

Reading the messianic in the *An Insurrectionist Manifesto: Four New Gospels for a Radical Politics* and MacEwen's T.E. Lawrence Poems

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Abstract

A group of scholars critiquing secularism, Blanton et al, have reclaimed radical theology in the wake of 9/11 for a new political activism in *An Insurrectionist Manifesto: Four New Gospels for A Radical Politics* (2016), using Paul and his Gospel on the messiah as the central motif. This review brings the political text on the insurrection into dialogue with a long poem by MacEwen on the British officer who led the Arab insurrection in 1916, T. E. Lawrence, to explore the messianic expectations surrounding historical and contemporary insurrections.

Key words

Paul; Lacan; the real; radical theology; messianism; insurrection

Most people can relate to the idea that the impact of 9/11 has been widespread. Projects such as Ann Kaplan's theoretical consideration of how the trauma of 9/11 inspired photography, film, improvisational memorial sites, and literature (Kaplan 2005); Žižek's political interpretation of 9/11 as the 'real' event that inspired a messianic waiting (Žižek 2002); and the numerous cultural works representing the event such as Don DeLillo's the *Falling Man*, Hollywood's *Extremely Loud and Incredibly Close*, and Michael Moore's documentary, *Fahrenheit 911*, are just a few examples of the breadth and depth of the impact of this event on the American psyche. The event also seeped deep into the academic circles that had the most invested in secularism, supporters and critics alike. Staunch secularists promoted strengthening secularism against religious extremism while critics of secularism have retaliated by questioning the value of blaming religion for terrorist activities.¹ In this latter camp are a group of scholars who, following the political energy of the religious turn, have reclaimed radical theology in the wake of 9/11 for a new political activism, and have come together to share their 'good news' in the recent publication, *An Insurrectionist Manifesto: Four New Gospels for A Radical Politics* (Blanton et al 2016).

While this project is shaped around a single political objective, outlined in the introduction, the four articles that follow the introduction, otherwise defined as 'Gospels', one each by Ward Blanton, Clayton Crockett, Jeffrey W. Robbins, and Noelle Vahanian, differ in the approach taken to carrying out the insurrection. Ward Blanton focuses on the historical biblical material and what it can tell the 'messianic

¹ My project *Secular Messiahs and the Return of Paul's Real: A Lacanian Approach* (Principe 2015) outlines some of the debates.

archivist' about insurrection; Valhalian identifies the insurrection as a subjective event ('insurrection from within'); Crockett explores insurrection through global warming discourse; Robbins' aims to define the theory of insurrection so as to apply it to critical analyses of literature. While they each outline a manifesto that draws on their particular scholarship and scholarly interests, there is a notable overlap of philosophical and theoretical ideas and a shared library of texts by Hegel, Deleuze, Negri, Malabou and Heidegger, that gives coherence to the Gospels of this post-9/11 insurrection.

While I was reading the *Manifesto*, I had also been re-reading Gwendolyn MacEwen's postmodern book-length poem on T. E. Lawrence,² the British officer who led the Arabs in their insurrection against the Turks in the middle East a century ago. Not only did there seem to be a resonance between the texts on the theme of political insurrections, there also was a strong, if asymmetrical, link in their consideration of the messianic trope. These issues seemed worth considering in greater detail and have become the basis for this response to the *Manifesto*. This is a review, of sorts, but is not aimed at determining to what extent *Manifesto* works in political or theoretical terms: rather, it aims to bring the political text into dialogue with a putatively incommensurable project, the poetry project, distanced as they are by discipline and mandate, to consider what this exchange might say about expectations surrounding the insurrection, and especially in relation to the messianic.

Making possible seeing a dialogue between a poetic text and a political manifesto requires some framing. MacEwen's *T. E. Lawrence Poems* is based on the story of T. E. Lawrence, a British military officer commissioned by Britain to aid the Arab Muslims in an uprising against Turkish rule in Jordan/Palestine/Lebanon in the early twentieth century. Lawrence's memoir about his experiences in Arabia, *The Seven Pillars of Wisdom* (1922), inspired the 1960s film starring Peter O'Toole as well as MacEwen's long poem. It represents a man whose sense of conviction in the uprising and his sense of messianic responsibility reflects his sense of messianic failure in light of his part in Britain's ulterior motives in the region. The historical event on which MacEwen relies for her project, the Arab insurrection against Turkish rule in Arabia, happens to correspond to the politics central to *An Insurrectionist Manifesto*, with a significant variance. MacEwen takes up the modernist subject and his sense of failure with a postmodernist twist, undermining the messianic grand narrative by distancing the poetry from its political roots. While the postmodern project means to disable the messianic trope, the post-secular project sustains the messianic impulse, but in non-Christian terms. This is to say that the scholars of the *Manifesto* disparage the messianic resurrection narrative as ineffective for political activism because it is partisan; a messianic insurrection, on the other hand, has the power to mobilize against capitalism 'without any dogmatic certainty' (14). Lining up the messianic principles in each project, the texts seem to resist dialogue: the postmodernist project is fundamentally a-political while the post-secular insurrection project is vehemently political.

This lack of dialogue appears to be an issue when thinking about the movements represented by each project: in chronological terms, postmodernism precedes post-secularism by a few decades; in disciplinary terms, the former

² *The T. E. Lawrence Poems* (MacEwan 1982): all subsequent quotations will be from this text.

originates in cultural practice and the latter in politics. On closer inspection, however, the sympathetic prefix seems to denote a critical practice common to both and thus suggests there is a ground for dialogue. While postmodernism has been considered a cultural movement aimed at pushing the modernist interest in experimenting with form, its critical engagement with semantics, as inspired by the post-structuralists and the critical strategies carried out in Derridean deconstructionism, has moved beyond culture to inspire feminist and or radical politics. Post-secularism is similarly driven by critique, but dates to the early twentieth century work by Carl Schmitt who highlighted that secular state systems are maintained by a religious infrastructure. Scholars since have considered the social and political implications of Schmitt's observation, noting that secularism's promise to free people from sectarian prejudice and superstition in the public sphere is a ruse: hiding its sectarian biases beneath a veil of neutrality, secularism promotes itself as better than religion when, technically, it is no different. The post-secularists' interrogation of the dichotomy that keeps secularism in place is an expression of this criticism that, chronologically, preceded deconstructive practice used in postmodernism, but in its fundamental interest in critique, is the same as this cultural practice. As will become apparent in the analysis ahead, the political divide between these projects as identified earlier falls apart under the formal pressures exerted by critique.

A rethinking of secularism's value in society and a freeing of restrictions against religion in the public sphere are central to the work in *An Insurrectionist Manifesto: Four New Gospels for a Radical Politics*. In the introduction, the Insurrectionists explain how they draw on the long tradition of radical theology most recently evident in the 'Death of God' movement that applied the Christian narrative of messianic sacrifice for social emancipatory projects so as to 'challenge and question orthodoxy' (6).³ In light of 9/11, they argue, a new radical theology needs to be defined: not only did 9/11 raise significant questions about secularism's ability to negotiate a working relationship with the religious east, it highlighted that, in order to dialogue with the non-secular non-Christian east, secularism needed to drop its oppositional stance to religion. This is the position the Insurrectionists take with their radical theology: moving beyond the secular-religious binary by embracing religion for the political change they call insurrection.

What is notable about the position taken by these post-secularists are two things. For one, I would suggest that their labeling of their work as 'Gospel', the Greek word for 'good news' used by the early Christians for the apostolic texts now known as the *New Testament*, promotes a Christianity that is problematic in light of their aim to 'question orthodoxy' while also building a dialogue with non-Christians. Is it useful for the Insurrectionists to reinforce a link to the liberation theologians' radical theology they are undoing by using the Christian biblical phrase, especially if the Insurrectionists recognize that their audience includes the non-Christian community behind, around or beside 9/11? Or, does the honesty implicit in exposing the movement's Christian ideological biases allow for a more successful dialogue with the non-Christian other? This latter question brings us closest to Walter Benjamin's thinking in his idea that the task of the historical materialist was to expose that what manipulates the puppet of history is the 'small and ugly' dwarf

³ The 'Death of God' movement eventually morphed into the 'Death of the Death of God' movement of the 1980s and 1990s.

who uses theology to do so. In Benjamin's interpretation of Schmitt, secularism's putative neutrality obscures its religious infrastructure, and thus its insidious ideological prejudices and biases. We might also consider that, despite their use of 'insurrection' as a means of dissociating its particular brand of radical theology from the 'resurrection' narrative of the earlier Death of God movement, the Insurrectionists' use of 'Gospel' maintains an investment in the messianic project, but with its complicated ideological provenance: before its titular use, 'the Gospel' was a term introduced by Paul of Tarsus to define his message to those first-century Greeks who were attracted to monotheism. That is, the term Gospel, in its first use, was a Pauline expression for the opportunities a Greek might have in a new life with the Judean faith, with Jesus as the motivator. As a post-secular project aimed at moving beyond the Christo-centric narrative in secularism, the Insurrectionists' manifesto draws on some very interesting creative strategies to reclaim, redefine and rethink the long historical connection between religion (the messiah) and politics. To what extent these strategies are effective remain to be disclosed by future responses to his work.

Lawrence's sense of messianic responsibility to the Arabs and his obligation to the Christian (Imperialist British) God, are the grand narratives MacEwen treats with postmodern irony, paradox and parody in a first-person long poem. The project is divided into three parts, which correspond roughly with before, during and after the insurrection. In the first pages of the first section, MacEwen sets up her postmodern engagement with Lawrence's messianic failure by defacing the Christian narrative for a secular subject: 'God is not yet born, and we await the long scream/ of His coming' (7). The Christian narrative of Jesus has been disabled in these lines: if he has not yet come, then it is as if Christianity never existed. Moreover, in secular terms, when he comes, he will not be born under a divine star, but as an infant screaming. Considering the context of this statement, that it precedes the Arab uprising proper and Lawrence's opportunity to be born a saviour, we might also hear MacEwen gesturing to the insurrection as the 'scream' of the birth of an Arab nation. This slippage of the messianic idea, from a single individual to the multiple, reflects that ambiguity pervading MacEwen's postmodern strategy in her portrait of Lawrence.

Lawrence's modernist devotion to his saviour persona grounds the irony throughout this portrait. It is specially audible in the caustic cynicism heard in the following lines about Jesus' sacrifice: 'Meanwhile/ if one must die for something,/ there's nothing like a cross/ from which to contemplate the world' (7). The 'cross' of suffering is here rendered as the privilege of a British officer to lead the Arabs' in a revolt against the Turks and not die in battle. His privilege is rewritten more perversely in the third section of the book, when Lawrence reminisces about his time as leader of the Arabs: 'After prostituting myself in the service of an alien race,/ I was too mangled for politics; the world/ swirled around me and I was its still centre' (59). Lawrence's status in the insurrection is rendered by MacEwen's poetry as parody. On the one hand, Lawrence is being used by Britain to manifest its authority in the region; on the other hand, she implies, he is being used by the Arabs. As opposed to being master of these two political entities, as would be promoted by the modernist narrative, he is merely the tool. Yet, with the postmodern irreverence of the grand narrative playing out in the messianic register, Lawrence's modernist critique of British rule is highlighted here, indicating a political register: 'I had not

done well at all – /I had freed the Arabs from everybody but ourselves’ (59). This, you could say, is where this project betrays the a-politics of postmodernist practices. Reflecting a critique of the colonizer’s rule, what one might call Lawrence’s post-colonial confession, MacEwan’s postmodern project has suddenly become political. Giving voice to Lawrence’s mission to decolonize his imperialist authority, MacEwan’s treatment indirectly affirms the messianic narrative, if only as an unfulfilled hope.

While the resurrected messiah has disappeared from *An Insurrectionist Manifesto*, the messianic function is there in the insurrection, as the principle of change that we find in Jacques Lacan’s term for the cause of trauma: the ineffable or incomprehensible as ‘the real’. The Insurrectionists use ‘the real’ as a signifier for God, redefined outside biblical terms: it ‘is not omnipotent, does not love us, and is not conscious’ (9), but, rather, ‘is being itself’, without self-awareness or agency. In rendering God as an abstract principle, stripped of biblical definition, such as gender or ‘wrath’ or even ‘son’, the Insurrectionists maintain a religious dimension for their radical theology but, as they stress, without partisan prejudices implicit in the resurrection narrative. The ‘real’, which is not of any religious orthodoxy, is the catalyst for change; the ‘real’ is an event that inspires the actors to rise up, haphazardly, in Deleuzian rhizomatic clusters contingent on local concern.

Though MacEwan’s poems are framed with secular values, and I speak here of a supposedly neutral face on a Christo-centric infrastructure, there is a force in her poetry that is similar to the abstract ‘real’ central to the *Manifesto*. For example, in the poem “Desert” (20), MacEwan represents Lawrence’s encounter with God in paradoxical terms: ‘Only God lives there in the seductive Nothing/ That implodes into pure light.’ Even if MacEwan’s God has a biblical kind of subjectivity (‘lives’), differing from the Insurrectionist’s subject-less God, God’s location in ‘nothing’ gives this living status the ineffable quality that is similar to the Insurrectionist’s ‘real’. God’s landscape that is the nothing ‘that implodes into pure light’ adds yet another facet to the ‘ineffable’ of God’s role in this insurrection, which is further developed in the impact God has on Lawrence: God’s ‘tongue ... invents a terrible love that is/ the very name of pain’ (20). Paradoxically, God’s ‘love’ does not inspire joy but ‘pain’ and has such a striking effect that Lawrence collapses: ‘I fall to my knees in the deep white sand, and my head/ implodes in pure light’. The suffering that causes him to fall and which ‘implodes’ in his mind, as ‘pure light’ (ineffable), is God, the encounter with which appears to initiate his role as the Arab’s saviour. This event functions much as the Insurrectionist’s ‘real’ functions: as the catalyst for the change central to insurrection. If we can see MacEwan’s representation of Lawrence’s suffering of God’s love as a parody of Jesus’ suffering as he fasted forty days in the desert, then this analogy could highlight that, while Jesus had a definite message, Lawrence’s anointing with pain is without message. With no clear directive, how can Lawrence have failed? MacEwan’s postmodern revision of Lawrence’s messianism changes not his status, but the terms of his failure. Within the context of the politics represented by Lawrence’s anti-colonial critique, this questionable failure and his sustained messianic status begin to deteriorate the postmodern fabric of this project.

As if every insurrection needs a ‘real’ moment in the desert, we find an equivalent to Lawrence’s moment in Jeffrey Robbins’s contribution to *Manifesto*, “Theory of Insurrection”. Robbins’ ‘Gospel’ begins with the premise that the

lynching of Black Americans after the Civil War in the US is analogous to Jesus' crucifixion. Since Jesus's suffering on the cross is not the product of a bloodthirsty demanding father, but, according to the black liberation theologian, James Cone, 'God's critique of power' (112), then God is the factor that exposes hegemony's violence against the weak and disenfranchised. Taking up this principle of exposure without the partisan detail of Jesus, Robbins focuses on the narrative of another biblical figure who suffers, as Jesus suffered on the cross, and who is a central figure in Negri's politics: namely, Job. In the book of Job, we read about his suffering, his dissatisfaction with explanations by those around him about why he suffers, leading God to appear to him. Robbins quotes Negri: 'If Job's desert ends with a vision of God ... defeat and every prison of the multitude will end in a new insurrection' (129). In other words, change has power if it is mobilized by suffering. Pain, not fear, Negri argues, is the affect that inspires a creative response in resistance: 'Pain is the democratic foundation of political society' (130). For Robbins, Job's pain can be seen as the 'real', or evental, that is the catalyst for insurrection. It seems that whether the insurrection is inspired by an imaginary God in a postmodern poem or the ineffable 'real' of a post-secular manifesto, pain in the desert is the catalyst for both movements: that correspondence is intriguing, especially since these projects were, at one point, incommensurable.

Considering the formalistic differences between these projects, the similarities stand out. The postmodern insurrection is driven by a paradoxical 'God' figure and the post-secular Insurrectionist has the equivalent in the Lacanian 'real'. Do we see a gesture to the post-modern paradox here in a political project? Both insurrections have similar relationships to pain and the 'biblical' desert. That detail highlights how both reflect a debt to biblical metaphor that is so central to a progressive politics. Yet, on the messianic idea, these projects remain worlds apart. If Lawrence self-consciously represents himself as a messianic failure, (i.e. British imperialism is a false messiah), MacEwen's postmodern intervention seems to call his failure into question. This is more so if we consider the historical material MacEwen is working with. Though Lawrence may have failed to actually free the Arabs, he did expose Britain's self-serving motivations in his memoir and admitted to his homosexual experiences (being raped and loving an Arab man), at a time when homosexuality was a secret practice. In this light, what do we make of MacEwen's questioning of Lawrence's failure? Does she mean to say that Lawrence's failure is forgivable since he never had a clear directive to begin with? Does she mean to suggest that the impact of his 'real' intervention remains to be seen? Or, does she mean to re-envision messianism as his turn from being an Imperialist stooge ruling the alien for the insurrection to being a man confessing to homosexual desire? The answer is as ambiguous as is his messianic achievement. Suffice it to say that, in MacEwen's postmodern representation and for her postmodern audience, Lawrence is courageous if not heroic, especially considering his rank, class and the homophobia of his time. Despite the postmodern strategies, MacEwen's representation depicts a messianic energy for change, a politics, that is similar to the messianic energy driving the post-secular Insurrectionists.

The post-secularists' radical theology is 'an experimental theology in which the most important elements are up in the air or at stake, a kind of testing in which theology is always *en process*' (15). What is remarkable about this 'process' strategy is that it aims to emulate the Gospel formula, a 'quasi autobiographical narrative

about the Galilean Jesus' (17). Of the four Gospels in the *Manifesto*, Blanton's project is the one that directly engages the Gospel motif through the historical material or archive on Jesus in his time. The messianic archivist rises up against assumptions and prejudices pervading contemporary messianic history and sees that the 'insurrection [is] a step-back into the organizing of affective zones, the constitution of old and new ethologies' (64). In other words, what we, today, see as a coherent narrative of the one messiah, namely Jesus, is actually a retroactive project that aimed to eliminate the material that complicated Jesus' messianic status. The messianic archivist dredges up the complications by drawing on the discarded material and, taking a page from Heidegger's work on thinking about theology as a condition of 'being', considers the 'being' of the archive; the archivist is the one who 'slowly, patiently rewire[s] the history of theology... attempting to catalogue the vibrancy of the specific gestures of linking whereby divinities irrupt as shareable, social solidarities—the opening and enforcement of countable multiplicities' (82). These 'divinities' that Blanton sees irrupting reflect the multiple stories, or various testimonies, of the historical subjects' encounters with gods, living and dead: sifting through this material, we may see that there is no single 'real' catalyst, as the retroactive effort of 'orthodoxy' would want us to believe, but multiple events unfolding. I believe we are invited to see Blanton's project as one of the unfolding events, among the four Gospels in a project that itself is simply one 'rhizome' among many other active rhizomes.

Blanton's Gospel focuses on Paul of Tarsus's letters as the most dynamic example of one of the multiple events unfolding in first century Judea. His letters form an archive that resist orthodoxy on many levels, the simplest being that Paul was not a Christian, but a Jew or, in historical local idiom, a Judean. Blanton sidesteps the Jesus resurrection narrative by focusing on Paul's role in inspiring an insurrection around his 'Gospel' (good news), decades before the formation of the *New Testament*: his 'good news' which was centered on dismantling Judea's cultic hegemony of the laws in his effort to bring pagans into the faith. Paul's redefinition of the laws, Blanton suggests, is evident in his treatment of sin in his letter to the Romans, and specifically, Romans 7:7. According to Paul, sin is a problem not because we are sinners, but because the law is there to show us sin. Blanton may be seen to rely here on psychoanalyst, Jacques Lacan's use of Paul's sin to explain desire in *Seminar VII*.

What is not explicit in Paul's letter, but is relevant to Blanton's interpretation of Paul's idea of sin, is the Lacanian notion of desire and the Oedipal complex. As socialized or Oedipalized subjects, we at one point in our forgotten history accepted the laws of society and repressed our desires: that acceptance of the law is the moment we became Oedipalized. When an Oedipalized subject sins or breaks the law, she/he is enforcing the law when she either confesses, 'Yes, I committed the crime' or lies and says 'I am innocent'. This 'I' that is the speaking/acting subject in society, which is the one who has successfully repressed infantile desire and assumed the social laws as her own, is central to Blanton's interpretation of Paul's sin for an insurrectionism:

'sin' is the code for insurrection because it signals an opportunity to change the conditions that make sin 'rise up'; the strategy is not to 'attack the law', but to change oneself: this change is rooted in 'a repetition of the immanent

‘springing to life again of sin’, a return of the repressed that displaces the ‘I’ from itself, effectively ‘killing’ it. (88)

If the speaking/acting ‘I’ of the subject no longer exists, then the social constraints of the law that limit the ‘I’ no longer apply: sin disappears.

Blanton’s interpretation of Paul’s ‘sin’ as a principle tied to the Judean law, is the ‘chance’ or opportunity to no longer be bound by law and so move beyond sin: ‘Paul has here made sin a partisan properly speaking, post-representational and insurrectionist, what Paul himself calls ... sin’s manifestation through the... commandment, the revelation of ‘sin beyond measure’ (90).⁴ Moving beyond the law is moving beyond sin which exemplifies the change of the insurrection. The insurrection is made possible by inverting the value of ‘sin’ from something to avoid to something to embrace as an ‘opportunity’: ‘sin’ is the opportunity to resist orthodoxy (the law), not by breaking apart the conditions that define sin (law), but by inverting the terms of its effect (sin). In some ways, Blanton’s interpretation of Paul’s insurrection is similar to Robbin’s argument that pain initiates change: both ideas reflect that creative engagement with the material reality that has, until that point, bound the subject. The ‘real’ is the catalyst that initiates change that offers freedom from constraint. More interestingly, Blanton’s use of Paul and not Jesus for an insurrection, implies that the messianic is not a person, a singular figure, that triggers change, but more amorphous and is equal to that enigmatic notion of the ‘real’ as a force. This would encourage using the Derridean neologism ‘messianism’ for the messianic idea as the factor of a change that is not the outcome of the one, but the work of the many. Embedded in this messianic idea is a debt to the political thinking in Walter Benjamin’s “On the Concept of History” (2003) and specifically his notion, ‘*weak messianic force*’.

If Blanton can contemporize Paul in his messianic archivist’s Gospel, we might also read MacEwen’s poems as a kind of Gospel of the Arab insurrection, a creative-autobiographical representation of Lawrence, the one who launched an insurrection for a new community (‘the freedom of your race’ 51), and who, as Jesus or Job did, suffered in the desert, but who was blinded (bound) by an encounter with ‘light’, much as Paul was blinded by a vision on the road to Damascus. Seeing Lawrence as similar to Paul is much more striking when we line up their projects: just as Paul was a foreigner (Judean) who preached to the non-Judeans (Greek pagans), so Lawrence was a foreigner (British) who preached freedom from Turkish oppression to the Arabs (savages).⁵ We might also hear in MacEwen’s representation of Lawrence’s homosexuality, a Pauline inversion of orthodox notions of ‘sin’. This is very suggestive for both the messianic archivist and for the

⁴ Blanton’s psychoanalytic approach to Romans 7:7 is an interesting one since it illuminates much of the enigma around this letter and what could possibly be meant by Paul’s refusal to see ‘sin’ as the problem. I have trouble with this analysis only in that it assumes that Paul’s law is a single given idea. In fact, as scholarship shows, the enigma of Paul’s law is not that he has invented a law, but that he was actually referencing several laws: the laws of kashrute, the moral laws given us by Moses, and also, possibly, the third law that was not integral to Judean philosophy, but was an idea growing in contemporary Greek philosophy, that being the mortal law. For a detailed review of these ideas please see Chapter 3 of my project, (Principe 2015).

⁵ Seeing a connection between Lawrence and Paul as insurrection leaders, supports my research in *Secular Messiahs* in which I explore the possibility that Paul’s understanding of messianism was not about a single figure, ‘messiah’, as is promoted by Christianity, but about the potential for each person to be ‘anointed’ and so be ‘mesiach’, messiah.

postmodern poet, especially considering that they share an underlying agreement in seeing the messiah not as a person but as a possibility; not a hero but a movement; not a single event, but a multiplicity of encounters with the 'real'.

Earlier I had noted that deconstructive strategies informed postmodernism's a-political difference to the post-secularists: so far, this has proved not to be categorically true for MacEwen's postmodern project on Lawrence; reading MacEwen's work against Valhanian's "The Gospel of the Word Made Flesh", draws out more parallels between the long poem and *Manifesto*. Valhanian relies on Catherine Malabou's strategy to disable the impasse at the heart of deconstructionism, by taking up Hegel's dialectic and twisting it with the principle of 'plasticity' as the factor for change. In Valhanian's terms, change is the creative impulse in response to a crisis. When the subject recognizes that words do not mean, signaling a moment of crisis, the subject takes the creative leap from the constraints of signification to make such Pauline statements as 'word made flesh' (148). Christianity is a movement formed on the crisis of meaning: 'the denial of the failure of the messianic' (156). Notably, this denial can be seen running through MacEwen's inclusion of a postcolonial politics in her postmodern spin on Lawrence's messianic failure. Whether that spin indicates secular ideology and its underlying Christian infrastructure or an unconscious Christian understanding of the messiah, remains to be determined. For the time being we can say that, in Valhanian terms, Lawrence's failure is not a failure, and so his messianic status hovers, even if it does so as a question. As will become clear shortly, the political elements running through MacEwen's project give it a Malabou-esque plasticity so central to Valhanian's Gospel.

According to Valhanian, insurrection is the creative impulse for change, and since change can only be registered by the subject, then change needs to happen within the subject. Insurrection from within is the "'anthropological illusion" at the heart of philosophy' (169) and is the jumping point for change. Valhanian claims that we see the creative effort for transformation in imperialist projects as well as in genocides such as the Turks of the Armenians, the French of the Algerians, and the Nazis of the Jews. A creative response to imperialist orthodoxy inspires the insurrection driving postcolonial critique in the works of poets such as Aime Césaire and philosophers such as Albert Camus. I would suggest this creative response is apparent in MacEwen's representation of Lawrence. As noted earlier, MacEwen's critique of Britain's grand narrative of the colonizer has several implications on the postmodern dimension of her project: namely, the messianic narrative does not disappear and Lawrence's failure has been obscured. These details leave a late twentieth century reader to wonder if his messianic success is still to be determined. This is to say that, as a critic of his own authority, and a confessed lover of another man, does he invert 'orthodoxy' or the status quo, and so stand for a politics of change in favour of equality and emancipation? Is Lawrence a post-secular messiah hiding in postmodern dress?

With respect to his homosexuality, or his love for an Arab man, Lawrence and or his representation may be said to embody a Valhanian 'insurrection from within'. In, "Notes from the Dead Land", the last poem of the whole project, Lawrence, as the post-dead messiah (resurrected) addressing Feisal, the Arab leader, ironically, abdicates his status. Feisal was the person Lawrence earlier had said he would have followed to 'the ends of the earth' (31): even if Lawrence is a Jesus (resurrected)

figure in the 'now' of the poem, he has ceded his leadership to the one who was, in imperialist terms, his racial inferior. This deference to the Arab is reinforced in a ceding of Christianity to Islam in the poetic project: in the last lines of the last poem, Lawrence references the two angels that are addressed at the end of a Muslim's prayer, one on each shoulder, 'recording good and bad deeds' (69). The book-length poem concludes, 'I salute both of the angels'. MacEwen's representation of Lawrence's messianic failure is adumbrated by the insistence of another cultural discourse, namely Islam. In contrast to how MacEwen disables the Christian grand narrative through postmodern strategies of paradox or parody in this long poem, she leaves Islam untouched. In fact, this long poem ends with the irony that this Christian homosexual messiah has confessed to a kind of conversion to Islam. In this sense, one might see the 'insurrection from within': the plasticity of a subject's creative engagement with orthodoxy through the 'crisis of meaning': a British Officer, critiquing his colonizing authority, confesses his love for an Arab/ Arabia.

Islam's 'effect' as the trigger for change in Lawrence's autobiography resonates uncannily with the radical theology of the post-secular Insurrectionists whose Gospels were triggered by 9/11, an event associated with, but not necessarily reflective of, Islam: we have to remember that the alleged hijackers remain alleged; that their act in the name of Islam is considered by the majority of Muslims a travesty of their faith. Despite these qualifications, I think the term 'uncanny' holds, because Lawrence's narrative, almost a century old in its first iteration, and thirty years old in MacEwen's treatment, is still older than the Insurrectionist project and yet reflects the same political and religious terms that we find in the post-secular Insurrectionists' work: how do we speak across the divide established by secularism, from one faith to another? Both projects, strangely, address the impasse reflected in that question.

Reflecting on the impact of 9/11 on western secular life, post-secularists were inspired to develop an insurrectionist politics or a new radical theology, that would not fail to admit its partisan limitations. MacEwan's postmodern representation of the modernist Arab insurrection focused on Lawrence as the false messiah and, by the end, it became a love story expressing some kind of conversion to Islam, in MacEwen's representation, at least. These two projects, read with each other, have shown a dialogue that suggests some continuity between the postmodern and post-secular insurrections in the messianic trope. They both see that a catalyst for change is pain in the biblical desert (Robbins); both reflect on how the insurrection is not initiated by a single figure, but by an abstract principle, whether that is the 'real' or a 'force', that triggers change for the better (Blanton); and both show that a shift inside a subject is the cause for change (Valhanian). These parallels between the poetry and the manifesto are striking, as it is, but what is more striking is that, despite their different engagements with the messiah, they are similar in one fundamental way: both critique the Christian messiah. On the one hand, the British failed (Christian) messiah is less than the Arab 'savage'; on the other hand, the messiah is not a resurrected (Christian) figure, but the catalyst (real) for change.

Moving away from a Christo-centric saviour for change that follows a new ideology, or at least, not a Christian ideology, seems common to both. Moreover, despite MacEwen's a-political postmodern strategy, her work on the Arab insurrection takes up a politics against imperial practices in Arabia, giving it the same political energy so central to the Insurrectionists' project for social change. The

similarities between these putatively incommensurable projects can have many implications and along those lines, may be used to make certain claims. In my opinion, the most interesting claim to make is centered on the pattern of repetition: operating in different registers and at different periods of time, these projects are evidence of rhizomatic political activity so central to the insurrection project as ongoing and independently moving in apparently similar directions. From a psychoanalytic perspective, the 'similar directions' may be seen as symptomatic of the working through of some shared 'real' and its trauma. That one trauma (or multiple layers of trauma in the same 'real') has some very interesting implications about the ideological differences reflected in the insurrections and the messianic tropes reviewed: at the least, it suggests that we are all working through something of interest to each other, which means that much can be said if we take time to listen.

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