

Ressentiment and Counter-Ressentiment: Nietzsche, Scheler, and the Reaction Against Equality

by Nicholas Birns

One of the thorniest concepts in the Nietzschean lexicon is *ressentiment*. In order to understand the strange trajectory of that term in English-speaking culture, we need, in an appropriately Nietzschean way, to go into the term's genealogy and the genealogy of Nietzsche's canonicity in the Anglophone world itself. Something we tend to forget in the English-speaking world is that the first impact of Nietzsche was felt, broadly speaking, on the Left. In England, there was George Bernard Shaw. In America, the leading Left-Nietzscheans were Jack London, whose anguished vacillation between Nietzschean individualism and Marxist collectivism is recorded in his vigorous and thoughtful novels, *The Sea Wolf*, and *Martin Eden*; and H. L. Mencken, who saw Nietzsche as a prod in his savage, satiric debunking of complacent American truisms. The Nietzschean vogue of the 1910s was ended less by the misappropriation of Nietzsche by the Nazis in the 1930s than by the anti-German hysteria that erupted after the US entered the First World War; even a thinker such as Nietzsche who would have been hardly enthusiastic about Germany's role in the war was deemed suspect. Much of the relativism of the 1920s, though, bore a surreptitiously Nietzschean imprint—from the permissiveness of the Jazz Age to the “revolt against the village” (to use Carl Van Doren's phrase) of Sherwood Anderson and Sinclair Lewis. Literary

figures such as, overtly, Eugene O'Neill, and, covertly, Ernest Hemingway (whose 'code' has a highly Nietzschean tinge to it) kept the Mencken-London tradition alive long after it had vanished from the salons. But up until about 1950 or so, Nietzsche was a blank space in the American academy. The novelist William Gass, for instance, in a recent review of Curtis Cate's Nietzsche biography in the August 2005 *Harper's*, states that he did not read Nietzsche when he went to college, which would have been in the late 1940s. After the Second World War, Nietzsche received an academic boost from his role as a precursor of existentialism and by the serious translations and studies undertaken by Walter Kaufmann and Francis Golffing. This Nietzsche was less political than Mencken's Nietzsche, far more refined (whereas the Mencken/London Nietzsche was vigorous and working-class, the Kaufmann-era Nietzsche was more a cocktail-artistic phenomenon), and had its center of gravity pulled away from *Thus Spake Zarathustra* toward *The Birth of Tragedy*. This was the era when "Apollonian" and "Dionysian" became household words, at least in the household of the American intellectual. In a later generation, the use of Nietzsche became more sophisticated and even more recondite, as Nietzsche's demolishing of the idols was troped as deconstruction, and his genealogy was taken up, in both letter and spirit, by Foucault.

Like many in my generation, I approached Nietzsche reading backward from de Man, Derrida, and Foucault. This mirrored the experience of the previous generation which read Nietzsche backward from Sartre and Camus. Everybody involved here, in both generations, saw themselves in participating in a critique of the American status quo that was fundamentally Leftist in approach. Meanwhile, Nietzsche became a respectable staple of American academia, flourishing in German, philosophy, and (remembering the preeminence of *The Birth of Tragedy* in the era of American academic expansion in the 1950s) Classics departments. As with most of US academia

at the time, these professors certainly, for the most part, saw themselves on the Left. Although of course, American neo-Nazis no doubt misappropriated Nietzsche the same way as their originals had in Germany, this was not an interpretive strain native to American thought.

The point of summarizing all this well-known material is merely to show that Nietzsche in America (as opposed to say, ‘Hegel in America’ which was part of the philosophical establishment in the late nineteenth century, even if not the dominant strain) has always been a pursuit engaged in largely on the American left. But there is one important exception to this, and it lies not on the Nazi fringe, but on the democratic Right. This exception--and ‘exception’, in the Carl Schmittian sense, will indeed prove to be an important attribute of our explication of this situation--revolves around one term of Nietzsche’s: *ressentiment*. A search of the digital archives of *Commentary* magazine reveals 24 instances of *ressentiment*, surely unequaled by citations of eternal recurrence, Zarathustra, the transvaluation of values, the will to power, or *amor fati*. Why is the idea of *ressentiment* so prominent in the discourse of intellectuals who otherwise would see Nietzsche as half-madman, half-malevolent genius, but in no wise a moral guide?

Nietzsche introduces *ressentiment* in *On The Genealogy of Morals*, when he is contrasting the (historically situated, though not actually historical) replacement of the dichotomy of ‘good and bad’ with that of ‘good and evil.’ In the Homeric aristocracy and similar tribal oligarchies, Nietzsche says, there were simply the well-born and the base, and only what we would today call class distinctions, not moral ones between good and its obverse. The bureaucratization of organized religion in the Mediterranean world, Nietzsche says, had a leveling effect. With its ideas of sin and guilt internalizing the physical struggle for existence, the priestly class operated as a kind of disciplinary intellectual cadre. “He has to defend his herd, but against whom? Against the

healthy people undoubtedly, but also against their envy of the healthy. He has to be the natural opponent and critic of all rough, stormy, unchecked, hard, violent, predatory health and power. The priest is the first form of the more refined animal which despises more easily than it hates. He will not be spared having to conduct wars with predatory animals, wars of cunning (of the 'spirit') rather than of force, as is obvious" (*GM*, III, 15). This substitution of despising for hatred, the replacement of straightforward antagonism with insidious envy, is the characteristic mode of what Nietzsche terms *ressentiment*.

Before we get to the history of the concept of *ressentiment*, we should look at the word itself. Why, when we are discussing a German philosopher in English, do we use a French word? All *ressentiment* means in French is resentment. If a French person had heard the word used, all they would have understood is the garden-variety connotation of 'resentment' in English. It has no original idiomatic meaning in French. Nietzsche was using *ressentiment* in a particular manner that, once he used it, was bound to become a term of art in later intellectual formulations; when Max Scheler wrote about *ressentiment* in 1912. He was using it in this designated, Nietzschean sense, as, to use Scheler's own phrase (39) a "terminus technicus." But it is a mistake to think that when Nietzsche originally used *ressentiment* he was using a word insulated from ordinary German conversation. Although German has words of its own roughly equivalent to 'resentment', such as *groll* (most literally translated as 'rancor,' see Scheler 39) and *verstimmung*, even before Nietzsche's time *ressentiment* was the word most Germans would use when they wanted to express this concept. Borrowed during the Enlightenment vogue for all things French (and, as Walter Kaufmann points out, Nietzsche's reaching for the French word can be seen as an instance of his aspiration to be a "Good European", a deliberate repudiation of Hegel's nationalistic

attempt to ‘Germanize’ the philosophical lexicon), the word would not necessarily have been spoken by the man in the street. But it was part of the general diction of the educated, cultured German, who, when they said it, reached for it with no strain, no affect.

Perhaps the word ‘genre’ in English is roughly comparable; ‘genre’ is of French origin, but it is also an English word, although again one not spoken by the man on the street; to the educated person, a ‘genre’ expresses something more particular than a ‘kind’ of something. The problem is, in English the word, *ressentiment*, always italicized, is not natural the way ‘genre’ is. As Robert Solomon says (118) it sounds more sarcastic *en français*. We have our own word, ‘resentment,’ and the very closeness of the French word to ours indicates that the Nietzschean use must be something special, something different. Whereas in German (and for that matter French) Nietzsche’s word is the same word used ordinarily, albeit with a special use, in a special ‘language-game,’ in English it is a downright exotic word used only within in Nietzschean context. Some other factors intrude here: French words are most often learned borrowings accessible to the intellectual elite, so the Frenchness of *ressentiment* rarefies it, makes it part of elevated parlance. “The German word has . . . the connotations of a word of foreign origin,” (128) says Rudiger Bittner. Thus it risks sounding pretentious by using a French word which has so obvious an English equivalent. Or perhaps, since nearly all of the people who would use *ressentiment* in English are intellectuals, and *ressentiment*, as a concept, implies that intellectuals are ill-motivated and have erected their systems as a revenge against the naturally strong, as a kind of *trahison des clercs*, an overtone of resentment creeps into the enunciation of *ressentiment* because the intellectuals who use it are, inferentially, admitting, or appearing to admit, that they are up to something dirty. In even mentioning the word *ressentiment*, intellectuals are exposing

their own false consciousness. Also, perhaps there is an unease about not pronouncing the word correctly, especially as it is so easy to leave out the extra syllable. Thus, even in the epiphenomena of *ressentiment*, resentment proliferates.

Though most intellectuals who use the word *ressentiment* are conscious in the first instance of its Nietzschean origins, it is Max Scheler who really popularized the term in a sociological sense. Scheler (1874-1928) is an unusual figure, somebody with a world reputation, but somebody who was judged as recently as 1967 by a sympathetic biographer, John Raphael Staude, to be a comparative failure (Staude 253). Scheler passed through a series of intellectual phases, from Catholicism (to which he converted at fourteen) to agnosticism, from an adamant support of Kaiser Wilhelm to a begrudging acceptance of the Weimar Republic. (Staude says [257], with reluctant candor, that, though the principles of Scheler's thought were ethically opposed to those of Nazism, Scheler's tendency to trim his intellectual sails according to which side was winning would have made him vulnerable to supporting Nazism if he had lived to see it come into power). Scheler is seen as contributing to fields as varied as phenomenology and sociology of knowledge, and was a great intellectual inspiration to the late Pope John Paul II. Scheler's monograph on *ressentiment* is an early book, and, for all its fame, lacks the intellectual depth and technical sophistication of his fuller treatises such as *The Nature of Sympathy* and *Formalism in Ethics*.

Some of what Scheler talks about as *ressentiment* seems more like garden-variety resentment. For instance, he mentions a mother-in-law's resentment of her daughter-in-law not only for stealing her son but for being a younger, prettier woman. This not only seems rather gendered for our own day but too trivial and mundane in apposition to Nietzsche's far more abstract and urgent rehearsal of the term. If the mother-in-law, who Scheler terms "a tragic rather than ridiculous

figure” (64) generalizes her resentment of the younger woman into a critique of youthful hegemony, and then, rather than contesting it, assumed a posture of scornful superiority toward it, that would indeed be *ressentiment* in the Nietzschean sense. But all Scheler seems to be pointing to is a kind of backbiting.

Similarly, Scheler mentions the case of e.g. a former President now out of office who resents the fact he no longer has the power held by his successors. Scheler’s primary reader would think only of Otto von Bismarck, and Scheler indeed says, “The ‘retired official’ with his followers is a typical *ressentiment* figure” (64). But Scheler ignores the more complex factors at work here. Bismarck certainly resented that he was out of power and that Caprivi and later Hohenlohe were in power, but surely Caprivi and Hohenlohe also felt resentment that their reputations would never be as great as Bismarck, that they were known and ridiculed as hand-picked men of the new Kaiser who could not stand competition from Bismarck, and that they did not command the ear of Europe the way that Bismarck did. In fact, Bismarck’s successors were no doubt more jealous of him than vice versa. This entire example incidentally, posits *ressentiment* as quite a modern phenomenon indeed, because it is no relatively recently that there were such a thing as ex-heads of government. Diocletian aside, Roman history proffers no Emperors Emeriti; Galba was not around to kibitz about Otho from the back seat of the chariot, simply because society was not stable enough to accommodate both power-holders and those who formerly held power. In both the mother-in-law and ex-President examples, Scheler’s sense of motivation seems impoverished compared to what a novelist or dramatist of any distinction would do with these situations. Scheler seems to assume a rather petty level of mentality, that of the *homme moyen sensuel*, and leave it at that. Both of these examples show Scheler retreating from Nietzsche’s bracketing of

the term *ressentiment* to include long-term cultural patterns, not individual instances of resentment. Surely the resentment you feel towards, say, the person who replaces you in your job or runs off with your spouse is not of the same order as the *ressentiment* that Nietzsche says the weak, as a class, feel against the strong, as a class?

One understands the popularity of Scheler's book among sociologists, since sociologists, unlike literary critics, are laudably undistressed by individual lapses, or even the fundamental inauthenticity of the basic premise of a work, if they can use it in formulating a methodological frame. One also understands the value of Scheler's other writings to phenomenologists and philosophers of religion. Nonetheless, Scheler's *Ressentiment* is a bit of a letdown to actually read. It is a monographic polemic, and there is an element of occasional writing, almost of journalistic commentary, to it. Nietzsche's very outlandishness insulated *On The Genealogy of Morals* from seeming like an Op-Ed piece, which is what Scheler's work often resembles: an informed, thoughtful commentary by a prominent public intellectual on the editorial page of a center-right newspaper. Witness Scheler's offhand remark that "The dictum of Wilhelm II about the 'social ministers' is extremely pertinent and striking" (133), or, even more hilariously, in a footnote, "Our present-day semi-parliamentarism the German Empire is conducive to the inner health of the people..." (177). Even if we bracket whatever our own feelings are towards Wilhelm II, even if he had made a seemingly kind remark about the Weimar Republic (as he was later, if with notably lesser enthusiasm, to do in the 1920s) this sort of specificity, lacking both Nietzsche's wide vision and gestural brio, demonstrates the limits of Scheler's mode of analysis, its tendency towards the journalistic and prudential. This prudential quality constrains what M. J. Bowles, in "The Practice of Meaning in Nietzsche and Wittgenstein" (14-15) says of the creative

possibilities of *ressentiment*: “Far from indicating the collapse of life, *ressentiment* in fact marks the potentiality of a tremendous energy source. The question, alas, has always been, not how can we save the mouse from running round and round on its treadmill, but how can we harness this raw source of energy? What can we build with it?” It is not just, as Scheler seems to think, something that is ‘wrong’ with society, something that can potentially be, in the medium-term at least, cured. Scheler’s diagnosis only pertains to ‘current’ circumstances, with little long-range applicability.

Nietzsche’s *ressentiment* is not resentment, but resentment that has become internalized, in which the weak have rationalized their own weakness by inversely privileging it as morally superior to the strong. There is still resentment in the petty sense, but it is systematized in an (inverse) transvaluation of values. *On The Genealogy of Morals*, though written in the 1880s, was distinctly not just a tract of those times.

Scheler’s book falls into two parts: a preliminary, and, as I have said, at times trivial accounting of resentment in ordinary society, and then an impassioned argument refuting Nietzsche’s assertion that Christian love was an expression of *ressentiment*. Scheler opposes ancient Greek love, which, as in Platonic love, moves from the lower to the higher, to Christian love. The Christian acts in the “peculiarly pious conviction that through this ‘condescension,’ through this self-abasement and “self-renunciation; he gains the highest good and becomes equal to God.” The change in the notion of God and his fundamental relation to man and the world is not “the cause, but the consequence of this reversal in the movement of love” (86) Scheler sees Christian love as being a kind of *noblesse oblige*, a shining of the light of surplus happiness from the saved to the unsaved. This may be true of the love of Christ himself--the doctrine of *kenosis* expounded by St. Paul in his Epistle to the Philippians, and commented on so thoughtfully in the

twentieth century by Romano Guardini, where Christ empties out his own divinity in order to save mankind.

But it is more arguable whether, in Christian terms, it is wise to say that this kind of love, what Scheler calls “sacrifice for the weaker, the sick, and the small” springs from “inner sanctity and vital plenitude” (90). For the Christian, Christ, as God, certainly has these attributes. But the believing Christian human being does not, *qua* Christian human being, have them. The condescension of the naturally strong towards the unfortunately weak sounds overweening when it is cited as the source of Christian love by Christian human beings to other humans. Surely the starting point for that kind of love is our sense of our own inadequacy and smallness. As opposed to Scheler’s immediate analysis, when Nietzsche singles out (his) contemporary anarchists and anti-Semites as nodes of *ressentiment*, he means anarchism and anti-Semitism as practiced throughout the nineteenth century, not just in the 1880s. Nietzsche’s scope of the present is, say, a century long, whereas Scheler’s is a decade. Thus Nietzsche’s critiques of the present are, in themselves, more abstract than Scheler’s. Scheler sees Christian love as being akin to *noblesse oblige*, a shining of the light of surplus happiness from the saved to the unsaved. Scheler seems contemptuous of Jews (though half-Jewish himself), women, dwarfs, cripples, and Social Democrats in a way that does not reassure us as to the catholicity of his concept of even the Christian human being, much less those outside the fold who presumably we, unlike Scheler, do not wish to consign to outer darkness. To impute Christian love overly to a God-given superiority is not only to be religiously smug and to succumb to an elitism similar to, but more self-satisfied than, Nietzsche’s. It is also more dangerous in that Nietzsche’s elitism was in important ways not totally ‘real.’ Nietzsche did not think there were people out in the world who actually constituted

such a potential elite in his terms. Whereas Scheler, thinking of Christians, surely thought that there were such people: that white, male Christians of ‘normal’ height were an elite that, if it did not actually exist, could be reanimated with a bit of a spark from Scheler’s own genius.

Though Scheler may at times see fragility in some humans (and I am using the word ‘fragility’ in explicitly the terms in which it has been used by Martha C. Nussbaum), he does not allow that glimpse to extend to his own self-reckoning. He makes statements that condescend to people unlike himself while imputing to himself a level of supreme cognitive authority, such as his prediction that “the representative feminine groups” (62) of the Anglo-American countries will be increasingly recruited...from those individuals who lack specifically feminine charms.” (62) Not only did this not foresee such twenty-first century phenomena as Jessica Simpson, it is so specific a prognosis as to be fundamentally crank. Scheler, like Nietzsche, can come forth with statements that, in objective terms, sound preposterous. But Scheler’s pronouncements are more vexatious because, unlike Nietzsche, he so clearly intended to be pragmatic and responsible.

Scheler takes the sense of self-aware disempowerment—of seeing power up close but not being remotely able to attain it—felt in Wilhelmine Germany by bourgeois people, socialists, Jews, women, and even dwarfs, all of whom at Scheler rather gratuitously mentions, and hypostatize it into an assumption about how all disempowered people feel under any conditions. Sociologists who accept Scheler’s account of *ressentiment* as adequate to any somewhat democratic society *tout court* risks misunderstanding how burdened Scheler’s account is by its Wilhelmine origins (Scheler would no doubt have written differently even ten years later in the Weimar Republic). They also risk saddling the disempowered, with all their other problems, with problems that are not in fact theirs, but are ascribed to them by sardonic, aristocracy-flattering intellectuals.

This is not merely a problem endemic to Scheler. Contemporary writers who speak of *ressentiment* also find themselves involved in such a position, of seeing the avatars of *ressentiment* as specific, current practices. Marion Tapper, for instance, cogently espies instances of *ressentiment* in a prevalent feminist climate of opinion at Australian universities, where, even if feminists do not have the formal power, women feminist academics exercise a kind of informal hegemony over discussion, lording it over men, and exulting that they are lording it over men in the way men once lorded it over them. (Tapper does *not* mention Scheler's association of women with *ressentiment*). This may be true (my own experience of Australian universities is not quite that) but it strikes one as a very specific critique. If *ressentiment* is so localized it is easily dealt with by easily implemented local reforms, hardly befitting a deep-structural problem. For all the wildness of Nietzsche's sighting of *ressentiment* in priestly Christianity, it does have the virtue of assigning to it not just one current practice but an entire way of thought, what Foucault might have termed an *episteme*, and casts *ressentiment* as more of a fundamental malady and less of a minor, if chronic, illness. Scheler's exemption of Christian love from *ressentiment* is *non-Nietzschean*, in the sense that Nietzsche would not have agreed with it—in fact Nietzsche saw Christian love as the *essence* of *ressentiment*. But Scheler's rescue-job is not *un-Nietzschean*, in that this kind of broad stroke is the sort of performance in which Nietzsche delighted. What Nietzsche would not have delighted in is the prudential, pedestrian metier of so much of Scheler's exposition

Scheler took a complicated, playfully enunciated concept and made it into something determinate, a term which was used by social commentators with a degree of confidence as to what it was they were discussing. Though it is risky to extrapolate what Nietzsche's views would have been on the history that happened after his death, one can hazard a guess not about Nietzsche himself but about those who apply the term *ressentiment*. Given that both Nietzsche and Scheler posit the French Revolution as a primal instance of *ressentiment*, it appears that the term especially applied to sudden swerves to the Left in national politics. What is the twentieth century equivalent? Is it the Russian Revolution? This really cannot be, as there were obvious ways to criticize Soviet totalitarianism without resorting to concepts as arcane as *ressentiment*. What those who resist social equality mean by *ressentiment* is what, in their view, ensued after the Left came to power democratically. Although an analogy can be made to the American New Deal, surely the chief *ressentiment*-enabling event was the election of Clement Attlee's Labour Party in the England of 1945. Though Attlee's was a mildly Leftist government which was heartily anti-Communist, somebody like Scheler would have regretted his ascension, denouncing as he did "all kinds of 'socialism,' 'social feeling', 'altruism', and other subaltern modern things" (Scheler 93). The assumption that in Attlee's England a more egalitarian social style would be adopted meant, for many who resisted social equality, the death-knell of a worthwhile society. The point is that Attlee's victory was not just considered a will o' the wisp, but a permanent change in who governed society. The masses were deemed, at least on a political level, to have gained parity with their quondam betters, *whether people liked it or not*. In 1975, a Labour government was in power in Britain; and, even if there had been many years of Conservative government in-between,

the fundamental assumptions of 1945-era Labour still reigned prevalent. Similarly, in Nietzsche's and Scheler's own Germany, the Social Democratic Party was not only in power, but was considered the natural party of government-- even if this had been a relatively recent phenomenon, it was seen as running with the tide of history, not against it. It was also in the 1970s that *ressentiment* became a byword employed by American neoconservative intellectuals. An example plucked virtually at random occurs in Stephen Miller's review of Peter Clecak's book *Crooked Paths; Reflections on Socialism, Conservatism and the Welfare State*, published in the March 1977 issue of *Commentary*. Miller accuses Clecak of having an "animus against the marketplace"(95) and that his too-egalitarian world-view would "enormously increase the *ressentiment* of the country's citizens, placing constitutional democracy under a well-nigh intolerable burden" (96). The use of *ressentiment* here is Schelerian, not Nietzschean, and it is tied to a particular dissent from what was then seen as the post-World War II egalitarian consensus. One would not want to risk repeating Scheler's mistake by binding the reaction against *ressentiment* to a local political agenda, but, even if the issues in the minds of people who used the term were more abstract, this was the political backdrop against which that abstraction arose.

If *ressentiment* was the problem of a leveling modern liberalism, "counter-*ressentiment*" or "counter-modernity" is the problem of a postmodern neoconservatism which seeks once again to divide our society into winners and losers, into the conquerors and the conquered. Counter-modernity attempts to reverse the social equality associated with the very concept of modernity, as Nietzsche and his contemporaries would have understood the term and as it was later refined by Weber, Durkheim, and, eventually, Hans Blumenberg. One wonders what Nietzsche would make of this. I cannot think he would be straightforwardly on its side, or a proponent of it; in

other words, he would recognize it as *ressentiment*, and not be deceived by its putatively anti-*ressentiment* rhetoric. But would he see it as simply the old *ressentiment*, with “a different fragrance” (*GM*, II, 10) or would it be a qualitatively new phenomenon? Did Nietzsche see modernity, good or bad, as running in one direction? Could he have conceived of the contemporary Right’s project of a counter-modernity so vast and so systematic as to possess, or appropriate, the force of a modernity that most thinkers, whatever their vantage point, had seen, since at least the Renaissance, as irrevocable?

Admittedly, one of the reasons counter-modernity has so shockingly seized the initiative from modernity is because modernity aspired to what Walter Benjamin called “homogeneous, empty time,” the obliteration of specificity and idiosyncrasy, and manifested an arrogant confidence in its homogenizing sweep. This was one of the aspects of modernity which the ‘Dionysian’ Nietzsche of the 1950s protested against; if the Dionysian had been able to be more satisfactorily integrated into modernity in the 1960s, perhaps the reaction against modernity would not have been quite so virulent and so powerful. Even earlier, the debunking, working-class Nietzsche of Mencken and London were trying to use Nietzsche to achieve a kind of modernity in which man was not reduced to an automaton whose only function was to mouth standardized clichés and repeat the slogans of the people running the social order. So pointing out the problematic assumptions of counter-modernity does not imply a blanket endorsement of modernity.

But an important point remains to be made about the homogenizing sweep of modernity. *This sweep constituted Nietzsche’s ‘horizon of expectations’*. Nietzsche was prophetic in many ways, but not even the most clairvoyant individual can foresee the specific instances of what T. S. Eliot called history’s ‘cunning passages, contrived corridors.’ So extrapolation of what Nietzsche

would think of our world a century after his death is difficult. Nietzsche describes a “ruling instinct and contemporary taste, in which would rather go along with the absolute contingency, even the mechanical meaninglessness of all events rather than with the theory of a will to power playing itself out in everything that happens” (*GM* II 12). Nietzsche bitterly complains about this meaningless, this plebeian conformity, yet it was, in Nietzsche’s own enunciation, *a horizon of his world*. What if that horizon was burst or repudiated by a counter-modernity? Would this be Nietzsche’s dream-come-true, or an unutterable nightmare? Nietzsche liked, as it were, to kvetch about modernity. Indeed, he protested against its fundamental assumptions, in strong and eloquent terms. But did he want to disestablish it? Just as Nietzsche lashes against the post-Kantian transcendentalists for thinking they had at all ‘advanced’ when they went beyond God, saying “They’ve become emancipated from the theologians. What a stroke of luck!” (*GM*, III, 25), so might he have said of the counter-modern right, “So, they have become emancipated from leveling social equality. What a stroke of luck!” Might his reaction to a triumphalist counter-modernity have been like this (*GM* II, 24): “How high a price has been paid on earth for the construction of every ideal? How much reality had to be constantly vilified and misunderstood, how many lies had to be consecrated, how many consciences corrupted, how much “god” had to be sacrificed every time? That is the law—show me the case where it has not been fulfilled!”

Nietzsche said that, in his time, *ressentiment* flourishes particularly among “anarchists and anti-Semites.” (*GM*, II, 10) Despite not being one of their number, however, he did not mention the democratic socialists in Germany as the fount of *ressentiment*, seeing the Social Democrats as people “whose criticism is absolute and uninhibited, precisely because they count on never being ministers.” (51) But Scheler seems to lean much more in this direction, and by the time we reach

1945 and the viability of social-democratic parties in the Western World, most on the Right who spoke of *ressentiment* had attacked social democracy and its imputed tendency to level people, to suppress what T. S. Eliot might call ‘the individual talent.’ Like Nietzsche, the reaction against *ressentiment* assumed that the individual, rather than the herd mentality (what Nietzsche calls “the organization of a herd,” *GM*, III, 18) , accounted for all that was truly noble and good in the human spirit. This sentiment echoed what Nietzsche said: "They are all men of *ressentiment*, physiologically unfortunate and worm-eaten, a whole tremulous realm of subterranean revenge, inexhaustible and insatiable in outbursts against the fortunate and happy and in masquerades of revenge and pretexts for revenge" (*GM* III: 14). Unlike Nietzsche, though, the counter-*ressentiment* party had specific remedies to oust *ressentiment* and its hegemony; simply by putting the rise of *ressentiment* so recently back in time, they did not see it as an endemic part of being as Nietzsche did. Basically, if one sees *ressentiment* as able to be transcended, to be ‘squared’ away, the time of *ressentiment*’s ascension is placed relatively recently, if not 1945 than at least (as Scheler seems to do) the French Revolution or a with a seventeenth-century ‘dissociation of sensibility.’ If you, as Nietzsche largely does, put the time of *ressentiment*’s ascension two thousand years ago you are, in all practical terms, suggesting that there is little one could do about it without bursting society’s bounds in an apocalyptic way. The post-1945 counter-*ressentiment* Right saw the society around them as interchangeable clods manufactured to fit into a system regulated by the need for social equality, and repressing individual initiative, individual genius.

It is in protest against this sort of equality-mandated mediocre leveling, what C. G. Jung, in a slightly different context, called an *abaissement de niveau mental*, that calls for the unfettering of the individual such as Ayn Rand’s were raised, though Randians apparently do not much use the

term *ressentiment*. It comes up in their discourse, but nearly always credited to Nietzsche, and does not seem to have taken on indigenous Randian life. Perhaps Nietzsche, for all his individualism, is concerned with the health and good of a society in a way that Rand is not, even if Nietzsche's society is hardly the stolid, conformist, modernized *Gemeinschaft*, to invoke Tonnies's famous dichotomy, that most mentions of 'society' in a classical sociological context evoke. As Rebecca Stringer points out, "*ressentiment* pertains to reactive feelings repeatedly felt and designates a psychological state that is always and only relational..." (264). *Ressentiment*, in many ways, is not just in the way we breathe. It *is* the air we breathe, and thus its diagnosis presumes some sort of social solidarity. Nietzsche has been called an antidemocratic individualist, but his sense of individualism is not atomized the way Rand's is, nor does it have the strange conformism that Rand's does. For Rand, every individual is different in a similar way, whereas Nietzsche's emphasis on play and gestural style means that every individual is potentially as different from most others as Nietzsche himself was different from most other people.

Nietzsche also, and this is not something we have been taught to expect from him, is far more compassionate towards those who do not, fundamentally, fit into his vision of the world than those who favor a resurgent counter-modernity. Nietzsche is adamantly opposed to a retributive morality based on punishment. His elevation of "good versus bad" over "good versus evil" is not a "back to basics" call to be "tough on crime." Nietzsche is opposed to the Biblical *lex talionis*, eye for eye, tooth for tooth, and is interested in less insistent and more ramified modes of articulating justice. And Nietzsche, despite various interpretations to the contrary, did not want 'ordinary people' to be mistreated. Witness the courteous, almost diplomatic language here: "There are indeed a sufficient number of good and modest working people among scholars

nowadays, people happy in their little corners. For this reason: because their work satisfies them, from time to time, with some presumption, they make noises demanding that people today should in general be happy, particularly with scientific knowledge. There are so many useful things to do. I don't deny that. The last thing I want to do is to ruin the pleasure these honest laborers take in their handiwork. For I'm happy about their work. But the fact that people are working rigorously in science these days and that there are satisfied workers is simply no proof that science today, as a totality, has a goal, a will, an ideal, a passion in a great faith. As I've said, the opposite is the case." (*GM*, III, 23). Nietzsche feels the 'good and modest working people' may be in the most basic sense living a lie, but he does not begrudge them the pleasure they get in their work. He is, in other words, not being spiteful, even against a system he thinks is ultimately based on spitefulness, on its repression into a rhetoric of social harmony and scientific optimism.

Nietzsche's protest against modernity has often been simplified into a championship of power-hungry alpha animals over less aggressive, acquiescent souls. Yet Nietzsche says he has found "strength where one would not look for it: in simple, mild, and pleasant people, without the least desire to rule - and, conversely, the desire to rule has often appeared to me a sign of inward weakness: they fear their own slavish soul and shroud it in a royal cloak (in the end, they still become the slaves of their followers, their fame, etc.). The powerful natures *dominate*, it is a necessity, they need not lift one finger. Even if, during their lifetime, they bury themselves in a garden house (*Nachlass*, fall 1880, 6 [206]).

In other words, power in Nietzsche can be exercised through passivity, withdrawal, restraint. There is even what one might call a Gandhian cast to it. This calm, reposed confidence sounds a note absent from stereotypical representations of Nietzsche. We are apt to think of Nietzsche as a

frenetic, belligerent aphorist. In many ways, Nietzsche means for us to think him so, witness his titling of *On The Genealogy of Morals* as (in Kaufmann's translation) "An Attack." But this passage is full of nuance, qualification, and genuine tolerance. And it is these qualities that are so lacking in those who seek to oust the regime of *ressentiment* and replace it with an era of renewed individual initiative. The contemporary Right, for instance, finds itself unsatiated with how strong it now is and how weak the left is; it has to grind the left's nose in the follies of its past. The discourse surrounding the War on Terror, for instance, has brought up Soviet Communism again and again. If this were just to assert a kind of genealogy of absolutist political thought from Nazism to Communism to Islamist extremism, this is not dishonorable. But the enormous space given to Communism in contemporary Rightist writing on terrorism indicates a vindictiveness, a desire to really let the Left have it for putting its trust in a Soviet ideology that a) was immoral and that b) lost. This is one of the most salient examples of counter-*ressentiment* on the Right. Soviet communism, or at least its rhetoric, is the embodiment of what Nietzsche would have seen as *ressentiment*. But the *ressentiment* of its enemies concerning it neither heals nor trumps it, but exacerbates the original *ressentiment*. With regard to Islamism, the quondam enemies of Communism (or, more accurately, those who in the twenty-first century retroactively assume this mantle) are in the position of outward happiness and inward agony, that Nietzsche describes so well in *Genealogy* I 12: "We come back again and again into the light, we live over and over our golden hour of victory—and then we stand there, just as we were born, unbreakable, tense, ready for something new, for something even more difficult, more distant, like a bow which all trouble only serves to pull more tight." The golden hour of triumph over Communism must be brought back again and again in a trite, vengeful spirit even in the midst of the proclaimed menace of

Islamism.

Put algebraically, is the *ressentiment* of *ressentiment* like multiplying a negative number by itself, thus producing a positive? Or is it like multiplying a negative number by a positive, thus exacerbating, supersizing the negativity? Does the conjuring of *ressentiment* against *ressentiment* cure the entire malady by doubling privation? Or must some element of lack remain?

III

I want now to read three works of literature written at three different ages: one in which social equality was deemed impractical, another where social equality was deemed to have advanced so far that it was the default mode of the society, and a third in which social equality is once again rendered vulnerable as some people are once again thought inherently better than others. This exercise will show how *ressentiment* would have operated in the era before Nietzsche, how it operated in the future as clairvoyantly glimpsed by Nietzsche, and how a systematic *ressentiment* operates in an era, that, hopefully, he did not foresee in his worst nightmares.

The name ‘Malvolio’ borne by the deluded and overweening servant in Shakespeare’s *Twelfth Night* means ‘bad will’, and it is easy to see how Shakespeare fashions Malvolio as a living excrescence of malicious volition run amok. As Duncan Large points out, Nietzsche had a great love of Shakespeare. So it is appropriate that for our most obvious demonstration of how *ressentiment* might appear in literature we go to a popular Shakespeare play, though not one that seems to have been especially mentioned by Nietzsche. *Twelfth Night*, beneath its ostensible concern with the pair of amorous couples that makes up its foregrounded plot, features Malvolio:

the ill-tempered (the name is virtually allegorical), overweening, ambitious, and above all humorless servant who gets above himself. He is able to be tricked into thinking that the aristocratic Olivia is in love with him because his conception of himself is that he is able to attain such heights (in a social, not in a romantic sense):

Why, every thing

adheres together, that no dram of a scruple, no

scruple of a scruple, no obstacle, no incredulous

or unsafe circumstance--What can be said? Nothing

that can be can come between me and the full

prospect of my hopes. Well, Jove, not I, is the

doer of this, and he is to be thanked. (*Twelfth Night*, act 3, scene iv, ll. 85-90)

As Marjorie Garber amusingly comments, Malvolio is “the Cincinnatus of the pantry” (Garber 528), cloaking his desire to climb socially in the vestments of social responsibility and duty.

Malvolio’s giving credit, in the speech quoted above, to Jove and not himself is just the sort of

complacent abdication of personal responsibility Nietzsche sees as typical of *ressentiment*. The

combination of thinking that he deserves better than his fate, that the tide of history is somehow

conspiring to bring him these better desserts, and that the gods are behind this is just the sort of

managerial complacency that Nietzsche sees fomented and disseminated by the middle-to-late-

antique priestly class. The audience is aware of the dramatic irony that Malvolio is in no way going

to get what he thinks he deserves; he is hung out to dry in front of us in advance, so to speak, making his aspirations more grotesque, more appalling. But although Malvolio is a servant attempting to join the ranks of the masters, class is not the only issue here. It is Malvolio's pompous self-importance, his officiousness, his treatment of what he thinks of as his own good fortune as something to be objectively vaunted, that makes the viewer mock him and recoil from him. As dramatic convention makes inevitable, Malvolio is foiled as part of the comic restoration at the end. Although Feste, the clown, who is an active agent in the tricking and foiling of Malvolio, is also in a way the 'voice' of the play, singing the *envoi* to the audience at the end, one does not feel Feste has a separate ideology of his own. In other words, Malvolio's defeat restores, and is able to restore, the *status quo ante*. Feste, on the other hand, does not have an independent 'counter-*ressentiment*' ideology that comes conceptually *after* rather than *before* the challenge to the *status quo ante*. . But Shakespeare is not just squelching the impudent servant in the way of Roman comedy in the hands of Plautus or Terence. Malvolio is seen as representing an incipient political tendency that can gain assent in an ideological sense, rather than a generally social sense. Shakespearean society cannot implement Malvolio's desired rise. That would imply a leveling of what one of Shakespeare's characters elsewhere calls 'degree'. But Malvolio is *just* plausible as a potential power-wielder in *Twelfth Night*. In other words, Shakespeare's political world may just be at the edge of a classical conception of *paideia*, where social stability is in a way encrypted into society's conception of itself, and towards a modern political world where allegiance and identity are far less bound. (I take this basic distinction from the work of Paul Rahe, although Rahe places it later, in the eighteenth century). This hint in the play is heightened by the fact that Malvolio, in his sobriety and repression associated with Puritanism, can be seen as a premonition of the Puritanism that was to conquer

English society during the Civil War just a half-century later. Jeanette Winterson's historical novel *Sexing The Cherry* (1991) makes just this point; that Cromwell's England was filled with *ressentiment* which inhibited creativity (Nietzsche says much the same about the Reformation with respect to the Renaissance), and that the explorer Tradescant, who discovered exotic food and even more exotic sex, was in a way a redress for this.

Malvolio has in fact been read as representing Puritanism:

Have ye
no wit, manners, nor honesty, but to gabble like
tinkers at this time of night? Do ye make an
alehouse of my lady's house, that ye squeak out your
coziers' catches without any mitigation or remorse
of voice? Is there no respect of place, persons, nor
time in you? (*Twelfth Night*, act II, scene iii, 42-46).

In this way, the triumph of the clowns and scapegraces over their dour would-be superior foils the emergence of a mentality in which Malvolio, invoking the authority of his imagined love, Olivia, conjures a world where such Dionysian indulgences as the drinking of ale would be prevented. Ironically, Malvolio, who is trying to ascend in the social hierarchy, no sooner thinks he has ascended to power than he immediately invokes a sense of order and degree under which he himself was previously limited. New presbyter, as Milton would have said, is but old priest writ large. This leads the historically-minded reader to wonder if, despite his defeat within the play, Malvolioism did

not triumph, at least for a time, in the 1640s and 1650s. If Nietzsche saw the French Revolution as an outgrowth of *ressentiment*, he surely would have seen the English Revolution as such, especially given its manifestly Christian overtones quite at odds with the French Revolution's militant atheism. (Interestingly, however, despite Nietzsche's detestation of the priesthood, these modern, *ressentiment*-fed revolutions were both very anticlerical).

But if Malvolio anticipates Cromwell, and is put down for it, there is no articulated philosophy of counter-revolution doing the putting-down. There are the squelchers of Malvolio, there are those who delight in his humiliation, but there is no counter-Malvolioism, and the society of *Twelfth Night* is set right in a way that may conveniently restore the old class boundaries but also contains the political energies launched by Malvolio's quest for power within the constraints of a stable order in which Malvolio's opponents do not, in taking their revenge, themselves become a political party with a novel, hegemonic ideology.

Let us now look at another fictional landscape, one where the boundary between master and servant is far less tidy. John L'Heureux's short story "Brief Lives in California" (1980) is set at Stanford University in the late 1970s. The protagonist of L'Heureux's story, Leonora, is an eighteen year-old young woman in her first year of college. Leonora is, very obviously, white and most likely from a 'non-ethnic' background. Leonora has come from a striving, middle-class family determined to give her the best in life. In high school, she performs academically in the way her family and society expect. And she is rewarded with that great passing of the threshold in America's 'meritocratic' society, admission to the highly selective Stanford University. But even at Stanford, in fact especially at Stanford, Leonora finds there are barriers that seem invisible to many, but to her are as solid as those against which Malvolio bumps his head. The admission office at Stanford is not

enthused about Leonora, seeing her as a ‘floater’ who is not a real Stanford freshman but is admitted because some of the ‘real’ Stanford students, the applicants seen by the admissions office as the caliber of student they would most naturally accept, have chosen Yale instead. Of course, Leonora does not know this; she thinks she is one of the chosen ones. To fully understand Leonora, we have to take account of Carl Schmitt’s observation that sovereignty lies in the exception, and Leonora thinks she is the exception, the exceptional student. Whereas Malvolio seeks to move up to the next degree, Leonora is at sea in a society without ascribed degree, which instead has a more mobile status system.

Once in college, she is humiliated by having to take freshman composition. The entire dilemma of Leonora having to take Freshman Composition arises out of the crossing of two regnant American educational doctrines of the past generation: the belief in the exceptional student and the call for raising of standards. The call for standards means that every student has to be taught basic skills, so that no child is left behind. But this scrapes against the rather Randian, libertarian doctrine of excellence, by which students who do well in school are made to feel entitled and that are led to believe that they can go through the curriculum at their own pace. I well remember being in classrooms at more or less ‘prestige’ colleges in which freshmen composition was required; a wounded sourness reigned in the air, as if a group of European aristocrats had been forced to work as longshoremen for two semesters. When her professor, Lockhardt, gives her a C, she protests and raises hell with the university administration all because she has been told all her life that she is exceptional and Lockhardt, in a university filled with the exceptional, tells her that she isn’t. From this point, Leonora’s life slopes steadily downward, and she eventually becomes violent and disturbed, intent on revenge against Lockhardt. Importantly, her revenge is not just *ad hominem*,

but sublimated into a general grievance against the system for having encouraged her to think she was special; and then, in college, letting her down by telling her that she was ordinary. There are two sides to Leonora's situation. One is that her parents have pushed her and encouraged her perhaps beyond her actual level of talent; the other is that, in a society where so many are encouraged to be talented in the same way, there is an inevitable standardization, and a denial to people of any right to be special.

Attainment of status in Leonora's world is now topsy-turvy, and there is not the monolithic measurement of degree that Malvolio possesses. In a way it is Leonora's fault that she is not that special; in another way it is not. L'Heureux interestingly juxtaposes Leonora's story with the Patricia Hearst kidnapping. Hearst, a teenage daughter of a wealthy newspaper proprietor, was kidnaped by a terrorist group with whom she later cooperated.. Whereas in previous generations Hearst would have been famous, if at all, for being wealthy and for being a part of 'the system,' in the era of diffused *ressentiment* Hearst becomes far more famous through her involvement with a purportedly rebellious group. (This is reminiscent of what Nietzsche said about the *ressentiment* of anarchists.) The assumptions of who is in control that existed in Malvolio's time have come apart. In this instability, Leonora sees her chance for power. Yet, beneath the appearance of instability, she fears that Lockhardt, the teacher, still holds the key to success. Leonora is evincing what Nietzsche (*GM* III, 26) calls "the high falsetto of....approval" of what the armchair academic does not have but sees as somehow desirable. To put Leonora's position in terms of the *vita contemplativa-vita activa* dichotomy evoked by Nietzsche in the *Genealogy*, Leonora thinks that academic laurels can be won merely by the 'me generation's' version of the *vita contemplativa*, that is to say 'being herself'. Lockhardt seems a bit smug and indifferent, and we can perhaps sympathize with Leonora

when she finds that his luck keeps going well, he writes best-selling novels and so on, while she gets even more desperate. Lockhardt, at the end, can be described as a man living off the fat of the land as both professor and novelist, with little direct stake or interest in his students' lives.

Like Malvolio, Leonora has no power or fame, and she wants those things desperately. Leonora conceptualizes her suburban origins as a starting-point which does not define her but is more a kind of abyss into which, before her birth, she has fallen, and can serve as a proving-ground to mount a 'return' to the sort of elite sphere to which her soul, as she sees it, 'naturally' belongs. Her unpromising suburban origins are thus transcended in a conceptualization of *ressentiment* squared as an enactment of the phrase *reculer pour mieux sauter*, in other words, fall back in order to rise again. (See Nietzsche's description of the ascetic ideal as a "*faute de mieux*" in *GM*, III, 28). Although Leonora does not have, either in her own person or her family history, a myth of elite origin, her sense that she is 'naturally' entitled not to be 'average' suggests that her dreamt-for scourging of *ressentiment* has, in her mind, an ontologically destined pattern. She is meant to be excellent, to burst the bounds of mediocrity; this is her destiny and when her life does not immediately turn out that way it is as if she is denuded, shorn of all possible aspiration.

Leonora failed. But her very failure indicates many successes, people who have become what she aspired to be. With the reemergence of free-market capitalism in the 1980s and the predominance of what Robert H. Frank and Philip Cook term "the winner-take-all society". In this society, the winners have burst out of the constraining herd mentality *ressentiment*. The winners are the unchained blond beasts; their lives are ones of merit, free to be fulfilled in a revived free-market utopia. I wish to look at a novel that, as it were, chronicles the other side of the mirror, through an abstract, fantastic prism that does not simply premise itself on an empirical, 'realistic' reading of the

situation. The acclaimed British novelist Kazuo Ishiguro's *Never Let Me Go* (2005) is set in a world much like ours, except that, from about 1945, human clones have been harvested to provide spare body parts for people who are ill. *Never Let Me Go* is set among the students of Hailsham, an institution that seems to an elite private school but is in fact a harvesting-ground for clones, where they are given a humanistic education, yet are schooled in preparation first for caring for clones who donate organs, then to donate organs themselves, where, after three donations, they "complete", i.e. die.

In addition to their schooling, they are psychologically prepared to donate organs. Unlike other clones, who are maltreated and kept in subaltern conditions, these clones are, comparatively, treated humanely and compassionately, and allowed, for a time, to aspire to the same kind of lives as 'normal' people. The same window opens for them that opens for Malvolio and Leonora: Malvolio is given the hope he will leave the realm of servitude through what he thinks is Olivia's love for him; Leonora is given the hope that meritocratic college admissions will elevate her above the suburban conformism of her parents; Kathy, the narrator of *Never Let Me Go*, and her friends, are, in their early years, given the hope that they will have normal careers and live out their full adult lives. They learn, though, what their eventual fate is, indeed they learn this too early for it to be suspenseful in narrative terms (one of Ishiguro's many ingenious maneuvers in the novel). Compared to Malvolio and Leonora, though, Kathy shows far less resentment against the system, even though she has much more to lose: Malvolio is humiliated and put back in a servile position; Leonora is expelled from the academic elite and loses her sanity; but Kathy stands to lose her very life. Kathy comes to a kind of acceptance and an embrace of the small, yet palpable, happiness she has had. This is not the kind of passive acceptance that renounces worldly ambition in order to feel an elevated moral

status, like (to use Nietzsche's example) the priests who rationalized their own weakness into doctrine of humility and acceptance, or (to use Scheler's) the mother-in-law who despises her daughter-in-law yet takes comfort in the younger woman's inadequacies. Kathy's stance is less akin to *ressentiment* than to another Nietzschean dramatic posture that is as renunciatory, yet more affirmative: *amor fati*. *Ressentiment* defines everything in terms of its opposite, and thereby erects a privileging of weakness that it does not really believe: it would be strong if it could. Kathy affirms her own life in such a way that her moral superiority to the people who have set up the system that constrains her is not even argued; it is so obvious as to be obviated, as to be unutterable.

Malvolio's world is that of the pre-democratic *paideia*, where there is a stable social order that can rebuke and constrain him. Leonora's world is that of modern democratic society, where people live, and aspire, on a mass scale, so that even the ordinary person can grow up thinking they are extraordinary, where *ressentiment*, far from being the trait of an unusually uppity servant, is in every suburban home, much like the television set. What is the world of *Never Let Me Go*? Do we not, in Hailsham, see the obverse, the other side of the mirror, of the world of counter-*ressentiment*, the world where the tide of modernity has been reversed, the 'successful' are once again free to be successful--a world where mediocrity is no longer rewarded, where winners can once again be winners and losers can once again be losers? The students of Hailsham are encouraged to believe that they are talented; an outside patron, Madame Marie-Claude, collects their art and displays it in a gallery in order to prove that clones, too, have souls, even though in fact, she finds the clones repugnant. The teachers at Hailsham do not even have the option; they are but cogs in a system whose task is to ultimately give the Great No to all its charges.

Ishiguro leaves a trail of clues which leads to a possible interpretation of the novel as a refracted

registering of counter-*ressentiment*. The art of Hailsham does not matter; the goods that are brought to the school for sale are not valuable commodities, but junk; the ‘achievement’ of the students of Hailsham is, in aesthetic terms, a zero-sum game, as since the art seems to be the object of collection and connoisseurship, it is all a put-up job, in which the art only has semiotic and not aesthetic value. As Philip Pothen’s recent book *Nietzsche and the Fate of Art* indicates, Nietzsche was himself skeptical that appreciation of the individual artwork can become a basis for ‘the artistic’. The fundamental insincerity of the interest shown by the adults in the work of the Hailsham students is an indication how percipient Nietzsche may have been. The art of Hailsham does not matter. But, nonetheless, the claims of Hailsham to be giving a truly special education to the clones do excite the suspicion of people, and, at the end of the book, as Kathy begins to come to terms with her fate, the school is closed. Kathy knows that she is disposable, that she will never rise in the world. But at the end of the book, her consciousness is raised to the extent that she can become a center of resistance. She has not just settled for her lot in life. She has stepped outside the game of her intended acquiescence with a Nietzschean zest that becomes a kind of affirmative *amor fati*.

Kathy finds out, at the end, that people are afraid of competing with the clones. In fact, they fear that group bred to be subordinate will in fact be superior, will have the makings of a new master class. Thus Hailsham’s rhetoric of individual distinction, however ersatz, is itself threatening, and needs to be rolled back. The time-scheme that Ishiguro develop for his clones, the way he has introduced them after 1945, is of course a necessary one considering the history of science, at only at that point could science have been remotely as advanced to even make it plausible as a fantasy. Yet 1945 was also, we recall, the year Labour came to power in Britain, and the existence of the clones, the way they were permitted access to the illusion of privilege schooling at Hailsham,

parallels the enfranchisement of the working class and everything that Scheler would see as indicative of *ressentiment* run amok. But the experiment palls; society decides that an enfranchised working class, however much it might flatter their sense of altruism and *noblesse oblige*, poses too much a threat; they have to be put back in their place. The people who are not slaves, who are not clones, only appear in *Never Let Me Go*, as administrators and supervisors, in effect jailers. But somewhere off in some mirror land are people just like Kathy and who are living in a utopia where there are not constraints. The search of the clones for their 'possibles'--the people from which they have been cloned--is an image of this mirror world, our own world, which is offstage. And it is this offstage world which seeks to put the clones in their place, after once finding them useful and eventually superfluous. Would, for this society, that this would be as easy as consigning Malvolio back to a position of servitude! But the genie of consent and democracy is out of the bottle; the bounds of order have been definitely burst; and the elite tightening their hold on power is not a triumphant comic act of reconciliation, but simply a movement of counter-*ressentiment*, of *ressentiment* trying to cure itself by transcending itself. Kathy is resigned to her death, but surely a society of such triumphant cruelty cannot long endure. The utopia of unfettered initiative, freed from the leveling mediocrity of *ressentiment*, is a utopia that tacitly depends on denying some people in the society the right to be part of it.

Nietzsche did not wish to live in such a utopia, one which sought to sweep all pain, all suffering, all inadequacy under the rug. He recognized not only the pain of human life but that we somehow need this pain in order to live genuinely. Any mode of artificially inoculating ourselves against this pain, whether through religion, culture, or politics, would have met with his sharp disapproval; any attempt to transcend it by a utopia, whether the modernity dream of collective

enfranchisement or counter-modernity's of a relaunched elite, would meet with scepticism. Look at these remarkable words on the Black Death of the fourteenth century:

“Human beings, often enough, get fed up: there are entire epidemics of this process of getting fed up (for example, around 1348, at the time of the dance of death). But even this disgust, this exhaustion, this dissatisfaction with himself—all this comes out of him so powerfully that it immediately becomes a new chain. The No which he speaks to life brings to light, as if through a magic spell, an abundance of more tender Yeses. Even when he injures himself, this master of destruction and self-destruction, it is the wound itself which later forces him to live on” (*GM*, III, 13).

Acknowledging one's wounds, learning to live with being fed up—this is just what Leonora in L'Heureux's story will not do. Nietzsche's ultimate strategy for trumping *ressentiment* may not be to oust it, but to learn to live with it. This acknowledgment of wounds recalls Jean Genet's idea of the *blesure secrete*, the secret wound that at once epitomizes what we have in common and how we are radically different from each other. Derrida recognized Genet's articulation of primal idiosyncrasy, juxtaposing Genet to Hegel in the two columns of *Glas*. Nietzsche, who in a way preemptively combines the two columns of *Glas* in one perpetually multi-tracked consciousness, articulates this antagonistic, but indissoluble, bond between idiosyncrasy and the weft which contains and constrains it. The acknowledgment of the persistent of *ressentiment* is part of this bond. In some ways, *ressentiment* is sublimation, in the Freudian sense, in other ways, it is like supplementarity in the Derridean sense, as it is a snag at the back of all willfully self-sufficient conceptions, a flaw preventing them from being subsistent. Like both sublimation and supplementarity, *ressentiment* proceeds from a flaw in the ontological constitution; but it can be a

way of staunching the wound of that flaw as well as exacerbating it. As Rebecca Stringer (267) puts it, *ressentiment* is “an inevitable and potentially positive force.” *Ressentiment* can also be reparative and comedic, transcending revenge. *Ressentiment* is certainly one stage further than the *lex talionis*, which Nietzsche calls “the oldest form of astuteness” (*GM* II, 8). This is the difference between Nietzsche, who premises *ressentiment* on the existence of law (*GM*, II, 11) , and one of his inspirations, the economist Eugen Dühring, the chief agent behind the Nietzschean concept, who begins the narrative only with an arbitrary act of force. It is the panicked wish to prematurely dispense with the positive as well as the negative effects of *ressentiment* that counter-*ressentiment* makes its mistake. In trying to square out *ressentiment*’s pitfalls, it creates a vindictive self-righteousness with all the flaws of *ressentiment*—its expediency, its relativism, its rationalization of the circumstances of one-time oppression into a status of permanent moral presumption--without its good, or at least its bearable, aspects, which are its vulnerability, its admission that we are not gods, its acknowledgment of plural and contesting social forces.

For Nietzsche, *ressentiment* can be generative. Indeed, in any analysis of the world as it is, one that is descriptive and not prescriptive, it must be recognized as as one of the sustaining features of existence. A return to a morality of good and bad is not in the cards in an immediate or even intermediate political sense, given the extent to which moral relativism has been institutionalized. Nietzsche does not view himself as the leader of a “Return of Good and Bad” party preparing to launch a bid for power. The very fact that his works were published in his lifetime, and that the *Nachlass* tacitly addresses an audience, means that Nietzsche concedes a spirit of *Offenlichkeit*, if not quite in the later Habermasian sense of the term: a public-mindedness. In a society where good and bad, not good and evil, were the dichotomy, power would be concentrated into the hands of

such a homogenous few that publication of philosophical works would not be necessary or viable; in the most humane version of such an elitist society, philosophical reflections might be privately printed. But the very fact that Nietzsche had to publish his work, had to presume an audience for his work, presumes the wide dissemination of power (at least the power to read, which is a not unsubstantive power) among a diverse population many of which must be animated, in some sinew, whether vestigial or foregrounded, by *ressentiment*. A society of *ressentiment*-mediated *offenlichkeit* is nobody's dream. But it is nobody's nightmare either. For that precise reason it can at least teeter on the brink of sufficing, to a bare extent, as everybody's reality.

The Nietzschean cure of self-overcoming (*GM* III, 27) , of *amor fati*—a cure that half-knows its own impossibility, is a far better 'solution' to the problem—the constitutive problem—of *ressentiment*—than is a giddy trust in the redemptive capacities of *counter-ressentiment*, of repudiating a leveling social equality, of a resurgent, arrogant initiative. In the wake of the raucous dissonance of counter-modernity, Nietzsche's understanding of the idiosyncrasy of all action, his sense of the gestural nature of all systems, and his awareness of the need for "tact in reverence" (*GM*, III, 22) wield an incalculable saving grace.

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