

# PRISM

*Crossing Borders*

## All o' We Is One

*Barbara Temple-Thurston*

**W**E – THE 800-STRONG REVELING MASQUERADERS IN THE JOUVAY MUD MAS BAND of the St. Clair Blue Devils – were all stepping and swaying down the dark street to the blaring rhythms of 1997's favorite calypso tune. I felt a hand grab me around the waist. Slightly wary, I struggled against the warm crush of bodies urging me forward and turned. I peered into a face masked by thickly smeared black mud and framed by hair knotted thick and globby with the same black mud. The head was crowned with the Mephistophilian cardboard horns that adorned us all, and darkness of the warm predawn air granted the comically gyrating mud-bespattered figure further anonymity. This grinning apparition, gesticulating excitedly with the trident in his free hand, could have been anybody.

But the lilt of a familiar American accent shouting "Having fun, Barbara?" above the thump of the bass beat of our band's soundtracks had jolted recognition. Relieved, I smiled into the excited green eyes of Daniel, one of the students on our Trinidad semester program, and nodded madly, knowing full well the futility of trying to communicate verbally above the din. He waved and turned. I watched him dance away, carried slowly on the current of moving humanity that curled around the corner of Tagarete Road like one long giant centipede, the head out of sight and the tail brought up a block and a half back by stragglers and hangers-on who jumped into the mas despite no horns, mud, or spiky tail.

The ping-a-ling of a competing calypso tune on steel pans reached me from a side street. Its silvery fluidity reminded me that our St. Clair Blue Devils were not the only ones out on the streets of Port of Spain tonight. I glanced up the street as our band wound by. The yellow glow of the streetlamps caught the light ochre mud covering the swaying bodies of the approaching band, giving them an eerie look. The color of their mud made them seem like a serpent wriggling free from its birthplace under the earth with mud still caked on its back. They would intersect our band when they reached the corner. Ochre would meet black and red and blue; horns would be exchanged; and some happy ochre reveler would surely go on her way waving a red trident.

I thought of the myriad bands all over Port of Spain weaving and winding their way at this moment into territories normally rarely visited, and I wondered at the peaceful crisscrossing of boundaries, the occupation and merging of new spaces, that is so utterly central to Carnival. The band from Belmont would dance its way through the streets of Woodbrook, and the Laventille revelers would find themselves weaving wildly past the president's house within deafening earshot of the prime minister's residence behind the Hotel Normandie. We, the devils from upscale St. Clair, even found ourselves near the project housing on Nelson street, a moment that filled us with a certain trepidation and awe. And at some point in the early morning we would all meet and mingle under the spreading trees of the Savannah, the beautiful sixty-five-acre park that is the gathering place for Trinidad's major festive events.

Aware that Trinidadians made these ritualized crossings of boundaries and space on a regular basis throughout their cultural life, my thoughts turned to the social and cultural spaces we in America occupy, and what kind of boundaries we traverse and why. How little we enter the spaces of others in America, how seldom we merge cheek by jowl with a mass of humanity. Our cultural events occur most often on the TV in the isolation of our own homes, or less frequently at organized functions like the

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*PAUL PORTER*

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## From the Editor

When the *Prism* editorial board decided that our theme for the Spring 2000 issue would be "crossing borders," we initially had in mind its more conventional – albeit important and lively – thematic possibilities stemming from the critical roles that global perspectives play in humanistic teaching and learning. Indeed, PLU humanities faculty responded with passion and insight as they shared their experiences as globally informed and globally committed scholars, teachers, and citizens. Barbara Temple-Thurston's reflections on PLU's pioneering program in Trinidad convey what others might tell of study abroad programs in Europe, Asia, South and Central America, and Australia. Denis G. Arnold, A. Paloma Martínez-Carbajo, and Paul Ingram illustrate how their own philosophical, literary, and religious scholarship readily crosses "borders" – national, sexual, and spiritual. And Katherine Hanson's translation of the fiction of writer He Dong not only dissolves linguistic boundaries but particularly illuminates our theme: this excerpt from "Always Cloudy" was written in Chinese, translated by the author into Norwegian, then translated into English by Hanson.

This issue also crosses other borders we had not anticipated. One is visual. For the first time *Prism* includes photographs, and interior color. Charles Bergman's photo essay portraying wild animals from different global regions urges us to consider animals as "other nations" with intrinsic dignities akin to those we recognize among human political and ethical communities. It is as important to meet their gaze, captured memorably by Bergman's camera, as that of all kindred humans.

But we face another journey into new territory with great sorrow. In August 1999 the university lost to a swift cancer its longtime graphic designer and publications director, Paul Porter. From the start, Paul was instrumental to the artistic and typographic integrity of *Prism*. He not only designed its logo and ensured the excellence of its production but for many years contributed original illustrations to accompany the essays. His role often far exceeded what the "job" required; he gave us his artistic visions and values as well, and we are immensely grateful for that.

To honor his memory, we once again rely on the pen and brush of Paul Porter for our illustrations. Although each was created to accompany another text, most of them in past issues of *Prism*, we feel that like all good art Paul's transcends the borders of the literal and the particular. Even as Paul's presence again this year adds grace and wisdom to our pages, we miss and mourn him, and we invite you to join us in celebrating his gifted life.

*Megan Benton for the Prism editorial board*

## From the Dean: *Staying Home*

The contributions to this issue continue the *Prism* tradition of strong, thoughtful writing that calls readers to involvement with their world. Begun by former dean Janet Rasmussen (and named by retired secretary Isabel Watness, granddaughter of PLU founder Bjug Harstad), *Prism* has for thirteen years provided students, alums, and other friends of the university with a sense of the rich resources we have in Humanities faculty and in support staff such as Paul Porter. How lucky we have been.

As Megan Benton states above, you will encounter in these articles a sampling of the many borders we cross in the course of our lives. But as I read the proofs, I was also struck by the fact that these same authors who invite us to join their journey are here on the PLU campus each day. These are people deeply committed to the classroom, to assisting – and also challenging – students in their learning. Renowned Lutheran theologian Joseph Sittler once characterized education as "movement into a larger world"; in these pages you will catch a glimpse of the opportunities this university provides for continued reflection and growth.

*Keith Cooper, Dean of Humanities*

theater or opera. Our sense of personal space is so large, so individual and private. We zoom down freeways locked in our cars connected with others via cell phones. It seems the wide-open spaces of the continent have found expression in our expansive body language. We stretch out with our feet on coffee tables; we roll around our private office areas in plush chairs on wheels. Yet ironically the luxury of space where we could be free to be ourselves seems, almost while we were not looking, to have served a baser human trait: the urge to remain separate from those not like ourselves and to nurture our prejudices against them. Few of us ever cross the boundaries that would land us squarely in the other worlds of America, the Bronx, the reservations, the migrant worker camps.

It struck me that cultural concepts of space significantly shape our behavior and expectations in life; that perceived differences among us can be traced to our use and treatment of space. How well did our life in Tacoma and the U.S. prepare our student group – now caked in mud and “chipping” their way around Port of Spain – for catapulting across cultural boundaries, for understanding and adapting to the conventions of the different spaces we would occupy? How could our group begin to unravel the confusion we felt at being thrust into new places and spaces so exciting, so challenging, yet still so unfathomable?

Since our departure from Tacoma and our arrival in Tunapuna near the University of the West Indies, we had traversed much more than mere geographical space. We had crossed national boundaries, and now, at various cultural events, we stood at attention for a different national anthem, one that claims not once, but twice, “here every creed and race finds an equal place.” Climatically we now occupied a very different space, one where the light cotton sweater I carefully packed each year had returned each visit untouched, and where people spent much of their social and family life outdoors. We had entered a zone where personal space was measured quite differently, where public transport was the norm and where we sat careful and contained in our maxi-taxi seats to ensure against spilling over, in large and gangly American fashion, into the space of the quiet and courteous Trinidadians beside us. It seemed to me that the finite boundaries of an island generated a respect for necessary space-sharing, as well as a consciousness and anticipation of the needs of others that translated into warm and genuine human interactions. The pleasant greetings of *goodnight* on the street from

locals, their good wishes and advice for our stay in their country, the *pleases* and *thank yous*, the chit chat that preceded business pleasantly surprised us all. People had time for us, and for each other, so a different concept of time was yet another boundary we had crossed.

As we whizzed by the urban communities in the maxi-taxi en route to Port of Spain, or when we crawled in the chaos of snarled traffic on the main road to reach our friends the Malick Folk Performers, we began to notice things. “What do the colored flags outside the houses mean, Barbara?” “Why are some triangular and some

*We stood at attention for a different national anthem, one that claims not once, but twice, “here every creed and race finds an equal place.”*

square?” We were intrigued to discover that the Hindu prayer flags and the square flags of the African Orisha and Shouter Baptists coexisted quite peacefully on the same block, just down the street from a Moslem mosque. Later, we were surprised to find Afro-Trinidadians celebrating the Hindu festival of Phagwa with their Indian

friends. We learned too that the accomplished Tassa drummers who pound out complex Indian rhythms for four nights in the streets of St. James during Hosay, the Islamic commemoration of the death of Hassan and Hussein, were not all Islamic. A significant number of the drummers were African Trinidadians, and I met a Christian American who played the brass cymbals in one of the groups.

But the ease, naturalness, and respect with which Trinidadians traverse back and forth across religious boundaries were clearest when we visited the southern town of Siparia during Easter. We found that each year on Holy Thursday the Catholic priest at the large local church supervises the placement of the side altar’s Black Madonna in a special room. There, all afternoon and evening, she receives gifts of oil, money, and gold jewelry from devout Hindu families who visit her from all over the island. They pray silently before her, confident that Sipari Mai (their name for her) would grant their prayers. On Good Friday the Madonna is returned to her usual space in the side chapel ready for Mass, where praying Catholics of all ethnicities once more light candles and kneel before her.

This tradition of a shared deity epitomized for me the way Trinidadians celebrate and participate in one another’s cultures. Witnessing

their willingness to venture beyond the boundaries of their own cultural practices or, on the other hand, to open their cultural doors in welcome to anyone who enters with respect and interest, remains the most astonishingly beautiful aspect of Trinidadian life. Trinidad surely has something to teach the world about religious respect and freedom.

For PLU students, however, the most profound boundary crossed in Trinidad remains race. It is a crossing for which our culture has poorly prepared them. While America struggles to integrate her richly diverse population, our lives are generally a testament of the lack of progress in this area, for we still know so little about one another. Where are the Native American communities in Tacoma? How many of us have visited Hilltop? What are Tacoma's Asian communities' concerns? Why is it that most white American students have never had an African American friend, and why does an American Korean family resist their son's marriage to an educated young white woman? Does Tacoma have a mosque? These are questions that bring to light the troubling fact that despite efforts to integrate schools and communities, the organization of social space in America remains largely racial and ethnic. As new waves of immigrants have sought their space, it seems our gift of vast lands has merely enabled separation.

But today we face a pressing need to learn to live and share together in respect and harmony, and despite the best intentions we often don't know where or how to begin. I believe our students' experiences in Trinidad have offered some profound insights. Our white students become instant minorities upon arrival, and despite retaining the perceived privileges of wealth, they quickly become acutely aware of their difference. "Hey, Whitey," yells a friendly Indian man at the Tunapuna market, hoping to sell his orange ripe pawpaws to a group of wandering Lutes. "Beautiful blue eyes, for you only three TT for the bag of portugals," chimes a stooped gray-bearded fellow from his stall under the Samaan tree as Mary strolls by.

Our few African American and Asian students have had a different experience. For them, being in a culture where color is the norm has generally proved a blessed relief. As Nzinga put it, "I feel as though I have come home." Unlike Americans, who usually shrink from any reference to race or color, Trinidadians generally use race as a descriptor, not as a judgment. In a country of such ethnic and racial variety it

becomes just another way to identify a friend, a business associate, or a relative: "My brother, the dark one" or "My friend, the Chinese." After initially being quite startled, our students expressed relief at having the issue of race addressed so clearly and upfront.

Lest I cast Trinidadians as angels of perfection, let me emphasize that they are very human. Like any place, tensions between groups bubble and subside as situations shift and change, and some of the interethnic exchanges have been quite vituperative. But Trinidadians have somehow been able to work out a way of being, a dominating ethic, that holds true to the refrain one hears from every quarter around Carnival time: "All o' we is one." Trinidad and Tobago are a nation of festivals, and the calendar is punctuated at frequent intervals by shared cultural celebrations of all kinds – Carnival, Phagwa, Hosay, Easter, Emancipation Day, Baptist Liberation Day, Divali, Christmas, and others. These spaces that the nation has carved out of its calendar are non-negotiable. They are held in reverence by all as spaces – almost sacred – that reinforce and ensure the pride in and celebrating of each other's cultures. And Trinidad Carnival remains the central cultural celebration embodying the inclusiveness of "all o' we is one." It not only beckons every citizen of its islands to participate and celebrate a recommitment to the humanity of all, but it welcomes those of us from far beyond its tropical borders. As Trinidadians shift and jostle to make space for us in their bands, in their temples, in their revelry, we are reminded of and humbled by the gifts that sharing brings.

I felt the stream of humanity around me slow and mark time to the calypso rhythms. We had reached the entrance of the Savannah stage, where a number of bands were joining ours to cross the stage together. The crowd grew tighter. I stepped on a rock and almost lost my balance. A hand reached out and steadied me from behind. I glanced back and smiled. As the crowd, now more of a river than a stream, moved forward up the stage ramp, I realized that the sky was light. A pale pink dawn was breaking ahead of us over the Trinity mountains that ring Port of Spain, and the black of the forests was turning imperceptibly to dark green. Just ahead I could make out the tall figure of Enrico Rajah, Dean of Students at St. Mary's Boys High School and King Devil of our band from St. Clair. Four attendant PLU imps still danced joyously around him. His broad smile had cracked and peeled the dried mud off his face. ♦

# “Fruit Salad Can Be Delicious!”

## The Practice of Buddhist-Christian Dialogue

Paul O. Ingram

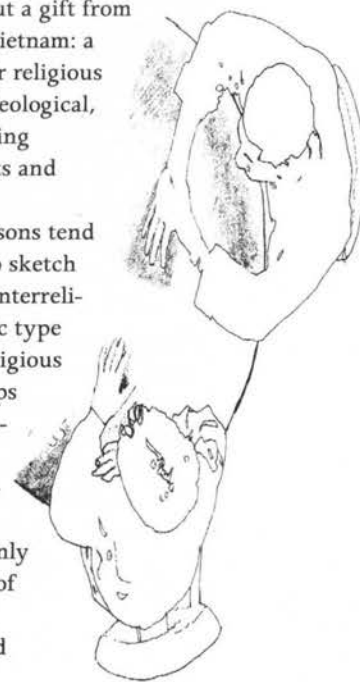
In *Living Buddha, Living Christ*, the Vietnamese Zen monk Thich Nhat Hahn described an inter-religious meeting in Sri Lanka where the participants were assured: “We are going to hear about the beauties of several traditions, but that does not mean that we are going to make a fruit salad.” When it came Thich Nhat Hahn’s turn to speak, he commented: “Fruit salad can be delicious! I have shared the Eucharist with Father Daniel Berrigan, and our worship became possible because of the sufferings we Vietnamese and Americans shared over many years.” Thich Nhat Hahn then observed that some of the “Buddhists present were shocked . . . and many Christians seemed truly horrified.”<sup>1</sup>

This meeting between Thich Nhat Hahn and Daniel Berrigan was a form of Buddhist-Christian dialogue. Both are ordained clergy in their respective traditions; both were at the time living in exile because of their protest of the war in Vietnam; each shared the depths of his religious life with the other. What brought them together in Sri Lanka was not mere intellectual curiosity, but a gift from those who suffered on all sides of the civil war in Vietnam: a sense of compassion and kinship that deepened their religious lives while transcending theological, philosophical, ideological, and institutional boundaries. Such creatively transforming events are rather common experiences among Buddhists and Christians engaged in serious dialogue.

Because most conversations between religious persons tend to be monologues rather than dialogues, it is helpful to sketch briefly the interdependent elements that structure an interreligious dialogue. First, interreligious dialogue is a specific type of conversation between faithful persons of different religious traditions that is without ulterior motives. This is perhaps the most important element of genuine dialogical encounter. Dialogue is a mutual sharing between two or more persons in which one seeks to place one’s faith in conversation with persons dwelling in a faith perspective other than one’s own, while at the same time sharing one’s own faith perspective openly and honestly with that person. Ulterior motives of any sort, such as the conversion of another to one’s own standpoint, transforms the conversation to a monologue.

Second, genuine interreligious dialogue requires being engaged by the faith and practice of persons dwelling in religious standpoints other than our own. In such a conversation, our own standpoints are stretched, tested, and challenged by the faith and practices of our dialogical partner. Third, interreligious dialogue requires critical and empathetic understanding of one’s own standpoint. It’s a bit like being in love. We can recognize the reality of another’s love because we also experience receiving and giving love. In a similar way, living in the depths of our own tradition enables us to apprehend the depths of our partner’s tradition.

Fourth, interreligious dialogue presupposes that truth is relational in structure. It may not be quite correct to think that truth is relative, but our sense of truth is certainly relational. We can only apprehend whatever truth is from the particular cultural, religious, social, and gender-specific standpoints we inhabit. For this reason, Carmelite nuns practicing contemplative prayer do not ordinarily experience



1. Thich Nhat Hahn, *Living Buddha, Living Christ* (Berkeley: Riverhead Books, 1995), 1–2.

## "Fruit Salad Can Be Delicious!"

lead, Ruben Habito organized a Buddhist-Christian meditation group in Dallas, Texas. Habito is an ex-Jesuit whose Awakening experience has been certified by his Zen teacher, Yamada Koun Roshi, who also authorized Habito as his "Dharma Heir."

What Thomas Merton and Ruben Habito and Buddhists like the Dalai Lama and Yamada Roshi discovered is that their practice of interior and conceptual Buddhist-Christian dialogue engendered forms of theological-philosophical reflection and experience that pushed them in new directions of social engagement. They were, in other words, mutually transformed by their experience. From a Christian perspective, such transformations seem a sign of grace.

Crossing the borders of my own religious tradition into Buddhist traditions and practices has taught me three lessons. First, interior dialogue with Buddhist meditative practice has taught me that faith is an interior journey through time – forward and back, seldom in a straight line, most often in spirals. Each of us is moving and changing in relationship to others, to the world, and, if one is grasped by Christian faith, to God, or if grasped by Buddhist faith, to the Dharma. As we discover what our particular religious journeys teach us, we remember; remembering, we discover; and most intently do we discover when our separate journeys converge. It is at spots of Christian and Buddhist convergence that I have experienced the most dramatic and creatively transformative forms of interreligious dialogue.

Second, as a Lutheran it strikes me as a bit glib to suggest that the focus of interreligious dialogue or any other form of religious practice is "God" or, if Buddhist, "Awakening," because I often feel intellectually and emotionally blindsided by what religious persons mean by these words. What do these terms mean as we practice whatever we practice? Conceptual dialogue with Buddhists has taught me that plenty of propositions can be strung together to answer this question, and I think it is important to guide one's religious practice by theological-philosophical propositions. But Buddhist and Christian contemplatives have taught me that we must never cling to propositions, because we will miss the reality to which they point. Conceptualizing and believing in propositions is a necessary beginning because they are a form of "faith seeking understanding." But faith is never, in Christian or Buddhist understanding, identical with belief in propositions. Faith is trusting the reality to which propositions can point but never

capture, a grasp that goes beyond propositions, is not caused by propositions, yet cannot be experienced non-propositionally, since even the statement that "God" or "Awakening" is "beyond the grasp of propositions" is still a proposition.

Finally, dialogue with traditions of Buddhist social engagement has taught me that interreligious dialogue is not merely an abstract conversation. Interreligious dialogue requires and energizes involvement in the rough-and-tumble of historical, political, and economic existence. For me, the central point of the practice of faith within the context of interreligious dialogue is the liberation of all creatures in nature from forces of oppression and injustice and the mutual creative transformation of persons in community with nature. Both the wisdom that Buddhists affirm is engendered by Awakening and the Christian doctrines of creation and incarnation point to the utter interdependency of all things and events at every moment of space-time – a notion also affirmed by contemporary physics and biology in distinctively scientific terms. Thus, as we experience the suffering of others as our suffering, the oppression of nature as our oppression, and the liberation of others as our liberation, we become empowered for social engagement.

Consequently, interreligious dialogue needs to include focus on practical issues that confront all human beings regardless of what religious labels they wear. Thus my thesis about dialogically crossing religious borders is in agreement with Christians like Martin Luther, Martin Luther King, Mother Theresa, John Cobb, and Thomas Merton; the Vietnamese Buddhist monk Thich Nhat Hahn and the Thai Buddhist layman Sulak Sivaraksa and the Dalai Lama; the Hindu activist sage Mahatma Gandhi; as well as Jewish and Islamic calls that we struggle for justice in obedience to Torah or in surrender to Allah guided by the *Qur'an*. All agree that interreligious dialogue throws us into the world's rough-and-tumble-struggle for peace and justice. Any religious practice that refuses to wrestle with the world's injustices is as impotent as it is self-serving. Accordingly, whatever particular form of religious faith we practice and whatever form of interreligious dialogue we pursue need to be guided by concern for the liberation of all sentient beings, for as both Christian and Buddhist teachings affirm, we are all in this together. Distinctively Christian practices and, I suspect, distinctively Buddhist practices cannot have it any other way, because in an interdependently processive universe, there is no other way. ♦

### **Buddhist-Christian Studies Conference**

On August 5–12, 2000, the Society for Buddhist-Christian Studies will hold its Sixth International Conference at PLU on the theme "Buddhism, Christianity, and Global Healing." Founded in 1987, the Society is an academic organization that encourages Buddhist-Christian dialogue at both its annual meetings and its international conferences, which convene every four years.

Plenary sessions will include addresses by eminent Buddhist and Christian leaders. Working group sessions, individual paper presentations, and a special seminar on "Buddhist-Christian Social Engagement" will also be featured. For more information, contact Paul Ingram, Department of Religion, 253-535-7319.

# The (Mis)Adventures of Catalina de Erauso

A. Paloma Martínez-Carbajo

Catalina de Erauso was an intrepid Basque woman who traveled around the world disguised as a man and actively participated in the conquest of the Americas. One of the main “disguised” women of the Renaissance, she crossed all sorts of sexual, social, religious, and territorial borders. Her adventures have always intrigued historians. An air of legendary mystery surrounds her. Some critics today even question her actual existence, which could explain the various versions of her “autobiography.” For example, a play by Juan Pérez de Montalbán, titled *The Nun Ensign*, was published in 1626 and possibly even read by Catalina herself. Two centuries later, it would be translated into French and German, and into English by Thomas de Quincey.

Rebellious, aggressive, temperamental, and yet brave, patriotic, and loyal – these characteristics are rarely used to describe a woman of the seventeenth century. To earn such “honors,” Catalina begins her endeavor by first committing an act of transgression that will liberate her: her escape from the convent where she had lived since childhood. She dares to trick her own aunt, also a nun, from whom she literally takes the keys to her freedom and runs to the woods, where she hides.

Once beyond the convent’s walls, she immediately decides to radically change her appearance: “There . . . my nun’s habit was useless and I threw it away, and I cut my hair and threw it away” (4). This statement reveals, in my opinion, certain traits of her personality. Discarding her habit, and not knowing what to do with it, indicates her separation from the Catholic Church, which she finds repressive and useless. Also, in abandoning her hair, she rejects something traditionally associated with femininity and the notion of beauty.

For a woman to adopt a masculine identity in a patriarchal society is to enter a privileged world, inaccessible in any other way. Initially, she may not know whether her transvestism will be temporary or permanent, or if her altered appearance reflects her changed sexual identification, but she knows she must create a visual illusion of a complete and balanced being. As feminist philosopher Judith Butler argues in *Gender Trouble*, it is important that “acts and gestures, articulated and enacted desires create the illusion of an interior and organizing gender core, an illusion discursively maintained for the purposes of the regulation of sexuality within the obligatory frame of reproductive heterosexuality” (136). Cohesion between Catalina’s interior and external appearance is essential in this process of adaptation. Until she reaches that cohesion, her body has lacked a “sex,” and it now becomes important to her self-identification.



## The (Mis) Adventures of Catalina de Erauso

Catalina's second most important step toward conversion is to create a name that will identify, even temporarily, her new being. In *Bodies that Matter*, Butler underlines the importance of self-identification as an essential tool in the power discourse: "The naming is at once the setting of a boundary, and also the repeated inculcation of a norm" (8). Catalina is fully aware of the limitations that surrounded her female being, the convent's walls, her superiors' strict orders, the beatings, and she knows she must do something radical to fight the passive role generally expected of women. She realizes she is not involved in the power discourse, simply because she belongs to the wrong gender.

After she decides to travel the world in search of adventures, Catalina realizes that her masculine appearance will be of great use. In fact, if she had not taken on the masculine role, she would have stayed out of the power play. She would not have actively participated in the colonization of the Americas. Latinoamericanist Beatriz González Stephan considers this colonization "phallogentric" because it "rests on the shoulders of *the citizen, the senator, the teacher, the judge and the father.*" I might add to this list the conqueror, the colonizer, and the priest. In this colonial context, the law "does not legislate the feminine subject; it excludes it from public life; that is, it is a non-citizen" (31). Similarly, the Chilean critic Raquel Olea points out that "the national project depends on a masculine, heterosexual body to organize memory and history" (Massiello 220). Only by becoming a masculinized being is Catalina able to take part in the history being written before her eyes.

Passing as a member of the ruling sex, Catalina can afford to complement "his" personality with a natural attraction toward the opposite sex. The implications of her love of women are enormous, though. Not only is Catalina a woman made into a man, but she is also a lesbian. Again and again in her autobiography, she tells us about her various relations with women. Early on, masters and superiors try to unite her with desirable ladies of the new colonies. In Saña, Peru, Catalina, known as Antonio, is under the orders of Juan de Urquiza, who attempts to arrange a marriage between Catalina and his own mistress. Interestingly, the lady does not seem to mind this arrangement. As Catalina tells us: "I used to sneak out at night to the lady's house, and there she would caress me, and implore me . . . to stay with her. Finally, one night, she locked me in and

declared that come hell or high water I was going to sleep with her — pushing and pleading so much that I had to smack her one and slip out of there" (13). Once again, Catalina has to flee from danger.

But her contacts with women continue, and, some time later, another lady tries to decide her love life for her. After a torturous trip from Concepción, Chile, to Tucumán, Argentina, in which she almost dies of starvation, Catalina is welcome in the house of a "mestiza" woman, "a widow and a good woman" (28). Grateful for her care, Catalina offers to "serve her to the best of [her] abilities" (28), and this promise, as expected, brings new love problems. In fact, she writes, "a couple of days later, she let me know it would be fine by her if I married her daughter — a girl as black and ugly as the devil himself, quite the opposite of my taste, which has always run to pretty faces" (28). Racism will be an impediment to this union. Failing to succeed in her masculine role and fearing discovery, Catalina's only solution is to escape, leaving no trace behind: "that was the last they ever saw of me" (28).

Catalina's passion for women complements her stereotypical masculine personality with its military courage. She confesses that she is naturally inclined to "wander about and see the world" (25) and, if she must become a mercenary to do so, such is the price to pay in such a complex world. She thus actively participates in an exterminatory process where men were expected "to conquer and take the gold" (33), overdoing her duties by "carving [an Indian] boy in ten thousand pieces" (34) or hanging an "indigenous captain, already a Christian" (28).

However, there are also times when Catalina is fully aware of her marginalized status as a woman. Colonialist Ann Laura Stoler has pointed out the ambiguities surrounding European women in the colonies. On the one hand, they are subjected to masculine authority, while participating in the colonizing project as mothers, daughters, servants, and lovers. On the other hand, at the decisive moment when Catalina's feminine sexuality is publicly exhibited, she comes out as a woman. Thus, in Guamanga, Peru, seeing her life in danger, she seeks an audience with the bishop and "seeing that he was such a saintly man . . . in the presence of God," (68) she decides to reveal the truth: "that I am a woman . . . [that] I was placed in a certain convent . . . [that] I left the convent for . . . such a reason . . . undressed myself and dressed myself up again . . . traveled here and there, embarked . . . hustled, killed,



maimed, wreaked havoc, and roamed about, until coming to a stop in this very instant, at the feet of Your Eminence" (64).

In spite of her outrageous confession, the bishop's reaction is surprisingly sympathetic toward Catalina because she is still a virgin. After reckoning on her extraordinary case, he calls for her again and speaks to her with great kindness, "urging me to thank God for His mercy in showing me that I had been traveling the road of the lost . . . that leads straight to eternal punishment. He told me to make a true confession, which shouldn't be too hard, since I had already confessed, more or less" (65). Catalina shifts easily from a criminal to an almost repented Christian.

Once her identity is discovered and she is redeemed, Catalina has to reenter the religious community she left twenty years before. The feminine rehabilitation is, therefore, to return to one of the traditional roles. There is a strong need to keep women tamed, domesticated. As Beatriz González Stephan points out, most believed that women in the colonies must be controlled and their instincts repressed. Luckily, thanks to her connections in the high places, Catalina gets a better deal. After spending two years at a convent, she is able to head back to Spain, where she intends to do something about her salvation.

That is easier said than done. Once her identity is discovered, Catalina is constantly scorned and ridiculed. In the colonies and in Spain, she is both admired and rejected. Seeing the reaction of those around her, she decides to remain anonymous, incognito. Her transvestism places her among a group of "abnormal" people in society. Catalina belongs to what French critic Michel Foucault calls a "sub-race," which includes all sorts of marginal beings. These individuals "circulated through the pores of society; they were always hounded, but not always by laws; were often locked up, but not always in prisons; were sick, perhaps, but scandalous, dangerous victims, prey to a strange evil that also bore the name of vice and sometimes crime" (40). I do not believe that Catalina was an unbalanced criminal, but others in the seventeenth century would have likely considered her dangerously perverse.

Catalina's search for forgiveness leads her to confront the trinity of power that, until the end of the eighteenth century, governed life in general: the canonical, the Christian pastoral, and the civil law that determined the division between what Foucault calls the licit and the illicit (37). Curiously, Catalina has shown no intention of repent-

ing until that moment. It is only when she sees her life in danger that she literally seeks shelter in the sacred temple and becomes anxious to relate her experiences. Catalina's repentance may be a truly authentic redeeming act or simply a strategy to get some money from the king that she for so long served. He actually grants her a pension, which she complains is too "little."

Not financially satisfied with the deal, she decides to take her case to the Pope and heads to Rome. As she promised the archbishop of New Granada, she also wants to do something about her salvation. Since it is the holy year of the great Jubilee, she hopes that the Pope himself will forgive her. She feels the need to seek the ecclesiastic confirmation so that she can return to a conventional lifestyle. Her personality takes her to Urban VIII, whom she tells "the story of my life . . . that I was a woman, and . . . had kept my virginity. His Holiness seemed amazed . . . and graciously [allowed] me to pursue my life in men's clothing, all the while reminding me it was my duty to lead an honest existence from that day forward" (78).

At this point, her security restored and the papal blessing in hand, the biography of this complex woman essentially comes to an end. Having dared to appropriate the phallogocentric voice and having colonized, destroyed, robbed, killed, seduced, and loved, Catalina is able to assume the privileged form of a man. The originality of her behavior is that both as a woman and as a man she transgresses all sorts of barriers. Even after coming out as a woman and receiving the papal pardon, she continues her adventures, dueling, gambling, and falling in love with women.

However, we cannot forget that she suffered, sometimes justly, sometimes not, mostly because her fame preceded her. She was prosecuted, imprisoned, robbed, assaulted, and her farce was discovered and mocked. Miraculously, nonetheless, her salvation lies in her precious virginity. Although she has disobeyed practically all Ten Commandments, her virginal state absolves her of any doubt about her virtue.

Her ambiguous voice, together with some comments on the female condition, is heard. Catalina, whether she is a subaltern or a selfish aggressor, is a very attractive character, even to the most traditional critics. Her autobiography surprises, confuses, and subverts traditional feminine narrative. ♦

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# Ethics and Oil in the Amazon

Denis G. Arnold

*American-owned companies are leaving an ugly legacy of poverty and contamination in one of the most important forests on earth.*

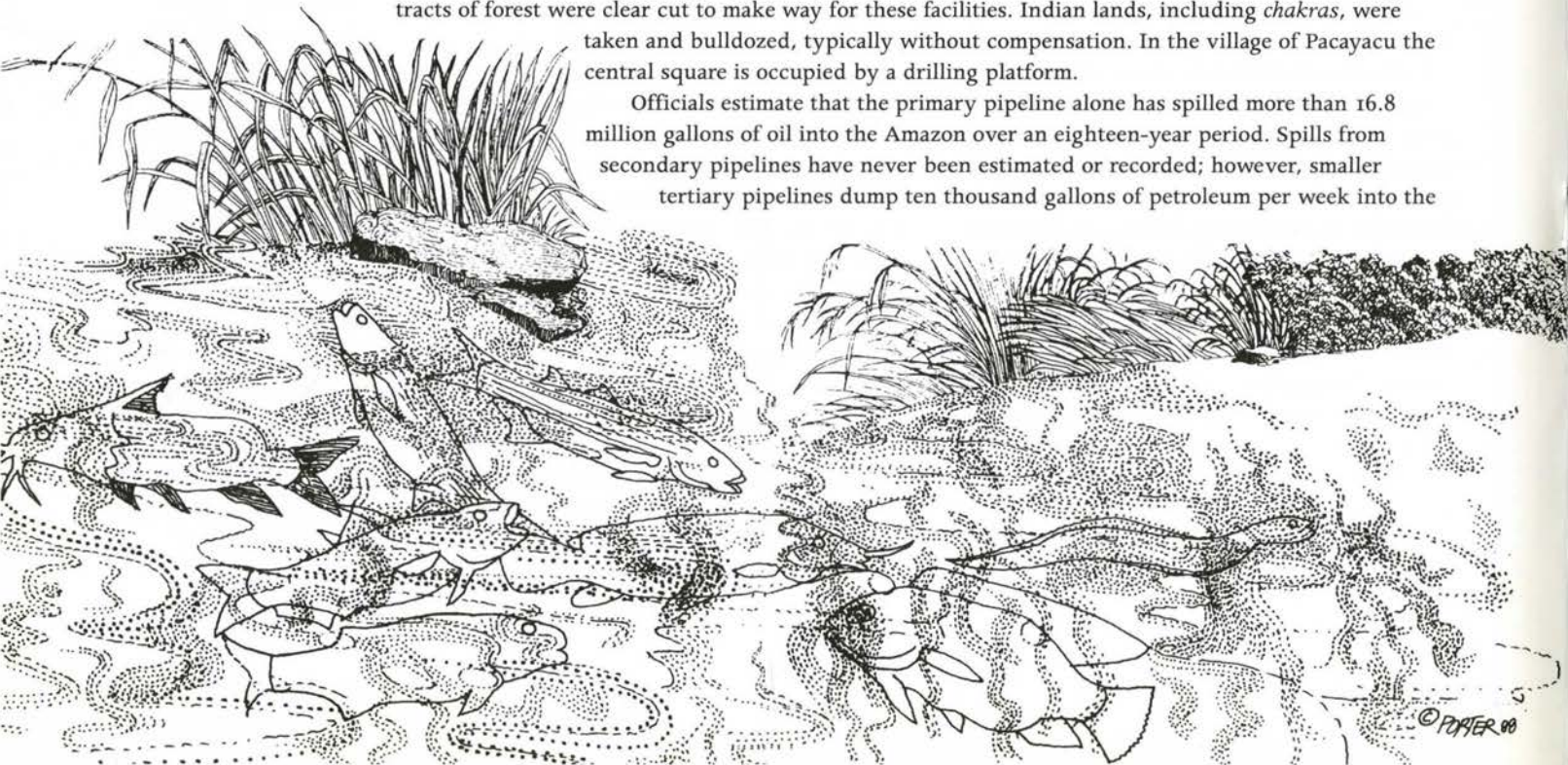
Robert F. Kennedy, Jr., Senior Attorney, National Resources Defense Council

**A**MERICAN TRANSNATIONAL CORPORATIONS frequently conduct business in host nations where it is lawful to engage in practices that most Americans find morally abhorrent. Frequently the lax regulatory environments stem from a desire of host nation governments to attract foreign capital. Should American corporations merely adhere to the law, or are there universal moral norms that should serve as minimum standards for corporate conduct across national boundaries? This essay draws on the little-known story of Texaco's operations in the Ecuadorean Amazon in arguing that adherence to the law is not by itself a justification for the violation of basic moral norms.

Ecuador is a small nation on the northwest coast of South America. The Ecuadorean Amazon is one of the most biologically diverse forests in the world. It is home to cicadas, scarlet macaws, squirrel monkeys, freshwater pink dolphins, and thousands of other species. Many of these species have small populations, making them extremely sensitive to disturbance. Indigenous Indian populations have lived in harmony with these species for centuries. They have fished and hunted in and around the rivers and lakes. And they have raised crops of cacao, coffee, fruits, nuts, and tropical woods in *chakras*, models of sustainable agroforestry.

Ten thousand feet beneath the Amazon floor lies one of Ecuador's most important resources: rich deposits of heavy-grade crude oil. The Ecuadorean government regards the oil as the best way to keep up with the country's payments on its \$12 billion foreign debt obligations. For twenty years American oil companies, led by Texaco, extracted oil from beneath the Ecuadorean Amazon. (The U.S. is the primary importer of Ecuadorean oil.) They constructed four hundred drill sites and hundreds of miles of roads and pipelines, including a primary pipeline that extends for 280 miles across the Andes. Large tracts of forest were clear cut to make way for these facilities. Indian lands, including *chakras*, were taken and bulldozed, typically without compensation. In the village of Pacayacu the central square is occupied by a drilling platform.

Officials estimate that the primary pipeline alone has spilled more than 16.8 million gallons of oil into the Amazon over an eighteen-year period. Spills from secondary pipelines have never been estimated or recorded; however, smaller tertiary pipelines dump ten thousand gallons of petroleum per week into the



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Amazon, and production pits dump approximately 4.3 million gallons of toxic production wastes and treatment chemicals into the forest's rivers, streams, and groundwater each day. (By comparison, the *Exxon Valdez* spilled 10.8 million gallons of oil into Alaska's Prince William Sound.)

Texaco has ignored oil industry standards that call for the reinjection of waste deep into the ground. Rivers and lakes have been contaminated by oil and petroleum; heavy metals such as arsenic, cadmium, cyanide, lead, and mercury; poisonous industrial solvents; and lethal concentrations of chloride salt and other highly toxic chemicals. The only treatment these chemicals receive occurs when the oil company burns waste pits to reduce petroleum content. Villagers report that the chemicals return as black rain, polluting what little fresh water remains. What is not burned off seeps through the unlined walls of the pits into the groundwater. Cattle are found with their stomachs rotted out, crops are destroyed, animals are gone from the forest, and fish disappear from the lakes and rivers. Health officials and community leaders report adults and children with deformities, skin rashes, abscesses, headaches, dysentery, infections, respiratory ailments, and disproportionately high rates of cancer. In 1972 Texaco signed a contract requiring it to turn over all of its operations to Ecuador's national oil company, Petroecuador, by 1992. Petroecuador inherited antiquated equipment, rusting pipelines, and uncounted toxic waste sites. Independent estimates have placed the cost of cleaning up the production pits alone at \$600 million.

A group of thirty thousand Ecuadoreans, including several indigenous tribes, have filed a billion-dollar class action lawsuit against Texaco in U.S. court under the Alien Tort Claims Act. Texaco maintains that the case should be tried in Ecuador. However, Ecuador's judicial system does not recognize the concept of a class action suit and has no history of environmental litigation. Furthermore, Ecuador's judicial system is notoriously corrupt and lacks the infrastructure necessary to handle the case (e.g., the city in which the case would be tried lacks a courthouse). Texaco has defended its actions by arguing that it was in full compliance with Ecuadorean law and that it had full approval of the Ecuadorean government.

In mounting this defense Texaco has invoked a common view of corporate social responsibility. This view holds that the only responsibility of publicly held corporations is to maximize profits for shareholders within the bounds of the law.

The most prominent defender of this view is libertarian economist Milton Friedman. Friedman argues that corporate executives act in morally and politically illegitimate ways when they devote more corporate resources than are required by law to such things as worker safety, environmental protection, or social welfare. This view has been criticized on numerous grounds and is rejected by almost everyone in the field of business ethics. Nonetheless, the view remains influential in business and politics. In what follows I argue that Friedman's position does not justify conduct such as that of Texaco in Ecuador.

Friedman argues that a business's only responsibility is to increase profits within the bounds of the law, for the following reasons. First, he argues that corporate executives are agents of the stockholders who own the business. He

*Libertarian  
economist Milton  
Friedman . . .  
argues that  
corporate execu-  
tives act in  
morally and  
politically  
illegitimate ways  
when they devote  
more corporate  
resources than are  
required by law to  
such things as  
worker safety,  
environmental  
protection, or  
social welfare.*

believes that, as agents, executives' commitment to any responsibility other than profit maximization is unjustifiable. Second, socially responsible activities – which Friedman characterizes as taxation and the expenditure of tax proceeds – are governmental functions, not corporate functions. He maintains that socially responsible activities constitute a pernicious form of socialism because executives are not democratically elected and such activities are not democratically determined. In his judgment, socially responsible actions are

largely the result of crusaders trying to achieve what they were unable to persuade a majority of their fellow citizens to enact through democratic means.

In an impressive, if galling, feat of historical revisionism, Friedman and like-minded libertarian thinkers support their views by identifying themselves as the intellectual heirs of Adam Smith. Smith, who held the Chair of Moral Philosophy at the University of Glasgow from 1752 to 1764, is best known to contemporary readers as the author of *An Inquiry into the Nature and the Causes of the Wealth of Nations*. In this work

*continued on page 16*

# Other Nations

*Photographs and introduction by Charles Bergman*

THESE PORTRAITS OF WILD ANIMALS, taken in many different nations of the world, are themselves images of different nations. But how do we usually act? As if only humans inherit and inhabit the world. Because animals are less perfect than us, the reasoning goes, they don't really exist in their own right. They exist largely for our benefit or by our leave. But look in these animals' faces. They reveal what the Roman poet Horace called *integer vitae*, integrity of being. Animals are what they are, and they pursue their lives with all the purpose and passion that humans bring to their lives, without the guilt and regret. It's an enviable integrity. For me, photography and writing are ways of deepening my engagement with creatures and the worlds of being that they embody. In these faces I hope you too can glimpse something of the wider possibilities for engagement and relationship with the creaturely others with whom we share this planet and this life.

▼ *Macaque, Japan*



◀ *Red-lored parrot, Mexico*



▼ *Green tree frog, Australia*



*We need another and a wiser and perhaps a more mystical concept of animals. . . . We patronize them for their incompleteness, for their tragic fate of having taken form so far below ourselves. And therein we err, and greatly err.*

*For the animal shall not be measured by man. In a world older and more complete than ours they move finished and complete, gifted extensions of the senses we have lost or never attained, living by voices we shall never hear. They are not brethren, they are not underlings; they are other nations, caught with ourselves in the net of life and time, fellow prisoners of the splendour and travail of the earth.*

Henry Beston,

The Outermost House:

A Year of Life on the Great Beach  
of Cape Cod (1928)



▼ Squirrel monkey, Costa Rica

▲ Gray wolf, Canada

▼ Mountain lion kitten, United States (Montana)



Smith is, of course, mainly concerned with economic activity. It is therefore not surprising that when Smith discusses motivation in the *Wealth of Nations* he is primarily concerned with self-interest. In his earlier and complementary work *The Theory of Moral Sentiments*, Smith provided an account of ethics and human behavior. Smith thought that "humanity, justice, generosity, and public spirit, are the qualities most useful to others," not self-interest or the pursuit of profit (part 4, chapter 2). Adam Smith lends no support to the libertarian conception of corporate responsibility. Indeed, the view of human beings as self-interested, profit maximizers is one of the major deficiencies of contemporary economic theory.

Friedman's argument rests on several controversial assumptions. First, he assumes that corporate executives are properly understood as agents of the shareholders. Legal scholars and others have criticized this view on the grounds that it is an inaccurate characterization of American law. For example, twenty-eight states have passed "other constituency" statutes permitting, but usually not requiring, senior managers and corporate directors to consider the interests of other stakeholders.

Second, Friedman assumes that corporations are not active in the legislative process and will not oppose the will of a majority of citizens. This view has tended to strike many of Friedman's critics as either extraordinarily naive or extraordinarily optimistic. Business constitutes the single most influential lobbying group in both state and federal legislatures. If Friedman fails to acknowledge this, his view must be seen as extraordinarily naive. A world in which business does not seek to influence the laws governing its behavior, but instead readily responds to the will of the people as expressed democratically in legislative bodies, does not accurately describe the world as we know it. Perhaps we should understand Friedman's view as normative, as optimistically recommending that corporate actions in our world should be based on the social and political dynamics of an ideal world. What is needed, however, is guidance for the conduct of business based on the social and political dynamics of the world as we know it.

Friedman's third and final assumption is that all citizens have an equal ability to regulate corporate behavior through the legislative process. Given the role of business lobbies and the disproportionate influence of wealthy campaign

contributors over legislators, this assumption is deeply problematic when considered in an American context. However, when considered in a global context this assumption must be regarded as false. Friedman and his allies tend to presume that an idealized form of American democracy is operative in the environments in which corporations conduct business. Yet American corporations conduct business in China, Indonesia, Mexico, Saudi Arabia, and countless other nations where this is not the case.

*A world in which business does not seek to influence the laws governing its behavior, but instead readily responds to the will of the people as expressed democratically in legislative bodies, does not accurately describe the world as we know it.*

Indeed, most of the developing nations in which transnational corporations conduct business lack many important democratic institutions such as equal voting rights, multiple political parties, democratic elections, politically neutral militaries, and an independent judiciary.

This is true of Ecuador for much of the time that Texaco maintained operations in the country. From 1948 to

1972 Ecuador's federal government was marked by instability and military dominance. From 1972 to 1979 Ecuador was under direct military rule. It was not until 1979 that some semblance of democracy was restored. Nonetheless, corruption remains widespread (a recent study by George Washington University found that only 16 percent of Ecuadoreans have confidence in their legal system); indigenous Indian tribes remain politically marginalized; and government officials remain fearful of deterring foreign investment by enhancing environmental protection standards. Democracy in Ecuador is incipient and must yet be nurtured. Independent of one's view of Friedman's position as it applies to ideally democratic nations, these facts lead one to conclude that Ecuador lacked the democratic institutions necessary for Friedman's analysis to be applicable during the period in which Texaco operated in Ecuador.

In the eighteenth century Immanuel Kant, the greatest of the enlightenment philosophers, argued that one should always treat other persons as an end unto themselves, and never as a means only. Persons are free and rational creatures and as

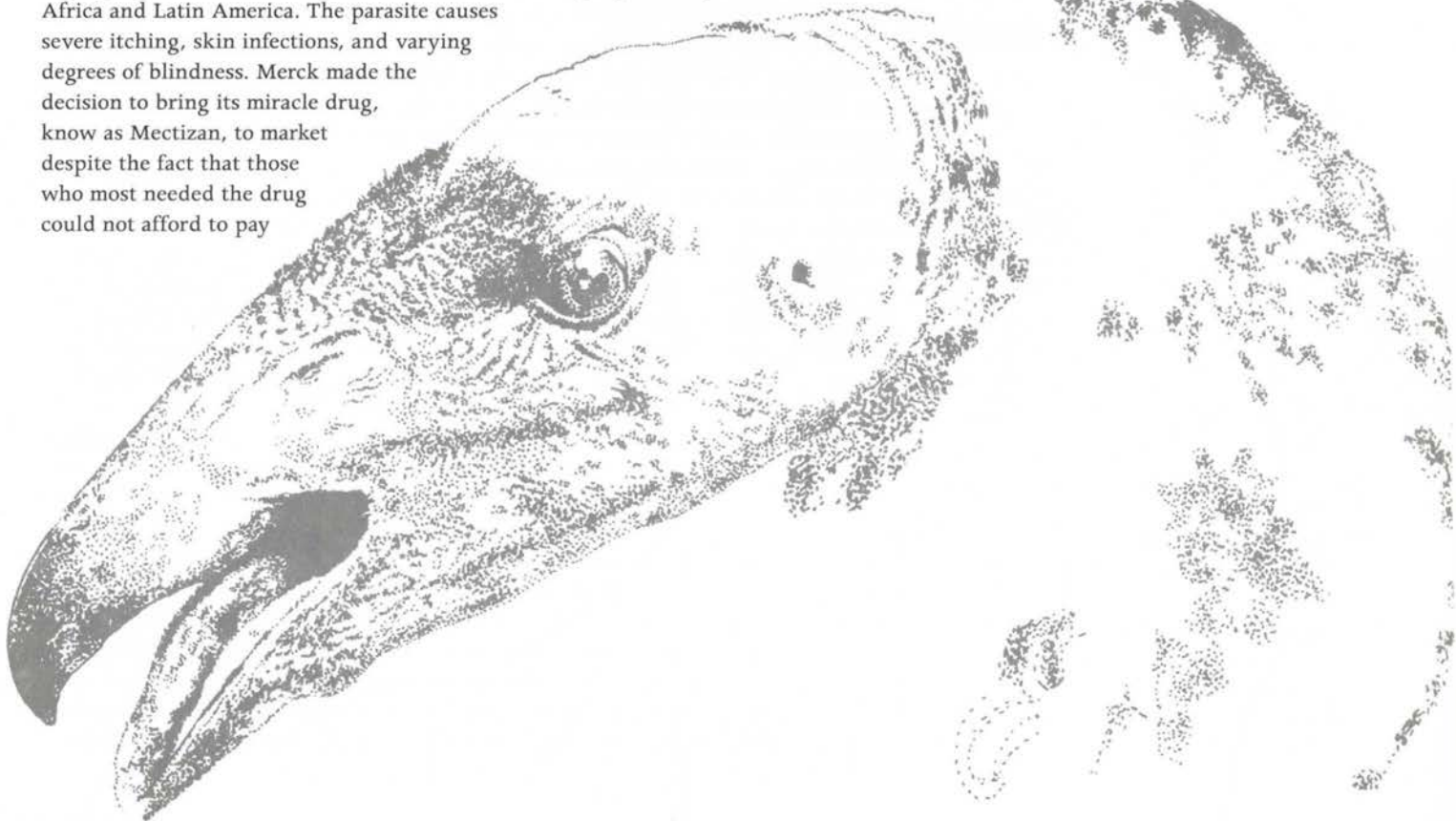
such, argued Kant, they have intrinsic value that must be respected. This means that the desires, goals, and aspirations of other persons must be given due consideration. Kant's idea has been encapsulated in the notion of a human right.

A growing body of international accords – including the 1972 Stockholm Declaration signed by more than a hundred countries, including the United States and Ecuador – identify the right to a clean and healthy environment as a fundamental human right that prohibits both state and private actors from endangering the needs of present and future generations. Texaco's actions stand in clear violation of this and other basic human rights. Furthermore, if one allows that animals and ecosystems have intrinsic moral value, then Texaco's actions must be seen as even more pernicious.

In reflecting on the sorry story of Texaco in the Ecuadorean Amazon it is important to be reminded that not all transnational corporations engage in such morally unjustifiable conduct. In contrast to Texaco, consider the case of the giant pharmaceutical company Merck. In the 1980s Merck's research scientists developed, tested, and brought to market a cure for a truly horrible disease known as River Blindness. River Blindness is caused by a parasite that enters the body through the bite of flies that breed on the rivers of Africa and Latin America. The parasite causes severe itching, skin infections, and varying degrees of blindness. Merck made the decision to bring its miracle drug, known as Mectizan, to market despite the fact that those who most needed the drug could not afford to pay

for even its production cost. Since 1987 Merck has manufactured and distributed over 250 million tablets of Mectizan for free. In 1998 alone 25 million people were treated with Mectizan in thirty-one countries in Africa and Latin America. In 1999 *Fortune* magazine rated Merck as the most admired pharmaceutical company in the world.

Remaining competitive in the global business environment does not preclude American transnational corporations from exhibiting exemplary moral conduct in their global operations. Access to education and information is rapidly increasing globally. As a result, citizens in America and elsewhere know more about the conduct of business in the global economy than ever before. This was demonstrated during the November 1999 World Trade Organization meeting in Seattle, when thirty to forty thousand citizens protested poor working conditions, low wages, environmental degradation, and other issues of concern. Increasingly, corporations that demonstrate morally reprehensible behavior will find themselves the targets of lawsuits, consumer boycotts, and shareholder protests. It is in the enlightened self-interest of such corporations to conduct operations in a manner that is respectful of all their constituents, not merely the hypothetical profit maximizers that Friedman purports they serve. ♦



an excerpt from

# Always Cloudy

a short story included in the collection *Ask the Sun*

*He Dong*

translated by Katherine Hanson

**TRANSLATOR'S NOTE:** *Poet and short story writer He Dong was born in Beijing in 1960, but it was not until after she moved to Norway in 1985 that she started writing seriously and for publication. In China she studied sports physiology, and following graduation from China University of Physical Education in 1982, she stayed on as a teacher and researcher. In 1985 He Dong was accepted for postgraduate study in biology at the University of Trondheim, where she earned a Master of Science in biology. She now lives in Oslo with her Chinese husband and their two-year-old daughter, and she divides her workday between a research position with the medical school, her own acupuncture clinic, and her writing.*

*To date He Dong has published one collection of poetry in China, *Thin Moon* (1990), another book of poems in Norway, in both Chinese and Norwegian translation, *Heaven Lake* (1994), and a collection of short stories, in Norwegian translation, *Ask the Sun* (1995). The search for identity and the exile's longing to find a home in a distant land are major themes in He Dong's poems, and she has acknowledged that the sense of loss and homelessness she experienced in Norway triggered her desire to reflect and to write.*

*He Dong writes in Chinese, but as she lives and publishes in Norway, her work must be translated before it meets the public. A translator herself, He Dong brings insight and creativity to the translation process. And as her familiarity with the Norwegian language increases, so does her ability to play an ever greater role in rendering her poems and stories into Norwegian.*

*Set in China, the stories in *Ask the Sun* are about children who grew up during the Cultural Revolution, under the rule of their "sun," Chairman Mao. They are beautiful, sad, and haunting stories, and when I first thought about translating them into English, I was filled with trepidation. How could I make a good translation from a text that was already a translation, and what did I know about Chinese culture and history? But one of the reasons we translators engage in this impossible art is a desire to introduce readers to literature they would otherwise never know, in spite of our knowledge that something is always and inevitably lost in translation. In this way we are very much engaged in "crossing borders" – indeed, the act of translation is a constant traversing of the borders of language.*

*In translating these stories, I was fortunate to have such a willing and capable collaborator in the author herself. He Dong gave thoughtful answers to my many questions, sometimes exclaiming, "This is what I really wanted to say in Chinese – can you make it better in English?!" It was an exciting process and rewarding on many counts, not least in that I made a new friend who has broadened my understanding of contemporary Norwegian society.*

Katherine Hanson

*Ask the Sun* was included in The New York Public Library's "Books for the Teen Age 1999." It can be ordered from:

Women in Translation  
523 N. 84th St.  
Seattle WA 98103  
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phone/fax: 206-781-9612

**I**N A TIME OF RED-HOT REVOLUTION, when everything smacking of capitalism and private enterprise was to be torn down, knife sharpening was about the only independent business in existence. Every time a knife sharpener visited the neighborhood, I wished, driven by some vague feeling or other, that I could sit and watch. The knife sharpener who most often came to us had an angular, dark red face. The dark red color of his skin was so intense that it shone through his thick beard. The neighbor boy, Xiaosan, and I dubbed him Redbeard. He was always wearing a worn and ragged jacket. It was impossible to tell what color the jacket material had originally been. All you could see were splotches of dirt



and oil. Redbeard always came with a knee-high workbench on his right shoulder. On his left he carried a burlap bag, specially made with two pouches and filled with tools. One of the pouches hung in front on his chest, the other on his back. Around his waist he had a wide, red sash. It was full of large and small holes, as many as there are stars in the heavens. A light, bronze-colored *suona*<sup>1</sup> hung from the sash. Now and then Redbeard had a little boy with him; he was dark and slight and was called Nan. The name means "suffering" and the boy had been given the name so he would be protected from life's suffering. Nan was Redbeard's only child. He always walked right behind his father and looked around with eyes full of fear.

I liked Redbeard, not least because his cry had a special ring and because it consisted of several segments: First a loud blow on the *suona* that sounded like a lament, penetrating if you were close by and frightening from a distance. After that he gave a good shake to a bunch of small iron sheets attached to a piece of rope. "*Hua-la-la, hua-la-la, hua-la-la.*" Three times he shook it. Then he stopped, lifted his head toward the blue sky and the big apartment buildings and cried with his resonant voice, "*Mo-jiang-zi-lai, qiang-cai-dao.*"<sup>2</sup> Once again he shook the iron sheets three times – "*hua-la-la, hua-la-la, hua-la-la*" – before moving on a little ways. Then another loud blow on the *suona* and the whole cry was repeated.

That was how Redbeard wandered among the apartment buildings and past the walls with the big-character posters. He paid no attention to the colorful posters, the huge headlines, or the quiet and pale professors and other bourgeois intellectuals who carefully read the posters. The knife sharpener cried to a distant heaven. When he figured that people were busy looking for dull scissors and kitchen knives at home in their apartments, and that some had already found them and were on their way out, he chose an open space between the buildings and put down his bench. He unpacked his various tools, slipstones, whetstone, grindstone, and other things. He always placed them in specific order. At that point he asked one of the children who was close by to bring him a little water. All of his movements seemed so natural. I often thought that this man who was a worker with dust and dirt in his hair and on his jacket, even in the creases on the palms of his hands, didn't need to fear anyone. He performed honest work every time he rubbed the knife back and forth against the stone. It was different with my parents and other bourgeois intellectuals who had pale faces and glasses. They had to be careful and appear humble, even when they were walking by themselves. They didn't produce anything. They lived off of what the proletariat produced with sweat and toil. They lived like parasites, according to the wall posters.

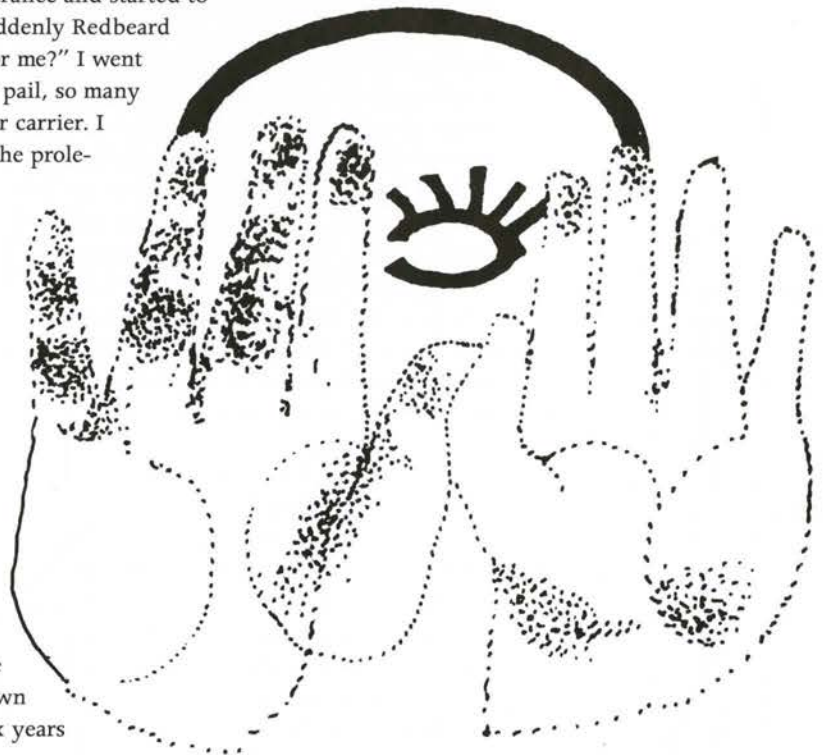
One day, I can't remember which, only that it was overcast, Redbeard came to our neighborhood again. He sat down on the bench right in front of the entrance and started to unpack the tools. As usual I sat nearby and watched. Suddenly Redbeard said, "Hey, little girl, can you go and fetch some water for me?" I went over to him and took the water pail. What an ugly water pail, so many dents and holes. From that day on I was the regular water carrier. I was happy. I felt like I was working, like I was a part of the proletariat. At school I was always encouraged to dissociate myself from my parents. The distance between me and my parents was great. Both had been sent out to the countryside, a hundred miles away, and I hadn't seen them for almost a year. But the teacher said the most important thing was to distance myself from them ideologically and emotionally.

I gradually became familiar with Redbeard's work routine. Cleaning, honing and then grinding, after that wetting, and finally drying. One day I plucked up my courage and asked Redbeard, "Will you teach me to sharpen knives?"

"Why do you want to learn that? This isn't anything for people from your class." He answered indifferently and continued his rhythmic movements, back and forth, holding the knife in his hands. It felt like a slap in the face. "Class," that difficult and yet well-known concept that I had learned about at school when I was six years

1. *Suona* is a wind musical instrument. It has three parts: a thin brass pipe with a reed whistle on the top, an awl-shaped wood pipe with eight openings (seven in the upper part and one beneath), and a bell-shaped brass bottom. It produces a sharp and sonorous sound, and it is widely used in music for weddings, funeral ceremonies, and other festival celebrations.

2. *Mo-jiang-zi-lai, qiang-cai-dao*: Literally, "Hone your scissors, sharpen your knives." It is the knife sharpener's trademark call throughout China.



## Always Cloudy

old, popped up again, right in front of me. Once again the class I belonged to was a barrier to the realization of a dream. I knew very well that the problem with my parents was a class problem. They had been sent to the countryside for rehabilitation through hard physical labor and through contact with peasants and other workers, precisely so they could free themselves of their class origins. But what was I supposed to do to free myself? No one had told me that.

I walked home with a bowed head, still in a state of confusion. I walked right into Aunt Song who was standing outside the entryway hanging up the laundry. She shared the apartment with us. She was around thirty and taught English at the University. She was an elegant woman. On a gray day Aunt Song struck me precisely as people usually said she was: Different.

I fetched a little knife. It was a pocketknife and the handle was studded with real jade stones. The knife was my best friend and I had it with me almost all the time. It had been the source of great envy among my classmates. I showed Redbeard the knife and asked if he could sharpen it. He picked the knife up gingerly and studied it carefully. "What a lovely knife! I have never seen its like. Oh, so lovely. Look at these exquisite jade stones, look at this delicate pattern, look at . . . No, no, this is much too fine to be sharpened, don't you see?" Just then I heard a lot of noisy footsteps, and I snatched the knife from Redbeard and hid it inside my jacket. An agitated bunch of Red Guards was running toward us. They were wearing genuine green Mao jackets and carrying gongs, placards, and big-character posters. They went past us and charged into the entryway where I lived. I could feel my heart in my throat. I didn't dare look. A few minutes later someone struck a gong and Professor Kong came tottering out of the entryway surrounded by Red Guards, punching and shoving. Grandfather Kong was close to sixty years old. Right after the People's Republic was founded, he returned to China from the University of Michigan. For nearly twenty years he had worked to develop educational systems in China. But now he was forced to wear a large sign on his chest with the inscription: "Capitalism's errand boy." As they passed by us one of the Red Guards suddenly stopped. "Look here! We have here our highly respected proletarian." He pointed at Redbeard and shouted with a voice charged with emotion. His eyes were filled with love and respect.

Redbeard barely lifted his eyes from the knife

he was working on, and was obviously both flattered and nervous. He was momentarily bewildered, but then stood up hesitantly. Rubbing his hands on the sash around his waist, he looked at Grandfather Kong, who'd been shoved right up to him.

"You must declare yourself guilty before our proletarian," a Red Guard shouted at Grandfather Kong.

"Yes, I declare that I am guilty. I do."

Grandfather Kong nodded with bowed head. He didn't dare look Redbeard in the eye.

"Would you please show us your hands,

*Once again the class I belonged to was a barrier to the realization of a dream. I knew very well that the problem with my parents was a class problem. They had been sent to the countryside for rehabilitation through hard physical labor and through contact with peasants and other workers, precisely so they could free themselves of their class origins. But what was I supposed to do to free myself?*

Master?" the Red Guard asked with respect in his voice. Quickly and nervously Redbeard rubbed his hands on the sash twice more, before he extended them. Two large and powerful fists. The skin was coarse and dry with lots of cracks, and the palms of his hands were full of thick, yellow calluses.

"Show us your parasite hands, you errand boy for Capitalism," the Red Guard turned to Grandfather Kong. Trembling, Grandfather Kong held out his hands. They were small, thin and white.

"Look! We've just had a vivid lesson in class struggle," the Red Guard continued. "What a shocking experience this has been!" Several Red Guards concurred, as if this had been a big

revelation to them. "This afternoon we're having a mass meeting and you shall give a self-criticism with your parasite hands as the main theme. Did you hear me?"

"Yes, I'll do that. About my parasite hands," Grandfather Kong answered, his head bowed in shame.

I stood there and looked at his hands. I'd seen them many times. These were the hands that had drawn my name in old Chinese characters. With a flourish of the hand my name had come alive, had

become a beautiful painting. "A long, long time ago," Grandfather Kong spoke with a deliberate voice, "our ancestors drew your name like a fish. An old, beautiful fish. The fish swam and swam in the sea." With graceful movements his hands imitated swimming fish. I followed his hands into a fairytale world of blue coral, white sea grass, and thousands of small air bubbles around me. And an old saint with a long, white beard waved his hands and painted rows of beautiful characters. I followed his hands into a Chinese world where Grandfather Kong painted mountains, lakes, and wading birds. It seemed as if every Chinese character had a thousand-year history, and every single character had many characters within.

But today these hands had become parasite hands. I thought about my father, who had also been taken by the Red Guards. Did he have parasite hands too? I shoved my own hands deep down into the pockets of my jacket.

The gong resounded once again. The Red Guards escorted Grandfather Kong away. The Red Guard bringing up the rear patted my head and smiled. "Bye-bye, little comrade." I gave a start and the hand in my jacket pocket clutched the little jade knife. He smiled sincerely and affectionately, and I envied him his genuine, green Mao jacket. He couldn't have known that I wasn't his comrade, but a *gou-zai-zi*.<sup>3</sup>

Redbeard smiled foolishly and his eyes followed the Red Guards until they disappeared from sight. And then he sat down on the bench again and resumed the rhythmic movement with his hands, back and forth, shoosh shoosh, as if nothing had happened.

"Do you know the old man?" He suddenly lifted his eyes and looked right at me.

"Hmm." I nodded mechanically.

"Is Michigan the place where they grow a lot of rice?"<sup>4</sup>

"No. Michigan is the name of a famous university."

"Strange name, isn't it?"

"Father told me that it's a university in a foreign country," I responded indifferently.

"There are only bastards in foreign countries. Foreign devils, they've killed many Chinese," Redbeard said angrily. The knife whirred against the stone and was smooth and shiny in a matter of minutes. I stared at his large hands.

Another day with overcast skies. I went to the kitchen to fetch water for Redbeard. Aunt Song came up behind me. "Why don't you invite

the Master in for a cup of tea?" I turned around and saw that she was wearing a blue, flowered skirt that flared right above the knees. The grownups often talked about how she looked like a lady from a genteel family. She could sing and dance and had been an ardent member of the University's revolutionary theater. But then she was branded bourgeois because of her upper-class background. I ran out and came back with Redbeard. He hesitated as he stepped into the hallway, quite evidently flattered. "Oh, such a large room . . . oh, such a high ceiling," he mumbled as he looked around. He turned and noticed the book shelves through the half-open door to mother and father's room. "My God, so many books! Do you read them all?" And then he turned around again and noticed Grandmother, who was sitting on the edge of the bed. He greeted her with a bow. Grandmother was surprised to see this rugged man, a complete stranger, in the middle of the hallway. Aunt Song leaned against the doorjamb of her room, her legs crossed, and said, "You must have worked hard, Master. Won't you come into my room and sit down? The tea has been ready for a while now." Redbeard rubbed both hands hard against the sash and followed the swaying, flowered skirt into Aunt Song's room.

"What a muscular body you have." Aunt Song's voice was different today.

"I hope that my husband has more muscles too when he comes back from the rehabilitation camp in the country in a few months." Redbeard was completely absorbed in taking large swallows of the tea. The drops of tea hung around his mouth before sliding down across his neck.

"My goodness, look at you. You're so thirsty," Aunt Song burst out laughing. A laughter that came from deep inside. She walked over to the door and said to me, "Go and look after the Master's things, my girl." And then she turned and shut the door right in my face.

It was boring to sit on Redbeard's bench all by myself. I opened and closed the jade knife, again and again. I observed the green color of the jade floating through the damp air. In the green, damp air I could see Nan's wavering eyes. When Redbeard came back and resumed his work, I suddenly asked without understanding why, "What does Nan's mother do?"

"She died a long time ago."

"Was she sick?"

"Sick? No, she died of hunger. To save Nan's life, she starved herself to death."

3. *gou-zai-zi*: Literally, "a bastard." It was a term commonly used during the Cultural Revolution period (1966-1976) in reference to the children of those who were regarded as "class enemies" (i.e., those who had questionable political backgrounds).

4. The Chinese name for Michigan is *Mi-xi-gen* (pronounced *mee-shee-guhn*). When transcribing this name in characters, they literally read "rice-west-root/source."

# PRISM

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