is futile because everything is in its natural state and change is therefore unnecessary and artificial. Finally, the most serious of the three, the jeopardy thesis, claims that some attempts

at reform may even start a snowball effect which might place in jeopardy the whole of society and the way of life as we know it.[38]

Cleaver's stance closely resembles what Hirschman describes as the "perversity argument" in conservative rhetoric. According to this argument, any handouts (money and other social benefits) given to the poor and the unemployed, with the intention of helping them to move ahead and be productive members of the society, will result in the exact opposite of what is intended by making them lazy and content – instead of encouraging individual initiative and work as means to improve their socioeconomic status. At the same time, the bureaucracy needed to administer the distribution of social benefits will further increase government spending. Therefore the well-meaning welfare system will not only be harmful to the poor and unemployed it was supposed to help, but will also end up costing the tax-payers. In conclusion, spending on welfare programs will supposedly only make matters worse, a perverse effect as to what has been desired. Cleaver's use of the perversity thesis can also be explained in the sense that,

> It is perfectly suited for the ardent militant ready to do battle at high pitch against an ascendant or hitherto dominant movement of ideas and a praxis that have somehow become vulnerable. It also has a certain elementary sophistication and paradoxical quality that carry conviction for those who are in search of instant insights and utter certainties.[39]

Obviously Cleaver can be considered an "ardent militant" who attacks the white power structure, both Democrats and Republicans, due to their inability to solve social problems having to do with racial discrimination, poverty etc. It is impossible to know whether Cleaver himself wholeheartedly believes in his rhetoric, but there is no doubt that, throughout *Post-Prison Writings and Speeches*, he does offer his followers and potential converts "instant insights and utter certainties" in a populist fashion. Nowhere is this more evident than in

[38] Hirschman, pp. 11-132.
[39] *Ibid*. p. 43.

"Robert Kennedy's Prison", where Cleaver ends the article with a punch, saying, "We don't need a War on Poverty. What we need is a war on the rich." (*Post*, p. 22). Thus he turns the tables on Johnson administration's slogan (War on Poverty) and points the blame at the rich and privileged liberals whom he considers equally responsible for the oppression of minorities as the conservatives. Moreover, Cleaver criticizes social workers who supposedly have a "vested interest in the existence of poverty", indicating that welfare spending is more beneficial to those who find jobs administering and deciding over the funds than the actual poor who would receive them. According to Hirschman, this was in fact a common argument used by the conservatives against the social programs initiated during the Johnson Administration.[40]

Although Cleaver's views on welfare seem to be very similar to those of any conservative Republicans who make it a habit to oppose 'big government', Hirschman points out that there is a different motivation between radical and conservative opposition to reform. Whereas the conservatives may even genuinely believe that welfare spending results in a perverse effect, is futile, or even places everything in jeopardy, the radical opposition to reform has more to do with not even wanting to see the desired effects accomplished by moderate politics. In fact, if the moderate reform is successful, for most people it would render unnecessary the more thorough changes in society that are sought by the radicals; therefore, the radicals want immediate action, perhaps even a revolution, in order to implement what they see as the best form of government and society, and this turn has to be done when the opportunity presents itself, i.e. when the time is supposedly ripe for revolution.[41]

Cleaver and the BPP's stance was that the African American population had been exploited, abused, neglected and denied their Constitutional rights for so long that giving them equal rights and opportunities by enforcing the already existing legislation was simply

[40] *Ibid*. pp. 62-63.
[41] *Ibid*. p. 64.

too little too late. Instead of waiting for a couple of generations to possibly reach the same socioeconomic status that, for instance, various groups of European immigrants had achieved (after having been allowed to strive for it immediately after disembarking on Ellis Island), Cleaver and the BPP wanted compensation for slavery without any further ado.

As stated earlier, Cleaver ends "Robert Kennedy's Prison" by saying that, "We don't need a War on Poverty. What we need is a war on the rich."(*Post* p. 22). A catchy slogan is always an effective rhetorical device, and, in this case, 'war on the rich' is a prime example. What 'Black Power'(or, for that matter, *white power*), 'Power to the People', or 'war on the rich', have in common is that they are deliberately vague and open to interpretation, and as long as they remain so, everyone can interpret them as they see fit. Even when demands are simple and straightforward enough, such as, "We want land, bread, housing, education, clothing, justice and peace." (from the final point of the BPP Ten Point Program), there are no sub-clauses that would explain just how such demands should be realized. In her book on Cleaver (1991), Kathleen Rout discusses how vaguely socialistic his concepts and plans were; thus, 'Power to the People' basically meant that "everything" would be owned and operated by "all the people, who would somehow know how to run things and who would do it so well that all inequity, and therefore all criminal behavior, which was motivated purely by want, would end."[42] It is more than likely that Cleaver himself knew better, but the rhetoric had to be simple and black and white enough in order to be effective in converting the lumpenproletariat. Of course it is only natural that this would be the case; if the target audience has had little or no education, an attempt to win them over with discursive structures and terminology that are too far removed from their reality would most likely not be very successful.

[42] Rout, p. 43.

3.3. Nation of Islam and the Cultural Nationalists vs. Black Bourgeoisie and the Nonviolent Civil Rights Movement

Like most blacks in the US, Cleaver was born a Protestant, but, while in reform school at the age of fifteen, he had already flirted with Catholicism before he decided to become a Muslim in the early 1960's.[43] At that time Islam was not yet recognized as a religion by the California prison authorities, and accordingly Muslims did not enjoy the rights and privileges of worship which were granted to Catholic, Jew and Protestant prisoners.[44] Since the main reason for Cleaver's conversion to Islam had been the example set by Malcolm X, it is perhaps no great surprise that when Malcolm was first expelled from the Nation of Islam and later assassinated, Cleaver grew disillusioned with Elijah Muhammad and his version of Islam. Before analyzing Cleaver's views on the Nation of Islam, I will briefly introduce the movement itself.

The Nation of Islam was founded by Elijah Muhammad (1897-1975) who also invented the group's doctrine which differs significantly from orthodox Islam. Pinkney (1976) explains how, according to Elijah Muhammad, black people had come to being some 66 trillion years ago, whereas whites have only existed for 6000 years. Moreover, Elijah Muhammad reasoned that blacks were Allah's chosen people who find themselves at a temporary disadvantage because of the evil scheming of the white devils. However, Elijah Muhammad taught that, before the year 2000, Allah would appear and destroy whites and the Christian religion, leaving the chosen people, blacks, to run the world.[45] The Nation of Islam's program called for racial separation and demanded reparations for slavery from the US Government, as well as an allotment of land either on US soil or elsewhere for the purpose of establishing a sovereign Black Muslim nation.[46]

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[43] Cleaver (1968), p. 30.
[44] Smith, pp. 138-140. The Black Muslims' faith was not recognized as a religion until after the US District Court for the District of Columbia decision in the case of Fulwood v. Clemmer in 1962. For further information on the importance of the case, see <http://academic.scranton.edu/faculty/DAMMERH2/ency-religion.html|>.
[45] Pinkney, pp. 156-159.
[46] These demands have not changed over the years; the Nation of Islam still advocates racial separation and black nationalism. For further information, see <www.noi.org|>.

Despite Elijah Muhammad's hostility towards Christianity, it is evident that his vision was more than a little influenced by the familiar story of Moses leading the chosen people of Israelites to the Promised Land from the slavery of Egypt. In fact, probably any fundamentalist sect, whether Muslim or Judeo-Christian, promotes the idea of themselves as the chosen people who will be either elevated to heaven or given an opportunity to take over from the infidels and sinners who will perish when the Judgment Day comes.

In his article from February 1967, "The Decline of the Black Muslims" (*Post* pp. 13-17), Cleaver first recounts how the Muslims had initial success in converting convicts in the California prison system, and gives his reasons as to which factors led to what he considered their decline. As "the most obvious cause", Cleaver saw the following:

> In order to prod the reluctant potential converts into a speedy decision on whether or not to join, the Muslims used to spread the word that Allah would destroy North America "next year" and that only those blacks who were already members of the Nation of Islam would be saved. If you wait much longer, they taught, you just might find yourself roasting in the flames along with the exiled demons of Europa. But the years passed and Allah never made the scene. (*Post* p. 15)

These three sentences are quite typical of Cleaver's straightforward, sarcastic style. While he ridicules the Nation of Islam, he simultaneously conveniently ignores the fact that he too was one of those who once believed in their message. Even if Cleaver did in fact see the failure of Allah to "make the scene" as "the most obvious cause" for the Black Muslims' decline, he was clearly more hurt and disappointed because of the manner in which Malcolm X, whom Cleaver referred to as "the universal hero of black prisoners" (*Post* p. 15), had been treated by the Nation of Islam:

> Malcolm died at the hands of assassins dispatched from some dark corner of the kingdom of this world. But the onus of his death rests squarely on the shoulders of Elijah Muhammad and the princes of the Nation of Islam in the upper echelons of the hierarchy. There is no doubt that they engineered his ouster from power over the New York Mosque, which he had built up from the ground.

> To have paid so coldly one who had worked so hotly to get the Nation over the hump brought about a doom in confidence and turned every Mosque into a ruin haunted by the ghost of Malcolm X. In prisons he sits in judgment of every Muslim and his martyrdom is a chicken that has come home to roost wherever Black Muslims congregate. (*Post* p. 15)

What becomes clear to the reader is that Malcolm X is the "universal hero" elevated to martyrdom while Elijah Muhammad is the treacherous criminal clearly responsible for his death. In addition to E. Muhammad, Cleaver accuses "the princes of the upper echelons of the hierarchy", which is actually not significantly different from his later rhetoric against the "pig power structure". What is common to Cleaver's real or imagined enemies is that they are always some kind of treacherous usurpers at top positions who abuse power in a manner harmful to their subjects. Accordingly, Cleaver always sees himself writing or speaking on the behalf of the people, from below. Perhaps Cleaver was originally attracted to the Nation of Islam because of their black nationalism and defiance against the WASP majority, but, just like Malcolm X, Cleaver became disillusioned by the power struggles and E. Muhammad's failure to live up to his own moral standards (for instance, he reportedly fathered numerous children out of wedlock).[47]

I implied earlier that E. Muhammad's version of Islam owed to Moses and the Old Testament, and, in a similar manner, Cleaver seemed to employ features of religious discourse all the way through his conversions from Protestant to Catholic to Muslim to revolutionary atheist. For instance, here Cleaver's tone is full of Old Testament style vindictiveness: he talks of judgment and martyrdom, how the ghost of Malcolm will not only haunt the actual assassins, but all the Black Muslims who are thus deemed collectively guilty of the sin of murdering Malcolm. The "chickens coming home to roost" is of course wordplay and homage to Malcolm, who had created a controversy in 1963 using the same expression in reference to

[47] Haley, pp. 288-289, 295-297.

the assassination of John F. Kennedy. In fact, Elijah Muhammad used this controversy as an excuse to first suspend and later expel Malcolm X from the Nation of Islam.[48]

Further in the article, Cleaver also accuses the Black Muslims of not providing any legal assistance to their incarcerated members in their case against the California Department of Corrections, the objective of which was to win the inmates the right to practice their religion in California prisons. Cleaver chuckles at the irony of the Black Muslim inmates having to ask white ACLU[49] lawyers ("white devils") to represent them instead. In the closing paragraph, Cleaver concludes that,

> Nation of Islam is dead in prisons, and it would take a visit by Allah in person to revive it. What black inmates now look to with rising hopes is the cry for Black Power and an elaboration of its details in the name of Malcolm X. In this connection, the most popular books being read by black inmates in prisons today, Black Muslims and just plain old fed-up Negroes, are: *The Autobiography of Malcolm X*, *Malcolm X Speaks*, *Home* [LeRoi Jones], *Call the Keeper* [Nat Hentoff], *The Wretched of the Earth*, *Negroes with Guns* [Robert F. Williams], and *Che Guevara on Guerrilla Warfare* - none of which lead to Mecca. (*Post* p. 17)

It is easy to see that instead of being a careful analysis or an article which would at least pretend to contain any degree of objectivity, "The Decline of the Black Muslims" is more akin to an indictment of Elijah Muhammad and the Nation of Islam, based on Cleaver's personal disappointment. Furthermore, when Cleaver lists what are supposedly "the most popular books being read by black inmates in prisons today",[50] one may question whether Cleaver in fact refers more to himself than to the black prison populace.

The so-called cultural nationalists of the 1960's, led by Ron "Maulana" Karenga[51], were mostly educated, middle-class blacks who were in favor of what they considered African culture, insomuch that they preferred wearing traditional clothing and changing their Anglo

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[48] *Ibid*., p. 405.
[49] American Civil Liberties Union, founded in 1920. <www.aclu.org >
[50] For a discussion on these works listed by Cleaver, see Rout, pp. 49-54.
[51] Karenga is one of the leading afrocentrics in the US.

names to African ones. In fact, the cultural nationalists were perhaps a more highbrow version of Marcus Garvey's UNIA (Universal Negro Improvement Association) movement which had advocated a return to Africa in the 1920's. Female activists of the era, such as Angela Davis and Elaine Brown, tended to prefer the BPP over cultural nationalists because they were especially put off by the latter's arrogant male chauvinism.[52] Cleaver, Newton and Seale dismissed the cultural nationalists as elitists who were too far removed from the realities of black ghetto, and mostly ridiculed them. Although Cleaver does not refer to the cultural nationalists during the course of *Post-Prison Writings and Speeches*, they nevertheless deserve to be mentioned in this context since they were a serious rival of the BPP at the time. Interestingly, the animosity between the BPP and the cultural nationalists was clearly based on ideology: the cultural nationalists advocated black supremacy and did not approve of any coalitions or co-operation with whites in any form, whereas Cleaver and the BPP formed coalitions with white radicals once there was enough common political ground. Thus Cleaver and the BPP applied in practice Fanon's Marxist notion of oppression being more a matter of class than color.

Cleaver's dislike for the black bourgeoisie and the Civil Rights Movement was rooted in the very same Marxist ideology which set Cleaver and the BPP apart from the Nation of Islam and the cultural nationalists. The idea of class consciousness being more important than skin color or ethnicity was clearly adapted from Fanon. In a chapter titled "The Pitfalls of National Consciousness" in *The Wretched of the Earth*, Fanon discusses the role of bourgeoisie in a newly independent, decolonized state, warning of a development where the colonial masters are simply replaced by the new national bourgeoisie who fill the vacuum and reap the benefits formerly enjoyed by the colonizer. Fanon further criticizes the bourgeoisie for its reluctance to share its knowledge with masses to work for the common good of the nation. Instead, the new national bourgeoisie functions as an overseer for the former colonial master, and the

[52] Davis, pp. 159-160; Brown, pp. 114-116.

exploitation continues as before.[53] Accordingly, Cleaver felt that the black bourgeoisie "at the top" had done basically nothing to help improve the socioeconomic status of the black population as a whole. As early as 1903, W.E.B. DuBois[54] had proposed that the solution would be to educate ten per cent of blacks, the so-called talented tenth, who would then in turn help lift the rest of the blacks to the same socioeconomic status with the general population.[55] Obviously, to this day, this kind of development has not taken place. Interestingly, although on the one hand the number of African American millionaires in the fields of entertainment (sports, music, and the film industry) has steadily increased, this wealth has clearly not trickled down to benefit the majority of African Americans who still remain the poorest ethnic minority in the US.[56]

In addition to adapting a certain class consciousness from Fanon, Cleaver and the BPP did not believe in turning the other cheek, but advocated self-defense – by any means necessary – instead. Another very important argument propagated by Malcolm X was that every time whites joined a black organization, they also ended up running it and deciding over its policy. This was also the motive behind the SNCC's decision (which was not unanimous, however) to expulse its non-black members in 1967.[57] In conclusion, Cleaver and the BPP not only opposed and were critical of what they considered white involvement in – or even dominance of – the Nonviolent Civil Rights movement, but basically saw the black bourgeoisie as puppets, a tool employed by the white power structure to keep the black minority in check. At the same time, however, Cleaver and the BPP were not against coalitions or white involvement *per se*, they just believed that any possible co-operation should be carried out on

[53] Fanon, pp. 148-205.
[54] W.E.B. DuBois (1868-1963) was a founding member of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP), and edited its newspaper, *The Crisis*, from 1910 to 1934.
[55] Franklin, p. 249. DuBois's essay, *The Talented Tenth* (1903), can be found in its entirety at <www. http://teachingamericanhistory.org/library/index.asp?document=174>.
[56] Feagin (2001) argues that blacks, due to their peculiar history on American soil, have not been allowed to accumulate neither the monetary nor the cultural capital needed in order to rise to the same socioeconomic level with other ethnic groups.
[57] Carson, p. 241.

their own terms. Textual examples of Cleaver's criticism towards the black bourgeoisie will be analyzed in the following subchapter.

3.4. "The Land Question and Black Liberation"

This piece from April/May 1968 is a manifestation of Cleaver and the BPP's demands where the influence of Frantz Fanon's decolonization is clearly felt. Although once again an indictment which takes stabs at the real and imagined enemies of Cleaver and the BPP, as well as threatening the power structure with nothing less than civil war, it nevertheless contains well-argued historical analysis based on undisputed facts, while Cleaver covers the different ideas and historical approaches by black nationalists over the issues of land and liberation. Cleaver starts the article with what can only be described as an exemplary, straight to the point topic sentence:

> The first thing that has to be realized is that it is a reality when people say that there's a "black colony" and a "white mother country." Only if this distinction is borne clearly in mind is it possible to understand that there are two different sets of political dynamics now functioning in America.
> (*Post* p. 57)

Next, Cleaver explains what he sees as the "land hang-up" on the behalf of "Afro-America"; how his ancestors were brought to America as slaves to work the land that belonged to the slavemaster, without ever being able to enjoy any of the profits the land produced. Cleaver also sees the history of slavery as the reason why "one of the most provocative insults" to a black person is to refer to them as "a farm boy", thus implying that they are from a rural area and somehow attached to the land. He also claims that, accordingly, the black bourgeoisie "measure their own value according to the number of degrees they are away from the soil." (*Post* p. 58)

To further explain the "two different sets of political dynamics now functioning in America," Cleaver destroys the myth of Abraham Lincoln as the great emancipator by direct

quotes which leave no room for doubt as to how notoriously racist "honest Abe" in fact was. Among other things, Lincoln is on record saying how he never was "in favor of bringing about in any way the social and political equality of the white and black races", or "in favor of making voters or jurors of Negroes, nor of qualifying them to hold office, nor to intermarry with white people".[58] In short, Cleaver's main argument is that ever since the founding fathers[59], white America has always viewed black Americans as inferior and, as a result, "the average black man in America is schizoid on the question of his relationship to the nation as whole, and there is a side of him that feels only the vaguest, most halting, tentative and even fleeting kinship with America." (*Post* p. 58). According to Cleaver, this situation cannot be mended with civil rights legislation and subsequent integration; in fact, he claims that these measures were adapted by the federal government not because of any benevolence or goodwill on their part, but purely because it was in the power structure's best interest:

> The domestic conflict over segregation was creating for the imperialists problems on the international plane. As long as the conflict remained purely domestic, the imperialists never moved to solve the problem. But things finally reached the point where the nature of American imperialism was continually being exposed around the world because of the way black people were being treated here at "home." America's enemies missed no opportunity to point out the sham of U.S. foreign policy – the exportation of "democracy"– as evidenced by the fact that the U.S. had no democracy at home to export. (*Post* p. 59)

Thus Cleaver claims that any measures taken by the Johnson Administration to fight segregation and poverty are solely motivated by a need to polish the US image internationally. Although Cleaver's claim of the US not having "democracy at home" is a wild exaggeration, he is nevertheless right in his assessment of "the exportation of democracy" being a "sham of U.S. foreign policy". In retrospect, that exportation did not bear fruit in Vietnam, and it does

[58] Cleaver quotes Lincoln from Richard Hofstadter's influential book *The American Political Tradition: And the Men Who Made It.* (New York: Vintage Books, 1955.)

[59] Feagin (pp. 9-16) argues quite convincingly how most of the white male founding fathers who drafted the Constitution of the United States of America were either slaveholders or businessmen (merchants, bankers) who profited from the existence of slavery. Thus it is quite safe to assume that these same men never meant any constitutional rights to apply to no-one else but themselves.

not seem to be any more successful some forty years later in Iraq either. Further in the text, Cleaver explains the whole civil rights/integration movement as "a coalescence of interests and goals," a development whereby the white liberals, radicals and the black bourgeoisie were tricked to work "hand in glove with the imperialists" (*Post* p. 59) of the power structure. Obviously this kind of suspicion is rooted in Fanon: for Cleaver, all the groups mentioned either knowingly sell themselves to the power structure to further their class interests (=national bourgeoisie working hand in hand with the colonizer) or are tricked into doing so with promises of reform (radicals).

Naturally anyone can form their own opinion as to how credible Cleaver's claims and conclusions are as a whole, but there is no doubt that one thing is certain: blacks were not entitled to equal civil and legal rights in the 1960's America. In fact, the newsreels of the era showing the Southern police attacking peaceful protesters with billy-clubs, water hoses and German Shepherds was not the best possible publicity to a country which wanted to present itself as the leader of the free world, as the champion of freedom and human rights. Cleaver essentially claims that it was in the power structure's interest to do something about an issue which was hurting the image of the US internationally: as he points out, "the Soviet Union and the entire world's left press continually embarrassed U.S. imperialism over the way black people were being treated", and something had to be done by the power structure to mend the situation.

> Therefore, when the federal government "joined" the civil rights movement, the imperialists in control of the government actually strengthened their own position and increased their power. Internationally, U.S. imperialism improved its image, making the con game it plays on the world, its pose as the champion of the human freedom, easier. When President Johnson, the arch-hypocritic [sic] warmonger of the twentieth century, stood before the nation and shouted, "We shall overcome," white liberals, radicals and the black bourgeoisie experienced a collective orgasm. (*Post* p. 60)

Thus Cleaver attributes the civil rights legislation purely to the need of the power structure to improve the US image abroad. Whether or not it was that simple is debatable, whereas the accusation of the US engaging in a "con game" of posing as "the champion of the human freedom" can be easily validated by just taking a look at the track record of US foreign policy over the last thirty years. Finally, Cleaver concludes with the punch-line of the triumvirate of white liberals, radicals and black bourgeoisie's collective orgasm at Johnson's public utterance of the civil rights movement slogan. Cleaver's sarcasm and contempt was due to the fact that for him and the BPP, civil rights legislation was long overdue and simply not enough: they wanted more, and they wanted it faster. Instead of possibly waiting for a couple of more generations for the blacks to attain a more equal socioeconomic status with the general population, the more radical black nationalists wanted land, compensation for 400 years of slavery and oppression, and a redistribution of wealth. In addition, Cleaver saw the establishment's participation as just another example of white power structure taking over a black movement and deciding over its policy in order to oversee that minimum damage would be done to the status quo.

Cleaver says, "What Johnson wanted was peace and quiet at home and an integrated army to defend "democracy" abroad."(*Post* p. 60) Malcolm X had already called attention to the fact that blacks were allowed to fight for democracy abroad, but not at home where they were expected to tolerate brutal violence and injustice by turning the other cheek.[60] Blacks in the military is an issue which warrants closer inspection: The black minority had already fought for the US in both World Wars (in segregated units), in Korea, and, at the time of Cleaver's writing, were once again doing so in Vietnam. Thus the poorest and the most underrepresented part of the population was fighting in foreign wars while, simultaneously, they were not entitled to the basic Constitutional rights on their home turf.[61] Cleaver further

[60] Haley, p. 270.
[61] *Ibid*, p. 275; Franklin, pp. 296-298, 302-304, 390-391, 488, 491. The first integrated US Army units were not formed until January 1945.

argues that the white radicals, liberals and black bourgeoisie wanted to "implement the American dream and the conception of America as a huge melting pot". To achieve that end, all that would be needed was to "integrate the black ingredient into the American stew and thus usher in the millennium of black-white solidarity wherein the white working class of the mother country would join hands with the black workers from the colony and together they would march forward to the Garden of Eden."(*Post* p. 61). This statement very closely mirrors the sentiments of Malcolm X who had earlier ridiculed the act of joining hands with whites and singing "We Shall Overcome" as the answer to the problems of blacks.[62] Cleaver goes on to claim that instead of joining hands with whites and marching forward to Garden of Eden, the black workers had responded by marching forward "to Detroit and armed urban guerrilla warfare." Calling the Detroit riot of 1967[63] "armed urban guerrilla warfare" is of course gross exaggeration and a weak attempt to elevate what happened in Detroit (no matter how justifiable or understandable the frustration behind those unfortunate incidents might have been) to a level of organized rebellion and resistance against the power structure. Therefore Cleaver harnesses the events in Detroit as evidence to support his hypothesis as to the impossibility of integration which he further argues against as follows:

> The basic flaw in the analysis and outlook of the white liberals, radicals and the black bourgeoisie is that the conception of the American melting pot completely ignores the distinction and the contradiction between the white mother country and the black colony. And the solution of Integration, based on this false outlook, was doomed from the beginning to yield only a deceptive and disillusioning result. Black people are a stolen people held in a colonial status on stolen land, and any analysis which does not acknowledge the colonial status of black people cannot hope to deal with the real problem. (*Post* p. 61)

Thus Cleaver is of the opinion that any attempt at integration will be doomed to failure because blacks in the US are "a stolen people held in a colonial status on stolen land", an

[62] Haley, pp. 280-281.
[63] Cleaver is referring to the Detroit riot in 1967 where, after five days of violence and looting, 43 people were killed, 1189 injured, and over 7000 arrested. For more information, see <www.67riots.rutgers.edu/d_index.htm>.

altogether separate people who, according to Cleaver, do not necessarily even want to be part of the US. Next, Cleaver emphasizes this even further by comparing blacks in the US to former colonial subjects of France, England and Portugal, saying how they had not been satisfied with anything less than "complete sovereignty in their drive for a better life." (*Post* p. 62) Later Cleaver returns to the question of the Detroit riots, and links the government suppression of those riots (the National Guard and even the 82nd Airborne were sent in by the government) to what he calls "the war of suppression against the national liberation struggle in Vietnam" (*Post* p. 63). Thus Cleaver adapts Fanon's ideas of decolonization to apply to the blacks in the US, declaring that they are in fact like any other people struggling for national liberation from the yoke of colonialism.

Whereas at the beginning of this text Cleaver states that the black bourgeoisie measure their success according to how far away they are from the soil, he later makes a distinction between the black elite and the black masses by claiming that, just like among any people, there is a "deep land hunger in the heart of Afro-America". Next Cleaver discusses the development of the land question since the Civil War, noting that "even the U.S. government once recognized that black people must have some land", pointing to the fact that blacks were promised forty acres and a mule after the war. As he takes the land question further, Cleaver brings up black leaders Booker T. Washington[64] and Marcus Garvey[65]. The former he calls "the first colonial puppet dictator set up over Afro-America by Imperial America", whereas the latter he treats more favorably, giving Garvey credit for "reasserting black identification with an ancestral homeland". As to Garvey's idea of full-scale black migration back to Africa, Cleaver says that it "turned most black people off because of a world situation and a balance of power that made such a solution impossible." (*Post* p. 64) Cleaver does not bother to

[64] Booker T. Washington (1856-1915) has been much criticized – somewhat anachronistically – for his submission and acceptance of segregation and inferior status for blacks.
[65] Marcus Garvey (1887-1940), a Jamaican, was the founder and leader of UNIA (Universal Negro Improvement Association). During the organization's heyday in the 1920's, Garvey encouraged people of African ancestry to return to Africa.

elaborate on this statement; instead, he is quick to add that Garvey's failure to carry out his mission was also due to "the white racist power structure and the bootlickers of his era." (*Post* p. 64). After Garvey, Cleaver focuses on Elijah Muhammad (a former follower of Garvey) and the Nation of Islam's demands for land. Basically Cleaver criticizes Muhammad of being deliberately vague in his demands, for not specifying any particular geographical location in the US where blacks should establish their separate nation. Cleaver says that a vague demand for land,

> …is merely a protest slogan; there is nothing revolutionary about it, because it is asking the oppressor to make a gift to black people. The oppressor is not about to give niggers a damn thing. Black people know this from bitter experience. In a land where the racist pigs of the power structure are doing every dirty thing they can to cut off welfare payments, where they refuse medical care to sick people, where they deliberately deprive black people of education, and where they leave black babies to die from lack of milk, no black person in his right mind is going to stand around waiting for those same pigs to give up some of this land, say five or six states! (*Post* p. 65)

If a demand for land is "merely a protest slogan" with "nothing revolutionary about it", what should be thought of "Black Power", or "Power to the People"? Or "Power grows out of the lips of a pussy" (*Post* p. 143) for that matter? Cleaver is quick to belittle and demean others, although he himself seems equally fond of "protest slogans". In addition, Cleaver's concern for the cutting off of welfare payments is not entirely consistent with his earlier criticism of the War on Poverty program where he condemned these very same welfare payments as crumbs from the master's table. However, Cleaver is probably right in his assessment that the power structure will never make any concessions out of sheer good will.

Next, Cleaver takes it upon himself to explain what must be done in order for his and the BPP's demands to be met with a different response than those of the Nation of Islam. Cleaver explains that "Black Power" is the answer, that blacks must first gain enough power to be able to "*force* a settlement of the land question." First he discusses how Stokely Carmichael argued

for redistribution of wealth in the US as compensation for four hundred years of sweat, blood and suffering by the blacks for the benefit of the slavemasters. As to how this would be implemented, Cleaver offers the solution that, "let's get some guns, organize and square off to deal with this honkie." (*Post* p. 66) Thus, for Cleaver, "Black Power" basically seems to equal obtaining more guns and firepower to be in a position to negotiate.

Cleaver considers Black Power as "a revolutionary breakthrough" for the black consciousness, explaining that although black people are dispersed across America, "making Afro-America a decentralized colony" (*Post* p. 67), that should not deter them from striving for unity and sovereignty as a nation. Cleaver draws a parallel to the Jews, pointing out how they had first formed "a government in exile for a people in exile" (Theodore Herzl and the National Jewish Congress) and later obtained land and established their own state of Israel (*Post* p. 68). He also claims that Malcolm X had had exactly the same in mind with his short-lived OAAU, and that both Stokely Carmichael and Rap Brown were now talking in the name of the black sovereignty or nation. Furthermore, Cleaver claims that, "the call for a U.N. supervised plebiscite in black communities across the nation", proposed by the BPP, "is winning more and more support." (*Post* p. 69).

At the beginning of "Land Question and Black Liberation", Cleaver argues that there are "two different sets of dynamics in America", insisting that blacks are "a stolen people held in colonial status on stolen land", living in diaspora but ready, willing and able to form their own government in exile until they will be allotted a suitable landmass somewhere. Second, he is pushing for a U.N. supervised plebiscite "for the purpose of determining the will of black people as to their national destiny". Later, however, he reduces the significance of the plebiscite by saying that, "The mere widespread agitation for such a plebiscite will create a major crisis for U.S. imperialism" (*Post* p. 70). Thus Cleaver practically admits that the purpose of the proposed plebiscite would *not* be the establishment of a separate black nation

on the US soil or anywhere else, but to act as an ultimatum which would force the power structure to make the necessary concessions demanded by the BPP. Therefore it is more likely that Cleaver is never actually seriously considering a separate black nation nor government; instead, his nationalist rhetoric and the demand for the U.N. plebiscite are merely meant to draw attention to the de facto "separate and inferior" status of the black minority. Subsequently, Cleaver and the BPP present their list of demands (The Ten Point Program) that should be met in order to improve that status. Finally, if these demands are not met by the imperialist, racist pig power structure, Cleaver threatens America with an armed conflict, a civil war, which would be nothing short of an apocalypse. In fact, Cleaver says that "The forces of reaction will be placed squarely on the defensive and it will be obvious to all that fundamental changes in the status of black people in America can no longer be postponed or avoided." (*Post* p. 70).

In conclusion, it is impossible to know when Cleaver is serious and when he is resorting to populist rhetoric only for the purpose of drama and grandeur, to add weight to his message, or whether he is simply engaging in a prison yard (or street corner) intimidation tactics to threaten his political opponents and the status quo. In fact, it is reasonable to assume that Cleaver's past – first as a criminal and later a convict – must have affected his psyche to at least some extent, and, consequently, he may not have been the most likely candidate to fully grasp the meaning of the word *dialogue*. For Cleaver, threatening and exaggeration may have been familiar communication and negotiation methods, and perhaps he did not spare them another thought. However, ridiculing and threatening political opponents inevitably lead to an increasing polarization where the two sides will stand even further from one another than they did before, and, consequently, any kind of co-operation and compromise becomes impossible. Then again this may be exactly what Cleaver intended; to push the limits until some serious confrontation would arise.

4. Religious and Populist Rhetoric

In this chapter, I will examine the ways in which Cleaver employs religious discourse in his text, both in the aggrandizement of the Black Panther Party leader, Huey P. Newton, as well as in his predictions as to the future of America if the BPP's demands and objectives are not met through peaceful means. In addition, I will compare and contrast Cleaver's rhetoric with that of his ideological opponents, and discuss what kinds of stylistic traits Cleaver resorts to when he threatens and ridicules his real and imagined enemies.

4.1. "The Genius of Huey P. Newton"

One significant feature which marks Cleaver's personal history is that he was always looking for a leader, someone or something to follow. By 1967, after stints as a Catholic and a Muslim, he seemed to have found what he had been looking for in the Black Panther Party and especially its leader and co-founder, Huey P. Newton. In his "Introduction to the Biography of Huey P. Newton" (*Post* pp. 40-42), Cleaver takes his admiration and worship of Newton to a somewhat dubious level. First he recalls how, during Newton's trial, someone had remarked how, "They are crucifying Huey in there – they are turning him into another Jesus", to which Cleaver supposedly "almost instinctively" replied, "Yes, Huey is our Jesus, but we want him down from the cross." (*Post* p. 40). Cleaver goes on praising Newton, stating how he is "different from everybody else", and how he is willing to "lay down his life in defense of the rights of his people". Next Cleaver manifests what seems to be the ultimate compliment in his phrasebook:

> I cannot help but say that Huey P. Newton is the baddest motherfucker ever to set foot inside of history. Huey has a very special meaning to black people, because for four hundred years black people have been wanting to do exactly what Huey Newton did, that is, to stand up in front of the most deadly tentacle of the white racist power structure, and to defy that deadly tentacle, and to tell that tentacle that he will

> not accept the aggression and the brutality, and that if he is moved against, he will retaliate in kind. Huey Newton is a classical revolutionary figure. His imagination is constantly at work, conjuring up strategies and tactics that apply classical revolutionary principles to the situations confronting black people here in America.
> (*Post* p. 41)

When Cleaver talks of Newton standing up "in front of the most deadly tentacle of the white racist power structure", he is referring to the shoot-out in October 1967 where Newton himself was wounded and an Oakland police officer killed. The actual course of the events on that particular night will probably never be known, but the legal facts were that Newton was indicted for murder while his defense pleaded self-defense.[66] Cleaver was very effective in organizing successful rallies and fund-raisers for the "Free Huey!"-campaign, the objective of which was to help Newton obtain the best legal team money could buy. Eventually the campaign resulted in maximum publicity which not only brought in money, but also elevated Newton and his trial to a whole another level: Huey P. Newton became a symbol, a victim of racist police brutality and 400 years of oppression, and, consequently, his guilt or innocence in the actual crime he was accused of was no longer relevant. In that sense, the Newton trial was a precedent to what happened with the cases of Rodney King and O.J. Simpson in the 1990's.

In addition to praising Newton's courage in standing up to the police, Cleaver portrays him as a "classical revolutionary figure", which can only be taken to refer to "a leader of the people" along the lines of Kim Il Sung or Mao Zedong, supposedly infallible leaders and authorities who always act according to what is best for their people.

As if the "baddest motherfucker", or "a classical revolutionary figure", were not superlative enough, Cleaver goes still further in his aggrandizement of Newton. First he talks of how Bobby Seale had "had no choice" but to "place his life in Huey's hands", and how

[66] Accounts of the events of this shoot-out abound; for the most credible and impartial one, see Pearson, pp. 145-147.

"his admiration and respect for Huey is a sort of worship", not "in any religious sense", but because of Newton's "burning preoccupation and concern" for his people makes anything less insufficient. Cleaver concludes the introduction by stating,

> Having myself joined the Black Panther Party, and accepted Huey P. Newton as my leader, I find myself sharing with Bobby Seale the same attitude toward Huey – the same willingness to place my life in his hands, the same confidence that Huey will do the right thing at any given moment, that his instincts are sound, and that there is nothing to do but follow Huey and back him up. (*Post* p. 42)

It is hardly possible to deny that a devotion of this magnitude is closer to a creed than political endorsement. Cleaver's choice of words here evokes interesting questions: was he serious in what seemed like a blind devotion to Newton, or was the savior/Jesus allegory more an attempt to sell Newton to the masses by resorting to a common image and a story, something that basically everyone would be familiar with? Granted, it would not have been the first time the said approach was utilized, one need only to remember how the cult of personality was employed in the former Soviet Union, i.e. how the religious icons and pictures of the czar were replaced with those of first Lenin and later Stalin; or how the famous Jesus-like image of Che Guevara is still hugely popular in the predominantly Catholic Latin America.

Cleaver not only presents Newton as a Jesus-like Savior (or a Moses who leads his people to the Promised Land), but he further declares Newton "the baddest motherfucker ever to set foot inside of history", and "a classical revolutionary figure". In conclusion, Cleaver employs religious discourse – with a profane colloquialism thrown in for a good measure – to construct and represent Newton as a mystical, infallible, revolutionary leader who does not suffer from any human shortcomings typical of the rest of the mankind. Now, what were Cleaver's intentions behind doing so? One explanation is that Cleaver really believed – or wanted to believe – in Newton as his personal and the African Americans' collective savior to such an extent as his text seems to indicate. At least Cleaver's wife, Kathleen, is on record saying that

Cleaver would have been happy to follow first Malcolm X and later Huey P. Newton, and that the latter really made a huge impression on him.[67] Unfortunately for Cleaver, however, the former was assassinated and the latter, who by most accounts never was the person Cleaver so badly wanted him to be,[68] later turned against his devoted follower, expelled him from the BPP and declared him "an enemy of the people".[69] Of course it is likewise possible that Cleaver just got overtly carried away – as often seemed to be the case – or simply was fond of aggrandizing things. Be it as it may, the aggrandizement which took place while Newton was incarcerated was not only something that Newton himself reportedly felt uncomfortable with, but also a disservice to the BPP as a whole: after his release from jail in 1970, Newton failed to live up to the unrealistic, Messiah-like expectations that the Party members, sympathizers and potential converts had placed in him in his absence. As opposed to Cleaver and Seale, Newton was not a good public speaker and had a high-pitched voice; during his first speaking tour after being released from jail in 1970 it was reportedly a common occurrence that people walked out in droves in disappointment.[70]

One factor which clearly led to Cleaver's worship of Newton was his and the BPP's propensity for violence. This becomes fairly evident from "The Courage to Kill: Meeting the Panthers" (*Post* pp. 23-39), Cleaver's account of his first encounter with Newton and his group in February 1967. This took place in San Francisco at a meeting where all the different local black activist groups were trying to agree on a program of events to commemorate the anniversary of the assassination of Malcolm X. In short, Cleaver explains that his intention had been to use the planned three-day memorial to revive the Organization of Afro-American Unity, OAAU, which Malcolm had been in the process of establishing before he was murdered. However,

[67] Linfield, p. 184.
[68] See for instance Brown, Pearson, Hilliard (1993).
[69] Pearson, pp. 229-234; Brown, p. 262.
[70] Linfield, p. 183; Brown, p. 251; Pearson, p. 226-227; Shakur pp. 225-226.

> By February the plan had been torn to shreds. If the plan was a pearl, then I had certainly cast it before the swine…It soon became clear to me that if the OAAU was to be reborn, it would not be with the help of this crew…Far from wanting to see an organization develop that would put an end to the archipelago of one-man showcase groups that plagued the black community with division, they had each made it their sacred cause to insure the survival of their own splinter group. (*Post* pp. 27-28)

There are two ways to interpret this criticism: the more cynical way would be that Cleaver himself was just another "one-man showcase group" incapable of co-operation if things did not go exactly his way. What adds credibility to his criticism, however, is that once he found a home with the Panthers, he was happy to follow Newton and work tirelessly for the common cause within the confines of the Party. In addition, Cleaver had a point since the black community was undoubtedly seriously divided over several issues. At the top of the social pyramid were the black middle-class (or *bourgeoisie*) integrationists with their 'responsible' Christian leaders like Martin Luther King and organizations such as NAACP[71] and SCLC[72], while Nation of Islam, along with different cultural nationalist groups, advocated racial separatism and Black Nationalism. Between these two general lines was the SNCC[73] which had started mainly to organize voter registration in the South and had been working alongside SCLC, but had since adopted a more radical outlook with leaders such as Stokeley Carmichael and H. Rap Brown.

Since the integration efforts of the civil rights movement were mainly directed to the South, the majority of the black population in the urban centers throughout the rest of the country was not very politically active or aware, nor represented in the political arena: most of the different cultural nationalists as well as members of the SNCC came from the same black middle class as the integrationists, and the Nation of Islam with its foreign religion and tough discipline was seen as too odd by many. When the Panthers appeared on the scene, Cleaver

[71] National Association for the Advancement of Colored People, founded by W.E.B. DuBois in 1909.
[72] Southern Christian Leadership Conference, founded by Martin Luther King in 1957.
[73] Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee. For more information on SNCC, see Carson (1981).

was overjoyed and saw the BPP as a vehicle to revive, if not the actual OAAU of Malcolm X, at least its spirit: Cleaver thought that the BPP could achieve a greater degree of "Afro-American unity" than any "one-man showcase" or splinter group ever could. In fact, by educating and raising awareness among the black masses, by converting the *lumpenproletariat*, the BPP could surpass any black middle class-led organization in popularity and influence. Although this development never materialized, it was the possibility of it happening that scared Hoover and the FBI to such an extent that they decided to destroy the Party – by any means necessary.

After explaining the context of the occasion where these splinter groups were arguing over the planned festivities, Cleaver arrives at the spectacle of his first encounter with the BPP during this same meeting. He describes how suddenly all the arguing and conversation at the meeting came to a halt, when a group of visitors arrived:

> From the tension showing on the faces of the people before me, I thought the cops were invading the meeting, but there was a deep female gleam leaping out of one of the women's eyes that no cop who ever lived could elicit. I recognized that gleam out of the recesses of my soul, even though I had never seen it before in my life: the total admiration of a black woman for a black man. I spun around in my seat and saw the most beautiful sight I had ever seen: four black men wearing black berets, powder blue shirts, black leather jackets, black trousers, shiny black shoes - and each one with a gun! (*Post* p. 29)

What is it that thus impresses Cleaver? Practically his admiration seems to be aroused by guns and uniforms, militant posture and the organized manner in which Newton and his cohorts presented themselves. In fact guns, uniforms, and discipline seem to be the common denominators behind an admiration for any army; whereas a Prussian/Nazi military tradition is the most obvious example, romantic guerrilla groups are popular for the very same reasons. The latter may sport long hair, beards, and improvised uniforms, but it is still the guns and the threat of violence, the *danger*, which attract. In addition, it is the same intriguing combination of violence and discipline which explains why the Mafia or Hell's Angels

continue to be romanticized in the popular imagination. Guns (the threat of violence) signify power and discipline means order. The "deep female gleam" which Cleaver recognizes as "the total admiration of a black woman for a black man" is interesting: is that how the women in the room really perceive the men with guns, or is it more akin to how Cleaver wishes they would, i.e. does he project his own admiration to automatically apply to the women as well? Whether it is conscious or not, there is sort of a masculine, homoerotic tone present in Cleaver's admiration for the Panthers. What is the difference between a black policeman in uniform and a Black Panther in uniform? Of course it could be argued that the former is an agent of the reactionary power structure, whereas the latter is a revolutionary guerrilla, but is it not nevertheless the uniform which attracts sexually or otherwise?

Next Cleaver describes in detail the guns these four Panthers (Huey P. Newton, Bobby Seale, Bobby Hutton and Sherwin Forte) were carrying, and how Newton introduced them as the Black Panther Party. As a result, "Every eye in the room was riveted upon them", and "there was absolute silence." (*Post* p. 30) Cleaver then describes his reaction as follows,

> Where was my mind at? Blown! Racing through time, racing through the fog of a perspective that had just been shattered into a thousand fragments. Who are these cats? I wondered at them, checking them out carefully. They were so cool and it seemed to me not unconscious of the electrifying effect they were having on everybody in the room. (*Post* p. 30)

Was the electrifying effect result of admiration, of everybody being impressed by this show of force, or was it a result of intimidation and subsequent fear? At least Cleaver never slows down to consider the latter possibility, nor does he spare any thoughts to entertain a possibility that perhaps not everyone in the room was equally impressed as he was. One constant in Cleaver's production is evident in this short example: he once again juxtaposes different registers. First he speaks of "…the fog of a perspective that had just been shattered

into a thousand fragments", and next he wonders "Who are these cats" who are "so cool". Thus he is happy to use colloquialisms together with the more standard English.

Further in the article Cleaver tells his version of what took place when Malcolm X's widow, Betty Shabazz, visited the *Ramparts* office in San Francisco – escorted by an armed group of Black Panthers. Ever since the moment they arrived at the airport to pick her up, the group of openly armed black men had attracted so much attention that eventually both the police and the media followed them to the *Ramparts* office. When Newton and his cohorts were about to leave, one "big, beefy cop stepped forward", and ordered Newton to stop pointing with his shotgun. According to Cleaver, Newton replied by taunting the officer and saying, "You big fat racist pig, draw your gun!" Despite more taunting and daring by Newton, the officer finally gave up and Newton and his group were allowed to leave the scene.[74] Cleaver recalls how seeing "Huey surrounded by all those cops and daring one of them to draw", made him think that, "Goddam [sic], that nigger is c-r-a-z-y!" (*Post* pp. 35-36). Cleaver goes on to admit that he was very impressed with Newton, and next he offers an explanation as to the importance and meaning of Newton's standoff with the police:

> The quality in Huey P. Newton's character that I had seen that morning in front of *Ramparts* and that I was to see demonstrated over and over again after I joined the Black Panther Party was *courage*. I had called it "crazy,", as people often do to explain away things they don't understand. I don't mean the courage "to stand up and be counted," or even the courage it takes to face a certain death. I speak of that revolutionary courage it takes to pick up a gun with which to oppose the oppressor of one's people. That's a different kind of courage. (*Post* p. 36)

Is Cleaver serious? Does he really believe that Newton's antics in the case at hand are an example of "revolutionary courage"? Whereas "picking up a gun with which to oppose the oppressor" is truly justifiable and admirable in some cases[75], it is quite difficult to consider this incident being one of them. Regardless of whether the BPP's "picking up the gun" can be

[74] For a full account of the incident, see Pearson, pp. 121-126.
[75] For instance, armed struggle against foreign invasion, or just plain self-defense, come to mind.

seen as justified or not, it is hard to fathom just what this kind of standoff with the police would accomplish, i.e. how does Newton's behavior (empty posturing and male bravado) advance the people's cause? What were the odds that the cops would initiate a shoot-out in broad daylight with the media present? Or perhaps therein lies the answer, for naturally there is the possibility that Newton's actions were motivated by the very presence of the media: perhaps he wanted to make a point and show the people how he and the BPP were not afraid of the "pigs". Thus he could have been making a conscious statement to impress potential converts – and it worked on Cleaver at least!

Cleaver exhibits considerable rhetorical skill in elevating Newton's behavior from the useless troublemaking it is to an example of "revolutionary courage". This can also be seen as conscious mythmaking and canonization which serves the BPP as a whole: Cleaver, the Minister of Information, is engaged in creating a historical, heroic narrative for his Party. This becomes even more evident later in the article where Cleaver presents his take on the development supposedly started by Malcolm X and continued by Huey P. Newton. According to Cleaver,

> For the revolutionary black youth of today, time starts moving with the coming of Malcolm X. Before Malcolm, time stands still, going down in frozen steps into the depths of the stagnation of slavery. Malcolm talked shit, and talking shit is the iron in a young nigger's blood. Malcolm mastered language and used it as a sword to slash his way through the veil of lies that for four hundred years gave the white man the power of the word. Through the breach in the veil, Malcolm saw all the way to national liberation, and he showed us the rainbow and the golden pot at its end. Inside the golden pot, Malcolm told us, was the tool of liberation. Huey P. Newton, one of the millions of black people who listened to Malcolm, lifted the golden lid off the pot and blindly, trusting Malcolm, stuck his hand inside and grasped the tool. When he withdrew his hand and looked to see what he held, he saw the gun, cold in its metal and implacable in its message: Death-Life, Liberty or Death, mastered by a black hand at last! Huey P. Newton is the ideological descendant, heir and successor of Malcolm X. Malcolm prophesied the coming of the gun to the black liberation struggle. Huey P. Newton picked up the gun and pulled the trigger, freeing the genie of black revolutionary violence in Babylon.
> (*Post* pp. 37-38)

First Cleaver explains how Malcolm rose above by transforming and refining the street credible discourse, the ability to "talk shit" ("the iron in a young nigger's blood"), to a powerful tool, "a sword", with which he could "slash his way through the veil of lies" which thus far had given "the white man the power of the word.", i.e. the monopoly on language. In other words, in mastering the master's language, Malcolm appropriated a tool of the oppressor and turned it against that oppressor. However, Cleaver sees this only as the beginning in a development where Malcolm the prophet leads Newton the Messiah – who obeys "blindly" – to the most powerful tool Cleaver can think of, the *gun*. Naturally there is a clear logic behind Cleaver's reasoning: if the mastering of language is not enough, and the sword turns out to be mightier than the pen (after all, Malcolm X was silenced by *guns*), then the only means left is to fight fire with fire, to use the same guns that the oppressor uses to keep the oppressed in check.

Next, Cleaver calls Newton "the ideological descendant, heir and successor of Malcolm X", but not in a sense of a loyal disciple and follower; by stating that "Malcolm prophesied the coming of the gun", while Newton was the one who picked it up, "and pulled the trigger, freeing the genie of black revolutionary violence in Babylon", Cleaver is in fact declaring Newton to be the actual *Jesus* or Messiah who has fulfilled the prophesy. Therefore Malcolm X is reduced to a mere prophet whereas Newton is supposedly the logical culmination of this prophesy.

In the end, in his capacity as the Minister of Information, it is as if Cleaver is writing his own Gospel for the Party. He is creating a quasi-religious narrative in order to show how everything is "going by the book", so to speak. In the process, he deifies Newton and presents him as some sort of angel of retribution. It is not clear, however, whether Cleaver's worship of Newton and admiration of violence is due to his personal attributes or has more to do with

the influence of Fanon, whose idea of violence as a cleansing force (see chapter two, pp. 19-21) is alarmingly close to Cleaver's notion of "revolutionary violence". At any rate, Cleaver seems to be fascinated with Newton's propensity for violence and his defiant posturing, and perhaps sees him as the missing link between Malcolm X and the desired revolution.

4.2. Cleaver as a Prophet of the Apocalypse

In *Soul on Ice,* Cleaver had argued that the time was ripe for a resistance against the power structure since the US involvement in Vietnam had supposedly weakened its ability to control minorities at home, thus presenting an opportunity for the African Americans to rise up and function as "a Black Trojan Horse" from within.[76] Furthermore, Cleaver argued that the oppressed minorities in the US had common interests with the Vietnamese and any other colonized people, and that they could and should unite with their international brethren in order to overthrow the power structure. As I have stated earlier, Cleaver seemed to be in the habit of threatening the power structure with violent reprisal in case the oppressed minorities' demands for social, economic and political equality would not be met. Accordingly, he appropriated the riots of Watts[77] and Detroit to be supposedly conscious efforts, landmarks which represented the struggle for liberation. However, the assassination of Martin Luther King seemed to mark a turning point after which anything less than a full-blown Civil War would not suffice for Cleaver. Dictated in the wake of his assassination, "The Death of Martin Luther King: A Requiem for Nonviolence" (*Post* pp. 73-79) is perhaps the most emotional piece in the book. Cleaver likens the death of King to be a final blow to the nonviolent civil rights movement, using the Latin word, 'requiem', to indicate that a funeral mass is the only thing nonviolence merits as a method of fighting injustice. Cleaver states that the assassination of King, "came as a surprise - and surprisingly it also came as a shock." He goes

[76]Cleaver (1968), p. 121; Rout, pp. 19-20.
[77] Blacks started rioting in Watts, Los Angeles, in 1965 when a black male was arrested for drunk driving. For further information, see <www.usc.edu/isd/archives/la/**watts**.html>.

on to say that the blacks who preferred Malcolm X's "by any means necessary"-stance instead of nonviolence had supposedly been certain that King sooner or later would have to die because he,

> refused to abandon the philosophy and the principle of nonviolence in face of a hostile and racist nation which has made it indisputably clear that it has no intention and no desire to grant a redress of the grievances of the black colonial subjects who are held in bondage. (*Post* p.73)

The choice of wording is different, but once again what Cleaver basically argues is that, "The oppressor is not about to give niggers a damn thing."(*Post* p. 65). In addition, if Cleaver earlier thought that changes in society could be achieved through political organization and pressure, the murder of King seems to be the last straw for him, a point of no return so to speak. Although he somewhat weakly tries to claim that King would have been even "hated and held in contempt" (*Post* p. 74) by black militants, he nevertheless sees the demise of King as an event of such magnitude that he goes on to declare the following:

> The assassin's bullet not only killed Dr. King, it killed a period of history. It killed a hope, and it killed a dream. That white America could produce the assassin of Dr. Martin Luther King is looked upon by black people – and not just those identified as black militants – as a final repudiation by white America of any hope of reconciliation, of any hope of change by peaceful and nonviolent means. So that it becomes clear that the only way for black people in this country to get the things that they want – and the things that they have a right to and that they deserve – is to meet fire with fire.
> (Post p. 74)

Of course if the black militants supposedly hated King and held him in contempt, why would they –Cleaver first and foremost among them – be so upset over his demise? Could it be possible that they secretly wished him success on the nonviolent path he had chosen, and in fact admired him? Or did they just opportunistically try to take advantage of his death, use it as an excuse to raise hell while the tempers in the black community were at a boiling point? Interestingly, while there were riots in over one hundred cities after King's assassination, at

the same time Huey Newton gave specific orders to the Panthers to do all in their power to keep things calm in their home base of Oakland, CA. This line of action on Newton's part has been attributed to two factors. First, he was of the opinion that blacks thrashing and burning down their own neighborhoods like they had done in Watts, Los Angeles, in 1965[78] would not accomplish anything. Second, he was genuinely concerned as to what the power structure's response would be in case of full-scale rioting in Oakland; Newton thought that rioting could have been used as an excuse for massive troop and police deployment in order to wipe out the black militants once and for all. [79]

Cleaver, however, did not agree with Newton. The very same night he had dictated his "Requiem for Nonviolence", Cleaver decided to literally "meet fire with fire" by gathering a group of Panthers and engaging in a shootout with members of the Oakland police department. After all was said and done, two officers and Cleaver were wounded, while the BPP's 17-year-old treasurer, Bobby Hutton, who was also one of the party's founding members, was murdered by the police after he had already given up his weapon and surrendered.[80] In his "Affidavit #2: Shoot-out in Oakland" (*Post* pp. 80-94), Cleaver blames the Oakland police for the incident, stating that the Panthers were pulled over for no reason and that the cops simply opened fire and forced the Panthers to defend themselves. Whereas this version was presented as truth in the early Panther literature,[81] later both Cleaver and David Hilliard admitted that they in fact deliberately went out that night to look for and ambush any police unit they might come across. [82]

Of course this sequence of events puts the contents of Cleaver's (dictated) text in a whole different light, as it can thus be seen as a seriously meant prediction of things to come. For

[78] An almost identical riot took place in L.A. in 1992 after four LAPD officers savagely beat a black drunk driver, Rodney King, and were acquitted in court in spite of videotaped evidence of the incident.
[79] Pearson, p. 154; Hilliard (1993), p. 183.
[80] Pearson, p. 155; Anthony, p. 59.
[81] For instance Marine (1969), Seale (1970).
[82] Pearson, p. 154; Hilliard (1993), pp. 183. Even though Cleaver has admitted his and the group's motives in going out that night, he –nor anyone else– has ever changed their story as regards to Bobby Hutton's death.

Cleaver, "the death of Dr. King signals the end of an era and the beginning of a terrible and bloody chapter that may remain unwritten, because there may be no scribe left to capture on paper the holocaust to come." Cleaver states that he has "no doubt at all" that such holocaust will take place, arguing that "people intimately involved in the black liberation struggle", all agree unanimously that, "the war has begun" (*Post* pp. 74-75). In the case of Cleaver and his followers on the night of April 6, 1968, the said 'holocaust' fell somewhat short; in fact, the outcome of the shoot-out was perhaps a realistic indication of just how successful any armed guerrilla resistance by the BPP against the 'racist pig power structure' could hope to be in real life. In hindsight, it is easy to see that if white liberals such as the Kennedy brothers, or "responsible Negro leaders" like Martin Luther King could be assassinated, then the Black Panther Party never stood a chance, especially when they were constantly monitored and their ranks infiltrated by the J. Edgar Hoover-led FBI.[83]

After declaring that the war has begun, Cleaver presents his somewhat apocalyptic visions:

> The violent phase of the black liberation struggle is here, and it will spread. From that shot, from that blood. America will be painted red. Dead bodies will litter the streets and the scenes will be reminiscent of the disgusting, terrifying, nightmarish news reports coming out of Algeria during the height of the general violence right before the final breakdown of the French colonial regime. (*Post* p.75)

Thus he envisions a violent confrontation which would lead to a national liberation in a manner reminiscent of Algeria. The demographic reality of the US, not to mention the fact that BPP did not represent the majority of blacks, makes this comparison farfetched to say the least. Nevertheless, the influence of Fanon is clearly present as Cleaver wishfully compares the black minority to the Algerian former colonial subjects. Further on in the text, Cleaver makes it clear that there simply is not any other solution left besides wreaking havoc upon 'Babylon' to such an extent that it "will force Babylon to let the black people go." The use of

[83] To get an idea of the sheer extent of illegal FBI activities directed at the BPP and other 'subversives', see O'Reilly (1989).

'Babylon' to refer to the US is a rhetorical device; by resorting to a religious term, the object is condemned while the subject, Cleaver, is simultaneously elevated to be more righteous than his opponents. Cleaver had learned and borrowed this tactic from Elijah Muhammad, who had likewise used Babylon to refer to the US.[84] In addition, the notion of "Babylon letting black people go" is of course reminiscent of Moses leading the chosen people of Israel from the slavery of Egypt. Thus it seems as if Cleaver is elevating the BPP to a collective Moses, the revolutionary vanguard under whose leadership the black people will be led to the Promised Land.

In the case of "The Death of Martin Luther King: A Requiem for Nonviolence", Cleaver's emotional reaction is understandable right in the wake of Dr. King's assassination, but his predictions and threats of the inevitable apocalypse do not stop there. In fact, the assassination seems to be the watershed after which the apocalyptic visions are a constant feature in *Post-Prison Writings and Speeches*, appearing with such regularity[85] that it is enough to wonder whether Cleaver treated his visions as some sort of a self-fulfilling prophecy, i.e. that if he kept repeating it long enough, it might become true. As a matter of fact, in all of Cleaver's writings and speeches dated after the assassination of Martin Luther King ("Affidavit #2: Shootout in Oakland", notwithstanding) he threatens the opposition with violence and predicts an inevitable, bloody apocalypse if things do not change fast enough. Naturally his outbursts could have been motivated by pure anger and frustration, but they may also be a deliberate attempt to shock, to strike fear in potential enemies and simultaneously help recruit new members with the over-blown, violent rhetoric. Then again there is also the possibility of Cleaver possessing a type of personality which presents itself quite differently in public and private sphere. This is how Kenneth Burke describes the transformation of a private individual to a public persona:

[84] Rout, p. 22. Rout also points out that Frederick Douglass had similarly used the term in his Fourth of July speech in 1852.
[85] See *Post*, pp. 38-39, 70-72, 94, 116-117, 127, 146.

> Do we not know of many authors who seem, as they turn from the role of citizen to the role of spokesman, to leave one room and enter another? Or who has not, on occasion, talked with a man in private conversation, and then been almost startled at the transformation this man undergoes when addressing a public audience?

Furthermore, Burke mentions persons who, "in their academic manner", may be,

> cautious, painstaking, eager to present all significant aspects of the case they are considering; but once they turn to political pamphleteering, they hammer forth with vituperation, they systematically misrepresent the position of their opponent, they go into a kind of political trance, in which, during its throes, they throb like a locomotive; and behold, a moment later, the mediumistic state is abandoned, and they are the most moderate of men.[86]

The above characterization fits Cleaver quite nicely. For instance, in "An Aside to Ronald Reagan" (*Post* pp. 108-112) Cleaver refers to the then Governor Reagan as "Mickey Mouse" and "a punk", tells him to "kiss [his] black nigger ass", and finally challenges him to a duel to the death. On the other hand, in the *Playboy* Interview (*Post* pp. 163-211) Cleaver comes across as an articulate, pleasant and thoughtful individual, who is capable of defending his views and arguments quite convincingly.

As stated earlier, the assassination of Martin Luther King may have been one deciding factor in elevating Cleaver's outlook and subsequent writing and speeches to more radical heights, but there are also other facts worth considering. First of all, *Soul on Ice* and the earlier *Ramparts* articles had been written by a private individual who had had all the time in the world to rewrite and revise his work before handing it over to his publisher. In comparison, most of the contents of *Post-Prison Writings and Speeches* are very emotional, written or spoken in the heat of the moment, and thus not subjected to much reflection or reconsideration before becoming public and irreversible. Moreover, everything written or spoken by Cleaver in the aftermath of the April shooting must have been affected by the looming inevitability of either having to return to jail or to become a fugitive.

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[86] Burke, pp. 215-216.

Be it as it may, Cleaver's obvious fondness for the "fire and brimstone"-type ranting and raving about the coming Civil/Guerrilla War and its gruesome consequences makes one wonder about his motives as much as the elevation of Huey P. Newton to a Jesus-like savior or Messiah did earlier; the obvious difference of course being that the threats and predictions of violence are much more troubling – especially when Cleaver literally 'picks up the gun' and goes out to meet fire with fire. Does Cleaver in fact engage in an openly fascist/Nazi admiration of guns, violence and, most of all, *power*? When he wants to topple the "racist pig power structure" by any means necessary, how does he see the possible future of America if the desired revolution will in fact take place? Cleaver's repeated glorification of guns and "bad motherfuckers", and his craving for a violent confrontation with "the honkie", seem to indicate that he is not insomuch in favor of democracy and human rights as he is of the "power [which] grows out of the barrel of a gun". Thus his loathing of the "racist pig power structure" is also loaded with jealousy; he would like to replace the existing power structure with the one designed and overseen by himself and his Party, in a manner reminiscent of how Lenin and the Bolsheviks seized power and held onto it with an iron grip.[87] Likewise, if Cleaver's habit of ridiculing and belittling basically anyone who did not agree with him is any indication, his utopian America probably would not have tolerated much dissent. In his Stanford speech, held on November 22, 1968, Cleaver is on record saying that his aim is "a classless society", which will not be neither [LBJ's] "Great Society" nor "Richard Milhous Nixon's society", adding that, "All of his [Nixon's] ilk, all of the pigs of the power structure, all have to be barbecued or they have to change their way of living." (*Post* p. 145).

In order to present a somewhat more articulate or refined vision as to the future of America, it is reasonable to assume that the following quote from George L. Jackson,[88] a

[87] In his biography of Lenin (2001), Robert Service demonstrates how Lenin and the Bolsheviks managed to seize power and hold onto it even though their group did not constitute a majority among the Revolutionaries.
[88] In 1960, George L. Jackson (1942-1971) was sentenced to one year to life for stealing $70 from a gas station. He was shot to death in an alleged escape attempt from San Quentin. Besides Newton, Seale and Cleaver, Jackson was one of the most famous Black Panthers due to the success of his *Soledad Brother: The Prison Writings of George Jackson* . (1970)

fellow Panther who was incarcerated in San Quentin at the time, reflects at least to some extent Cleaver's views, too.

> Revolution within a modern industrial capitalist society can only mean the overthrow of all existing property relations and the destruction of all institutions that directly or indirectly support existing property relations. It must include the total suppression of all classes and individuals who endorse the present state of property relations or who stand to gain from it. Anything less than this is reform.
>
> Government and the infrastructure of the enemy capitalist state must be destroyed to get at the heart of the problem: property relations. Otherwise there is no revolution.[89]

When Jackson calls for "the total suppression of all classes and individuals who endorse the present state of property relations or who stand to gain from it", he more or less spells out that dissent would not be tolerated in a BPP-led revolution and the subsequent utopia which would follow.

It is impossible to know how serious Cleaver was with his doomsday visions of inevitable violent confrontation since his tone seemed to change according to whom he was addressing. Nowhere is this more evident than in the *Playboy* interview (*Post* pp. 163-211) where he goes back and forth with the issue of violence. First he states that if their demands are not met, there will be

> Not just a race war, which in itself would destroy this country, but a guerrilla resistance movement that will amount to a second Civil War, with thousands of white John Browns[90] fighting on the side of the blacks, plunging America into the depths of its most desperate nightmare on the way to realizing the American Dream. (*Post* p. 165)

When Cleaver is asked how much time there is for the BPP's demands to be met before the above described events would become reality, he responds that, "What will happen – and when – will depend on the dynamics of the revolutionary struggle in the black and white communities" (*Post* p. 165), thus evading any clear and specific answer. In addition, after the

[89] Jackson (1972), pp. 7-8.
[90] John Brown (1800-1859) was a militant white abolitionist who was tried and hanged after raiding a federal arsenal in Harper's Ferry, Virginia, in order to arm black slaves.

interviewer points out the contradiction in the BPP's constant ambiguity as to whether they are aiming at a violent revolution or nonviolent social reform, and asks him which one is it going to be, again Cleaver evades a straight answer by engaging in a vague and indefinite discussion of how everything depends on the "dynamics" of the situation, i.e. which level of revolutionary consciousness has already been reached among those who are to carry out the inevitable revolution. In the end, Cleaver's statements and declarations concerning violent revolution are populist and irresponsible; he makes violent statements and threatens his enemies, but he never gives a straight answer as to whether he is in fact serious or not.

4.3. Cleaver's Rhetoric – a Brief Comparison with Hitler, Reagan and Bush Jr.

In this subchapter, I will discuss what Cleaver's rhetoric has in common with the equally populist rhetoric of some well-known figures that might at first glance be considered his polar opposites ideologically. First, I will juxtapose Cleaver with Adolf Hitler's rhetoric in his *Battle* (*Mein Kampf*), relying on Kenneth Burke's[91] analysis of that infamous piece of work. Burke wrote the article in the 1930's, and his motive was to analyze the reasons for Hitler's success in order to know what to guard against if similar politics or movements should start to take root in America. In order to avoid any misunderstandings, however, this comparison is not by any stretch of the imagination intended to place Cleaver and the BPP in the same category with Hitler and the Nazis; instead, the intention is to show the obvious similarities in any populist rhetoric, whether it is radical or conservative, extreme right or extreme left etc. Second, I will briefly compare Cleaver's rhetoric with the type of Conservative Republican variety which was made famous first by Ronald Reagan in the 1980's and most recently by George W. Bush.

[91] Burke, pp. 191-220.

Even though Cleaver and the BPP frequently compared the US to Nazi Germany, and for instance referred to the police not only as 'pigs', but also as 'Gestapo'[92], they nevertheless simultaneously resorted to populist rhetorical tactics which were very similar to the ones employed by Hitler. The most important aspect in this sense is what Burke calls the unification device: Hitler stressed the fact that there must be one, single, simple, and common enemy which will unite the people in opposition to it. Once this enemy is constructed, it can be used as a scapegoat for basically any ills whatsoever, leading to "purification by dissociation".[93] In addition, this dissociation can also be seen as a means of projecting internal problems and traumas to external enemies; as Burke puts it, "the greater one's internal inadequacies, the greater the amount of evils one can load upon the back of "the enemy"."[94] In the case of Cleaver, this might explain some of his rage and fury against whom he considered his enemies. In fact, Kathleen Rout makes a point of how Cleaver was never willing to face the issues of his personal past and vehemently resisted any attempts at psychological introspection.[95]

Another type of unification device that Cleaver and Hitler seem to have in common is the use of uniforms. It is as if people in general share a fetish for uniforms, most likely because the uniforms signify discipline, order and authority – values that are held in high regard at both extremes of the political spectrum. In the case of The Nazis, their Party guard wearing uniforms at rallies added a sense of authority which was an important factor in converting people to Hitler's cause. For the very same reason, Burke warns against the use of this uniform gimmick in American politics, and recommends that uniforms be prohibited in political gatherings.[96]

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[92] *Post Prison Writings and Speeches*, p. 101: "The notorious, oppressive, racist, and brutal Oakland Police Department…This gestapo force openly and flagrantly terrorizes the black people of Oakland."; p. 131: "Gestapo Chief J. Edgar Hoover".
[93] Burke, p. 202
[94] *Ibid*. p. 203
[95] Rout, p. ix.
[96] Burke, pp. 217-218.

According to Burke, Hitler was of the opinion that masses needed certainty, and he considered the Catholic Church's dogmatism a prime example of the kind of certainty which would also work in the political arena. In order to add power of conviction to his message, Hitler invented a 25-point program as the platform for his party and never made any adjustments to it.[97] Likewise, Cleaver defended the Black Panther Party's Ten Point Program and Platform and, consequently, it was never revised or adjusted while he belonged to the Party.

As far as enemies are concerned, Hitler blamed everything on the international Jewish conspiracy, whereas Cleaver and the BPP singled out the 'racist pig power structure', the US political system, as the root of all evil. Both Hitler and Cleaver also used the word 'Babylon' to refer to a monolithic enemy or system they despised: for Cleaver, Babylon equaled the US, and Hitler used it to describe the city of Vienna where the parliament of Austria-Hungary was located in the years leading to World War I. By employing a religious term, both declared themselves to be righteously above the system or institution they criticized.[98] (In fact, this moral superiority issue is a recurring theme throughout *Post-Prison Writing Speeches*.) Hitler saw the Habsburg Empire as a 'State of Nationalities', and the Parliament of that state as a 'Babel' of voices; in his judgment this multinational pluralism was the reason for the Habsburg Empire's demise, while democracy would only lead to "a lack of personal responsibility".[99]

Cleaver did not believe in electoral politics and gradual reform as a solution either. Instead, he was to such an extent influenced by the examples of China, Cuba, Algeria and, naturally, the Soviet Union, that he believed the desired changes in society would only materialize by means of a violent revolution, with himself and the BPP acting as the revolutionary vanguard. Thus these seemingly different ideologists seem to display similarities concerning the

[97] *Ibid*. p. 212.
[98] Rout, p. 22; Burke, p. 2
[99] Burke, p. 200.

question of violence, or how the desired utopia can only be reached through war and bloodshed. In the case of Hitler, he justified war and the liquidation of Jews as necessities in order to accomplish a happy future for the German people. Likewise, Cleaver ranted and raved about the inevitable Civil War or violent confrontation as a logical step on the oppressed people's way to freedom. However, based on the models of society that were established in the countries Cleaver admired, it is reasonable to assume that any revolution led by Cleaver and the BPP would have meant a repressive dictatorship to anyone who did not agree with this self-appointed revolutionary vanguard.

Even though Cleaver resorts to populist simplification in a manner reminiscent of the Nazis – he clearly uses the racist pig power structure as a unification device – he is by no means a racist hatemonger, however. Whereas Hitler externalized the enemy, Cleaver opts for class struggle which is based on conflicting class interests, thus agreeing with Fanon's notion of any oppression ultimately being more a matter of class than color.[100] In short, the main difference between Cleaver and the Nazis is that Cleaver's political beliefs are based on a Marxist interpretation of history and society which also calls for international decolonization from the yoke of imperialism – he is not a racial supremacist and nationalist inventing a scapegoat against whom rich and poor alike may vent their anger. In the "Stanford Speech" (*Post* pp. 113-146), Cleaver declares that,

> For all these hundreds of years black people have had the thrust of their hearts against racism, because racism has been what has been murdering them. So black people oppose racism. The Black Panther Party opposes it, and we would hope that everybody can oppose it whether it's black or white. Because it will do us no good. It will only get us killed, and it will destroy the world. (*Post* p. 142)

It is somewhat puzzling that while Cleaver is against any discrimination based on skin color, at the same time he does not see any problem with doing away with all his ideological opponents by any means necessary. For instance, in the course of the same speech, he

[100] Fanon, pp. 148-205.

mentions that, "all of the pigs of the power structure…have to be barbecued or they have to change their way of living."(*Post* p. 145) Thus Cleaver proves that political fundamentalism and extremism can be every bit as harmful as racial bigotry.

Finally, I will make a short demonstration as to what Cleaver and the BPP have in common with such ideological foes as conservative Republicans. Interestingly, Cleaver's archenemy in *Post-Prison Writings and Speeches*, Ronald Reagan, used strikingly similar rhetorical techniques when he became President some ten years later. Mary E. Stuckey (1990) shows in her analysis of Reagan's presidential rhetoric how he was quick to label anyone who dared to disagree with him as "unpatriotic at best and treasonous at worst".[101] Furthermore, those who disagreed with Reagan were supposedly working not only against the national interest but to the advantage of the communists. This is of course very similar to how Cleaver blamed the black bourgeoisie and white liberals for having been duped to "work hand in glove with the imperialists" (see 3.4.). Reagan was perhaps most famous for inventing what Stuckey calls "devil figures", i.e. countries and rulers who supposedly represented evil, whereas the US with Reagan at the helm was the sole hope of liberty. Accordingly, Reagan referred to the Soviet Union as the "evil empire", and called the Libyan dictator Muammar Gaddafi the "mad dog of Middle East".[102] To sum it up briefly, Reagan's populism was similar to Cleaver's in a sense that both demeaned and discredited basically anyone who disagreed with them. Moreover, both men offered simple solutions to complicated issues and were self-righteous, thinking they had been granted the wisdom to judge who or what is good or evil in the world.

The same kind of black and white views of the world have been revived and continued in American politics most recently by President George W. Bush, who has been very effective in keeping Reagan's legacy alive. When comparing Cleaver's rhetorical choices to those of the current Bush Administration, there are again very similar examples to be found. For instance,

[101] Stuckey, p. 16.
[102] *Ibid*. pp. 28, 56-57, 78.

whereas the BPP wanted to challenge "the racist pig power structure", i.e. the social, political, and economical system supposedly rigged against them, and Cleaver called for a "war on the rich" instead of "war on poverty", the Bush Administration started a "War on Terror" in 2001. This war was declared against Al-Qaeda, the terrorist network which, according to the Bush Administration, attacked America on 9/11 simply because they "hate our [the Americans'] freedoms"[103]. In addition to this hypothesis concerning Al-Qaeda's motives, the speeches held by George W. Bush in the wake of 9/11 contained other remarks which are interesting in comparison to Cleaver's output of the 1960's. Among other things, Bush declared that North Korea, Iran, and Iraq formed an "axis of evil", a statement which of course is as black and white as possible, and, at the same time, implies that its originator is righteously good, elevating him above those he criticizes. Although "axis of evil" undoubtedly owes more to Reagan's invention of "devil figures", both are clearly reminiscent of how Cleaver and Hitler used the term "Babylon". What is even more reminiscent of Cleaver's playbook is Bush's declaration that, "Every nation, in every region, now has a decision to make. Either you are with us, or you are with the terrorists". In other words, "you're either part of the solution, or you're part of the problem" (*Post* p. 143), and no middle ground exists.

What I have tried to show in this subchapter is that populist rhetoric is always full of certain features and characteristics, no matter whether it is radical or conservative, in the service of the power structure or those trying to overthrow it. The common denominator is the overt populism and simplification with which such rhetoric is embedded. The most common features seem to be the use of a common enemy as a unification device, simplification and purification by dissociation (we are good, they are evil), and, perhaps more than anything, the lack of alternatives (either you are with us or you are against us).

[103]George W. Bush's Address to a Joint Session of Congress and American People, September 20th, 2001. >www.whitehouse.gov/news/releases/2001/09/20010920-8.html<

4.4. "The Eldridge Cleaver Show"

After the April shoot-out, Cleaver ultimately had his parole revoked and was supposed to return behind bars by November 27, 1968, to wait for a criminal trial for his involvement in what had taken place on April 6. Instead of returning to jail, however, Cleaver decided to leave the country and go into exile. Thus he became a fugitive, living in Cuba, Algeria, and France until 1975 when he surrendered to the FBI and returned to the US.

Before fleeing the country and becoming a fugitive, however, Cleaver used his final months in the US to obtain maximum publicity for himself and the BPP. He ran for President on the white radical Peace and Freedom Party[104] ticket, and embarked on a speaking tour which generated considerable public notoriety because of Cleaver's freewheeling use of foul language in attacking –among others – both the then-Governor of California Ronald Reagan, and the state prison authorities whom Cleaver had learned to detest during his years in the California prison system. Part of Cleaver's hostility towards Reagan also had to do with the Governor's attempts to ban him from giving a series of lectures as part of an experimental sociology course at the University of California at Berkeley. Reagan was quoted as saying that, "if we allow Eldridge Cleaver to teach our children, they will come home one night and slit our throats."[105]

According to Scheer, Cleaver was "an uneven, though at times brilliant speaker", and he chose the *Stanford speech* (*Post* pp. 114-146) to be included because it is both "illustrative" of Cleaver's thoughts in the period, and a typical example of the polemical speeches he held on various college campuses during his last months in the US before fleeing the country.[106]

Cleaver starts the speech by thanking those who have invited him to Stanford, and continues by discussing how he had been told not to use any four-letter words at Stanford.

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[104] For further information on the Peace and Freedom Party, see <www.peaceandfreedom.org/what_is.htm>
[105] <www.cnn.com/US/9805/01/cleaver.late.obit/>
[106] Scheer, pp. xxiii, 113.

According to Cleaver, he had been told that while cursing at state-supported institutions might be acceptable since it would mean "cursing part of your own money", Stanford was an institution funded by "private money", and therefore he should "have a little respect" (*Post* p. 114). After this buildup, Cleaver states that,

> I want to couple my basic response to that with my response to Ronald Reagan. I guess people are getting more and more permissive in this society, because I think people are ready to hear someone say Fuck Ronald Reagan, or Fuck the private money at Stanford University. Fuck Stanford University if that's necessary, dig it? That may or may not be the limit of my vocabulary, I don't know. I don't go around counting words. Because we're reaching the point where words are becoming more and more irrelevant. The brother that introduced me failed to mention the affiliation with the Black Panther Party; but that's the foundation, that's where we start, and it looks like that's where we're going to end, if certain people have their way.
> (*Post* p. 114)

The use of "Fuck" in this context can be interpreted in more ways than one: it may be a calculated trick meant to either entertain or shock the audience, or it may genuinely reflect Cleaver's frustration and anger at a point where he already knew he would have to either go to jail or exile. Thus he did not have much to lose, and could speak his mind the way he wanted to. Whatever the reasons behind his choice of words, he obviously stretches the limits of what is considered acceptable public behavior by a public persona. It should be remembered that at the time Cleaver was a bestselling author and a political activist, and therefore this kind of public speaking at a place such as Stanford University was nothing short of outrageous. As far as "words…becoming more and more irrelevant", Cleaver may be saying that the time for revolution has come and it is time for actions to speak instead, but his words may also signify an acknowledgement of defeat. This latter interpretation is further strengthened by Cleaver's remark of the BPP "foundation" being not only the start, but also the end "if certain people have their way". With "certain people", Cleaver naturally means the whole "racist pig power structure" and their agents of repression, such as the police. Cleaver may be admitting his own

powerlessness against his enemies, and the only thing left for him to do is to vent his anger and frustration by lashing out against them verbally. Even if words are supposedly becoming irrelevant, it is nevertheless through speech, and therefore *words*, that he is reaching out to his audience.

In addition to Cleaver's use of the f-word, however, the speech is full of perceptive commentary. In the following excerpt, Cleaver makes his case quite convincingly:

> The basic problem in this country today is political confusion. People don't know who their enemies are; they don't know who their friends are. They don't know whether to be afraid of the right or of the left. They don't know whether they themselves belong on the right or on the left, so they just say, Fuck it, throw up both hands, take acid trips, freak out on weed and pills – alcohol is still with us. People feel that they just can't deal with the situation. And that's because, I believe, the people have been consciously manipulated to that end. (*Post* pp. 115-116)

I believe this is a statement which could be used when referring to any democracy where a significant number of citizens choose not to exercise their right to vote. Whether or not "people have been consciously manipulated to that end", it is a fact that, by "throwing up both hands" and choosing not to participate, these people voluntarily leave the decision-making to those who are in the positions of power to start with. Later in the speech, Cleaver claims that those in power "have usurped the machinery of government in this country", and that "they call it representative democracy", even though "it represents nothing but the pigs of the power structure." (*Post* p. 123). Whether Cleaver is urging people to vote, or to resort to more direct action in order to change things, it becomes clear that at least he does not see ignorance and indifference, or alcohol and drugs, as viable solutions to anything. Thus Cleaver is trying to wake up and provoke his audience to take political action in favor of himself and the BPP. Part of Cleaver's approach is to educate the audience as to who their enemies are, and, first and foremost among them, Cleaver presents Governor Ronald Reagan. Cleaver refers to

Reagan many times[107] in the course of his speech, but the single most direct, personal example has to be the following:

> I challenged Ronald Reagan to a duel, and I reiterate that challenge tonight. I say that Ronald Reagan is a punk, a sissy, and a coward, and I challenge him…to a duel to the death or until he says Uncle Eldridge. And I give him the choice of weapons. He can use a gun, a knife, a baseball bat or a marshmallow. And I'll beat him to death with a marshmallow. That's how I feel about him. Here is a man, a demagogue, in the negative sense. I'm a demagogue – in the positive sense. (*Post* pp. 133-134)

It is impossible to know as to how serious Cleaver is. On the one hand, it seems as if his act is in fact deliberate stand-up comedy with a healthy dose of self-irony. After having just insulted the state governor, Cleaver has the audacity to claim himself "a demagogue in the positive sense". On the other hand, if Cleaver is in fact dead serious, this outburst is no longer funny – it is scary. At any event, whether he is serious or not, Cleaver is quite successful in focusing all his possible dislike for the 'pig power structure' on one man. He ridicules and belittles Reagan, and uses his persona as a unification device for everyone to focus their anger on. Cleaver's name-calling and challenging of Reagan to a duel to the death in public is an act which, at least to my knowledge, has never been duplicated by any activist or public figure anywhere, at least not to any comparable extent.

After covering various different topics during the course of his speech, Cleaver all of a sudden addresses the women in the audience, and says, "You have the power to bring a squeaking halt to a lot of things that are going on, and we call that pussy power. We say that political power, revolutionary power grows out of the lips of a pussy." (*Post* p. 143) This seems to be Cleaver's personal twist on Mao's idea of power growing out of the barrel of a gun, which both Cleaver and the BPP were in the habit of quoting every time the opportunity presented itself. Cleaver later elaborates on his statement and explains how women could simply exert pressure on men by threatening to "cut off their sugar", which would supposedly

[107] *Post*, pp. 113-115, 119, 122-123, 132-134.

motivate men to become politically conscious revolutionaries, who would then be "running around here acting like Lenin, Mao Tse-tung and Jerry Rubin". (*Post* p. 143). In addition, he explains how,

> We have said that you're either part of the solution, or you're part of the problem. If you're part of the solution, what do you look like laying up with part of the problem? Everything can be progressive, everything can be revolutionary. Love can be progressive, sex can be revolutionary. And it can be counterrevolutionary, it can be reactionary, or conservative, if you lay up with Mickey Mouse or Donald Duck. [[108]] (*Post* p. 143)

Thus Cleaver seems to be politicizing *women's* sexual behavior, telling them who they should and should not "lay up with". Interestingly, Cleaver does not offer any instructions as to who the male revolutionaries are allowed to sleep with, or in fact whether this type of political correctness applies to them at all. The most troubling aspect here is the strong presence of fundamentalism: Cleaver reserves himself the right to decide and dictate what is progressive and revolutionary, and what counterrevolutionary, reactionary, or conservative. Interestingly, this is very similar to how Ronald Reagan made moral judgments over good and evil when he became President.

Later on in the speech Cleaver makes the following statement to the people in general: "We say, power to the people, all people should have the power to control their own destiny. White people should have the power to control their own destiny. Eskimos and Indians, every living ass and swinging dick." (*Post* p. 144) Stylistically speaking, Cleaver either ends his statement in a humorous climax, or undermines his credibility by resorting to cheap vulgarity for shock value; this of course can be personally interpreted by every listener/reader. The idea of "all people having the power to control their destiny" is confusing. If, according to Cleaver, "you're either part of the solution, or you're part of the problem", what would happen if the people do not agree on what that destiny should be, or if the people see that destiny in a

[108] With Donald Duck, Cleaver is referring to Max Rafferty (1917-1982), a Republican candidate for Senate in 1968.

manner different from Cleaver's? He must have known fully well how difficult it is to reach a consensus even within one ethnic group, let alone amongst cultural mosaic of various ethnic groups. If in fact "every living ass and swinging dick" should have the power to control their destiny as they see fit, where would that leave Cleaver and the BPP? In fact, Cleaver seems to be saying that people should have the power as long as they wield it the way *Cleaver* sees acceptable, otherwise he is contradicting himself.

Finally, to close off his speech, Cleaver reiterates his main arguments:

> When the sane people don't do it, when all the good middle class people don't do it, then the madmen have to do it, and the madmen say that we're going to have freedom or we're going to have chaos; we're going to be part of the total destruction of America or we're going to be part of the liberation of America. And if you kill me, well I'll just lay me down to rest, you dig it, and all power to the people. I'm very glad to have been here, and in closing, I'll repeat, Down with the pigs of the power structure. Back to Disneyland for Mickey Mouse. Thank you. (*Post* p. 146)

This is a curious mixture and as such very typical of Cleaver's style. First he declares that if the "sane", and the "good middle class people" are not up to take care of their revolutionary responsibilities, then "madmen" like Cleaver will. Once again there is no middle ground; the options are simply between freedom and chaos, and the total destruction or liberation of America. In the end, he repeats his slogan, "Down with the pigs of the power structure", and takes a final shot at Ronald Reagan. The meaning of "Back to Disneyland for Mickey Mouse" is that Cleaver has had his say and spoken at Stanford (despite Reagan's attempts to ban his appearance), and now he challenges Reagan to respond.

On his speaking tour, Cleaver achieved considerable notoriety with his recurring use of the f-word along with his somewhat bizarre comments. This was Cleaver at his most populist where his act started approaching stand-up comedy. Nevertheless, although death threats and profanities made the headlines, the vast majority of the content of Cleaver's speeches still dealt with real political issues. Thus it is reasonable to assume that Cleaver's verbal outbursts

were at least partially premeditated and calculated, and meant to guarantee maximum publicity. What made Cleaver's use of profanities effective was his mixing of registers. Thus he caught the audience by surprise by including words which no-one was used to hearing in the context of a public speech, let alone a political one. If he had just added one expletive after another, the message would have gotten stale very quickly. As a matter of fact this was the case with the BPP Chief of Staff David Hilliard; even though he was addressing potentially receptive and friendly crowds in rallies against the Vietnam War, he nevertheless managed to make these crowds boo him on more than one occasion because of his excessive use of profanities.[109] Cleaver, however, normally kept speaking in a regular Standard English people were used to hearing, and skillfully inserted the profanities when he saw fit. He seemed to be aware that constant repetition of foul language would turn most people off, and thus the f-words for the most part stayed in the minority, no matter how crazy or bizarre comments he might have been capable of uttering. In addition, Cleaver at his best was witty and humorous. By the time he went to exile, he was not only considered a "bad motherfucker" by radical youth of all colors, but he was a bestselling author and celebrity, and a counterculture icon. Unfortunately for Cleaver, however, this fame was short-lived since he quickly fell of the map due to his subsequent years in exile.

[109] Pearson, pp. 213-214.

5. Conclusion

In *Post-Prison Writings and Speeches*, Eldridge Cleaver comes across as a populist writer and speaker. In his capacity as the Minister of Information of the Black Panther Party, Cleaver elevated his leader Huey P. Newton to a mythical status, and declared their Party the revolutionary vanguard. From a critical standpoint, it is easy to see how Cleaver presented any issue in black and white and simply reserved himself the right to divide people into good revolutionaries and evil reactionaries. In doing so, he engaged in a practice of reversed Manichaeism where the previous dichotomy of black and white is turned upside down. The fact that Cleaver is credited with inventing the phrase "either you're going to be a part of the solution, or you're going to be part of the problem", is a telling example. Thus there was never any middle ground, and ideological opponents were always subjected to ridicule while Cleaver presented his own convictions as undisputed facts. It must be noted, however, that even though Cleaver was trying to make converts by resorting to overt simplifications, he was not willing to do so at any price; Cleaver would not clean up his discourse or back down from any outrageous statements and views he believed or pretended to believe in.

Despite his aggressive tone, Cleaver was capable of considerable eloquence, although he also more than occasionally used what can be generally viewed as offensive ("Fuck Ronald Reagan") and sexist ("revolutionary power grows out of the lips of a pussy") language to shock his audience. A common characteristic of Cleaver's rhetoric is his free-wheeling between different registers: during the course of an article or a speech, Cleaver could lump together learned vocabulary with colloquial or slang expressions and profanities, making him at times sound like a politician, lawyer, preacher and a cursing street thug all rolled into one. Of course rhetoric, or the art of persuasion, has traditionally been practiced by mostly politicians, lawyers, and preachers, but what Cleaver added to the mix was his carefree use of

profanities and slang/colloquialisms. In that sense, he did not perhaps follow any traditional set of rules for rhetorical eloquence and, consequently, his rhetoric was somewhat unorthodox and, for better or for worse, more original.

On the one hand, at times Cleaver was right on target with witty remarks, but, on the other hand, it is evident that he sometimes could not control his anger and resentment. Thus he resorted to hostile, violent declarations, challenges and personal attacks to vent his anger. This duality presents itself mainly between writing and speaking: the *Ramparts* articles are in general more thought-out and refined, whereas the public speeches are extemporaneous affairs where Cleaver either decidedly or spontaneously gets carried away. A fair share of the angry, hostile tone in Cleaver's speeches may more than likely be attributed to his personal disillusion with institutions, leaders and movements he earlier had believed in and had wanted to be a part of, only to be disappointed one time after another. Interestingly, Cleaver never sacrifices any thought to the fact that he himself once believed in most of the people and organizations he later harshly criticizes.

First and foremost, however, Cleaver was a politician who used populist rhetoric to advance the Black Panther program; he offered simple solutions to complicated issues and tried to raise political awareness among his audiences by explaining to them who their real enemies and oppressors supposedly were, and what the oppressed should do in order to lead the black community and other minorities (Latinos, Native Americans) onto the path of social advancement and equality. Cleaver was strongly influenced by Frantz Fanon and adapted his theories on decolonization to apply to the black minority in the US. As a result, Cleaver considered class struggle more important than skin color, and welcomed coalitions and co-operation with white radicals. Cleaver's agenda was no less ambitious than to overturn what he defined in his writings and speeches as the "racist pig power structure", i.e. the WASP

military-industrial complex which he saw as holding all the key positions and making all the decisions at the expense of the rest of the population.

As far as the significance of this thesis is concerned, I consider Eldridge Cleaver's writings and speeches an intriguing subject which would merit further study. In addition to Cleaver, the two waves of the so-called Panther literature, not to mention the original Party Newspapers, would offer countless possibilities for further research at least in the fields of history, literature, women's studies and sociology. My intention in this thesis has been to analyze Cleaver's text in order to gain a reasonable understanding of his rhetoric. Naturally it is impossible to draw very far-reaching conclusions as to how serious Cleaver was, or what his real motives behind any given statement were, for such conclusions would be interpretive at best. However, I am confident that I have been able to point out the common characteristics of Cleaver's rhetorical simplifications, and engage myself in fertile, argumentative discussion with them throughout this work. Finally, I would like to say that since this type of 'resistance literature' represented by Cleaver does not fit the traditional genres of English literature, it is equally doubtful whether the traditional literary theories can be applied to it. Thus both the topic and the approach I have chosen for this study may be somewhat unorthodox, but, at the same time, they present an opportunity to challenge the normative order of the traditional literary studies, and hopefully strive for something new in the process.

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