SIGI JÖTTKANDT, OSCAR DAVIS, MOHH GUPTA, ELVIRA BERZINS, MATTHEW MOCLAIR-ADAMS, ANNA RODITIS, AMY IRELAND
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Dear Behrouz

Dear Behrouz Boochani, Dear Adjunct Associate Professor Boochani, Dear Mr Boochani, Behrouz Boochani-e *azizam*, Dear Behrouz (if we may?). What is being invoked here are the many different openings of the ninety-nine letters we wrote to you during our Covid-19 isolation this term when we studied your stupendous book, *No Friend but the Mountains*.[1] We've been inspired to do so by Anne Surma's beautiful letter to you (Surma 2018), while also recalling the long tradition of letters in providing support and even, in some cases, initiating the release of political prisoners. Yet in order to write to you we need addresses, and these are still elusive—not only spatial (for where are you now?) but also formal (how are we to name you, the one who incarnates the slippery fox?). We need to know, for example, how to inscribe the envelopes framing our words, and which labels to apply so that our characters can be successfully retrieved. We also need to practise, like a lover rehearsing words of affection, and to do so skillfully, like a legislative branch making a request to remove unfit judges. Above all, we need to prepare ourselves so as to maintain the right bearing in relation to you. To respond to your act of speech requires capital letters.

In recalling how address and redress share the same Latin origin, we implicitly seek to "right" ourselves by writing to you: *directus*, to correct, make straight. Still, directness also seems to invert the premises of *No Friend but the Mountains*, which is shaped by a completely different logic. The direct line purports to be a straight line, but your novel is a *tour de force* in the art of the turn. The turn, irreducible tropological figure actualised in your harrowing odyssey, resists the striated places of prison

logic. By contrast, and constitutionally uncontainable by every model of inclusion and exclusion, the turn traces arcs that preclude The Kyriarchy (which is now indelibly linked with the word "Australia").[2] The turn would embody a diversion from the latter's lethal border logic.

And so a second figure surfaces in your words. The turn or trope references the ironic twist of a life "shaped by the notion of freedom" (Boochani 229), whose tragic arc landed him in a cage. But allied in your novel with a uniquely poetic language—for, as we discovered in studying it, your writing is dense with rhetorical figures: *anaphora*, *auxesis*, *antitheism*, *epistrophe*, *homoioteleuton*, *antonomasia*, the parallelisms of *isocolon* and *tricolon*, as well as complex, repeating *hydrographia*, *dendrographia* and *toposthesia*—the turn or trope cedes to an analytic of perception which one could, following Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, name deterritorialisation, but which you simply call the Mountains.

Mountains exhibit a certain topography that situates a prisoner differently in a world. They expose the logic of the borderline to its unconscious knowledge as an ever-permeable boundary. Mountains also recall the figure of the line to its original displacement by a double: the rule of mountains is the fold, which is always dual. The mountains thus mark a collective structure of Two that pre-inhabits the One powering The Kyriarchy, a One that would atomise every relation.

For this, Behrouz, is what I have come to understand as your signature event, your "MEG-alithic" weapon, as it were: when your character leaps the fence of Manus Prison and looks back at the compound from the shoreline of the beach, or when he climbs onto the roof of the prison corridor and becomes a "part of the landscape," he reconfigures the perspectival logic of The Kyriarchy. Eternally occupying the world's originary *refugia*, the mountains inherent in every terrain, neither "inside" nor "outside" but, poised on the fold which contaminates each side with its other, you summon an indeterminate zone out of the borderline, a no-man's land that topologists call a neighbourhood.

And thus, albeit humbly, in the understated form of the litote, *No Friend but the Mountains* powerfully reshapes the definition both of Australia and of Australian literature. Beneath your unflinching gaze,

the Australian *Literarchy* rears up and transforms. Citing your signature move, serried lists reform into accordions of folds while the logic of foreground and background exchanges places, and a new vision of our traumatised country suddenly swims into view: no longer as a closely guarded island-prison colony but an opening in and onto an interconnected oceanrim.

So with these letters, we would like to express our heartfelt thanks. Your writing from Manus Prison came to us in this ravaged year as an unimaginable gift in the most literal sense. Whereas *Manus*, in Latin, means being under another's power (particularly a woman in relation to her husband), its close cognate, *munus*, from which the word community (and indeed *immunity*) derives, highlights the act, rather than the object, of the gift. The Italian philosopher Roberto Esposito explains:

> All of the *munus* is projected onto the transitive act of giving. It doesn't by any means imply the stability of a possession and even less the acquisitive dynamic of something earned, but loss, subtraction, transfer. (Esposito 5)

When he defines love as the gift of what one doesn't have, the French psychoanalyst Jacques Lacan similarly invokes the idea of a purely formal act of conferral, one where the subjugated object miraculously transforms into a hand that reaches back towards us (Lacan 179). The gift of your book, impossibly sent out as a teletechnic signal through the blank of media silencing, was received by us as such an act of love. Its significance for me lies in the way that something other than the premise of a relation or a position vis-a-vis "the other" has become possible. For like a Benjaminian shockwave, your *coup de bookhani* electrified the infinitely looping, Kyriarchal Systems of subjugation, erasure and forgetting to force a new figure of politics into being.

For such a true novelty, my deepest thanks.

Sigi

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Dear Behrouz,

Thank you.

Your writing has affected me deeply, and will stay with me for a long time. I know you've said previously that your continued reporting in the face of systemic abuse is not an act of courage, or a choice, but the result of being left with no other option but to resist. Even so, I appreciate the risks you undertook and am immensely grateful to have a copy of *No Friend but the Mountains* sitting before me on my desk.

I was asked to describe in this letter what I thought the significance of your novel was. To me, it is significant as an intricately crafted, intimate piece of writing which documents a time and place obscured from Australia's cultural record. It humanises a specific experience of humanity not confined geographically, but socio-spatially, and in doing so has a broader relevance beyond the shores of Manus.

From a literary standpoint, it is a blend of genre and form like nothing I've read before. Prison literature, surrealism and psychological analysis coalesce around a structure of live reporting, whereby "technique, style and voice" shift as events unfolded before your eyes. It reads like a tapestry of your consciousness, strands of thought woven together (or unraveled) by the traumas of Manus Prison[3] and your journey to reach it. To read *No Friend but the Mountains* is to occupy the passenger seat of your memories. Omid Tofighian's choice in the translation process to alternate prose with verse in an approximation of Farsi's poetic conventions contributes to this manifestly. I cried reading the second chapter where you describe your journey from Indonesia. The abrupt shift from verse to prose in the following lines tore me from the tranquility of nostalgia to the clamour of imminent death:

> *Mountains and waves /*
> *Waves and mountains /*
> *Where is this place? /*
> *Why is my mother dancing?*
> … I awake in a panic. Darkness everywhere … screaming and wailing can be heard from below. It is a warzone. (Boochani 32)

I could never say that I understand what you've been through—I can say however that in reading your story I imagined it, vividly, and that it terrified me.

Your lyrical use of colour further enables our ability as an audience to situate ourselves in your lived experience. It also acts as a recurring motif, linking the divergent genres and modes of thought you articulate and sequencing the narrative itself. A common trope in prison literature is the degrading, transformative impact of uniform, which you describe as "an awful blend of colours: a yellow t-shirt, a black pair of shorts, and naked legs … I have been transformed into someone else" (Boochani 97). Your first impression of Manus Island is "a riot of colours, the colour spectrum of madness" (Boochani 101), its squalid conditions a "mix of lime and dirt. Everywhere, fine white sand sticks to one's feet … the stench of sludge, a multicoloured spread …" (Boochani 192). Your description of life on Manus is intensely sensory and renders it palpable for an audience who, predominantly, has and will never set foot there. My government's policy of offshore detention is willfully opaque, the narrative around asylum seekers frequently distorted. It is immeasurably significant that you have documented "Australia's hidden history" from your position imprisoned within it. I think deep down many Australians are subconsciously grateful for our government's dehumanisation of asylum seekers. It precludes us as a nation from having to process the excruciating brutality inflicted on children, women and men like you, in the name of our interests. Your memories, and the grace with which you express them, force us to examine what we instinctively flinch from. They force us to accept what we have done. It is from this collective acceptance of reality that we can begin to understand the human cost of our actions, and to put measures in place which prevent their reoccurrence.

I also find the collaborative process by which your writing was penned, transmitted, sequenced, interpreted, translated, collated and published deeply inspiring. It seems like the antithesis of The Kyriarchal practices you endured in Manus Prison, where its denizens (refugee and Papuan alike) were turned against each other with relentless and pervasive practices of micro-control. You wrote that this is evident in the queues for food, access to toilets and basic sanitary

products where people "who behave in a more despicable and brutish manner [have] a more comfortable lifestyle" (Boochani 197).

You, however, slowly established a network of friends, advocates, writers and publishers (around the world) whom you could trust, and in a series of micro-actions (epitomised in the WhatsApp messages you smuggled out) created something which could prove to be The Kyriarchy's downfall: a blueprint for solidarity, community and love. It brought me joy to learn that *No Friend but the Mountains* has been translated and published in Italy, where the discourse on refugees has been similarly vituperative and characterised by misinformation as in Australia. I think Kyriarchy is relevant to the economic concerns that often plague this discourse, where refugees and migrants are posed as threats to working class jobs. Your articulation of how it manifested at Manus could go a long way in a context like Italy where such a gulf in understanding exists.

That's what I hope the enduring significance of your writing will be: something which educates, which humanises debate, which encourages collaboration and connection in the face of antipathy and distrust, not just in Australia but globally.

Thank you for your time.

Oscar

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Behrouz Boochani,

Having read your novel *No Friend but the Mountains: Writing from Manus Prison*, I find myself not wanting to believe the account of what you experienced. Yet as I sit here, privileged enough to be able to analyse your work from the comfort of a home, I believe it is a wholly necessary piece of writing in today's world. Your novel is significant in that it is the ultimate antithesis against the prison Kyriarchy of Manus Prison. It brings to light that which has been shoved into darkness, it creates from a place where creation is squashed and above all else, it humanises those who have been dehumanised.

The first and foremost function of your book has been to open the world's eyes to the horrors that prisoners of Manus Island have to go through, and the unimaginable challenges of the refugee experience as a whole. Speaking personally, as a non-Australian, I had never heard of Manus Island before reading your book, likely because this knowledge has been withheld by the Australian Government from the attention of the world. In this context, your book is a feat of journalistic excellence, exposing me, and countless others, to a situation that deserves my attention. By virtue of your actual imprisonment and the fact that this book was composed from experiences literally in front of your eyes elevates the account from an *exposé* to a call to action. It is clear from the language of your book that this is no fiction. In your description of the bathrooms as an epicenter of self-harm, you describe how "at sunset or hours of midnight, someone takes a hold of one of those razors with the blue handles, chooses the most appropriate toilet, and over there, in the moments that follow, warm blood flows on the cement floor" (Boochani 176). The journalistic objectivity that you have practised throughout your career is quite evident in this harrowing situation. The description is not embellished with emotional adjectives, yet still carries the weight of details such as the "blue handle" and "warm blood" that pull the reader into the moment and wrench at their emotions. Such profoundly saddening experiences are rarely attributed to refugees. The word conjures tropes of destructive parasites on economies, tropes meant to turn the attention of the public away from the realities of being a refugee. Your book uncovers what these subjugating characterisations are trying to hide—the realities of The Kyriarchal System.

The dehumanisation of refugees and prisoners throughout the world has long been an effective tool to maintain hegemony, but your ability to capture your experience, indeed to create and emote in a place where such practices are systematically annihilated, brings life to the image of those imprisoned everywhere. The most direct manifestation of this in your book is the inclusion of poetry. As discussed earlier, your objective journalistic language allows the reader to trust you, but your poetry gives humanity to the experience. In a poem about the prison itself you describe palm trees:

The tall coconut trees that line the outskirts of the camp have
grown naturally in rows /
But unlike us, they are free /
Their grand height allows them to peek into the camp at all times /
To know what is going on in the camp /
To see what is happening in the camp /
To witness the anguish suffered by the people in camp.
(Boochani 112)

The poetry takes the reader into the minds of the prisoners. It is clear that the idea of freedom was never lost on you during your imprisonment. Despite the fact that the palm trees cannot move, and have grown in such an orderly fashion as a row, they are still free. It is ironic then that these trees are the only living beings that can see what is going on in the camp, yet it is almost another layer of cruelty to know that they cannot help you in any way. Like this one, your poems give the reader access to the personal thoughts, commentary and feelings that traditional journalistic literature cannot encompass. They beg the reader to reconsider their preexisting notions of prisoners, for if one person can feel so much, what is the true extent of suffering at this prison?

It is clear throughout your book that "The Kyriarchal System of the prison is set up to produce suffering" (Boochani 136). To create this book while being subjected to this system is a testament to the willpower and humanity of every refugee around the world. It is a work of art that draws from the very system that was supposed to prevent it. It has changed my perspective on what I think of when I think of refugees and it has motivated me to question my world more rigorously, as I'm sure it has for everyone who has read it.

Sincerely,

Mohh

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Dear Mr Boochani,

In *No Friend but the Mountains*, you observe that "Life is full of islands" (Boochani 265). I have come to know your voice in the way it connects people. By addressing our collective, innate understanding of how freedom shapes us, your words transcend temporal and physical barriers. I firmly support Brigitta Olubas's view that *No Friend but the Mountains* is a necessary work of Australian literature (Olubas 1). To interpret your role as an Australian author, Australian society must move beyond dismissing your experience as arising out of a complex situation. We must confront the issue of why representation of refugee and asylum seeker experience is contested in order to illuminate the power structures that determine who can ask questions, and who cannot. I believe this is what makes your book vital in every context. You've indicated that your aim is to create a "new language" to dismantle the oppressive power instigated by The Kyriarchal System (Boochani 2019, n.p.). By sharing what I have learned and understood from your work, and furthermore assessing how Australian society perpetuates misrepresentation, I hope to contribute to the process of dismantling the systems that operate through dehumanising and disempowering others.

I found Doran Larson's work particularly valuable in exploring *No Friend but the Mountains* as an important piece of prison literature. I feel that acknowledging it as such directly challenges the lies that The Kyriarchal System imposes. Larson cites John Edgar Wideman's observation that the "evils (prisons) perpetrate" rely on a form of "willed ignorance" from the public (Larson 144). This is clear in Australian society's reluctance to admit to the horrors that the prisoners on Manus face. The Australian Government vehemently denies Manus Island is a prison. Many are willing to believe it; it is a far more comfortable reality, and so heavily reinforced that Australia is convinced it is dependent on the use of offshore detention. The Kyriarchy cultivates this dependency, deliberately generating distrust and confusion to maintain full control.

There is one moment in *No Friend but the Mountains* that lingered in my mind long after I read it: "In reality, the extent of violence

administered on the body of The Prophet is equivalent to the power he took from them" (Boochani 278). I realised how often language is manipulated from a position of influence to persecute and segregate in Australian society. You capture the agony this inflicts on the voiceless: "I am disintegrated and dismembered, my decrepit past fragmented and scattered, no longer integral, unable to become whole once again" (Boochani 265). By defining your experience at the oppressive centre of the system, you reclaim the language and identity that The Kyriarchy endeavours to violate and destroy. I was struck by how deeply this resonated with my cumulative understanding of the implicit prejudices within journalistic language. The phrases "offshore processing centre" and "asylum seekers" are circulated incessantly within Australian society to distance ourselves from any feelings of empathy or connection. These terms diminish human suffering and support the colonialist belief that the government is rendering a service to those it disempowers. Your work exposes the devastating consequences of this belief, and emphasises that denying the pain and suffering of others is rejecting humanity at its most genuine:

> *The human being is born enduring affliction /*
> *The human being lives while enduring affliction /*
> *The human being dies by enduring affliction /*
> *The human being realises affliction* / (Boochani 245)

To recognise this as our reality is the only way we can liberate others. Humanity is how we exist in relation to each other, and how language fosters the social, cultural and ethical values that animate our *being* in the world (Surma, 521). In the words of Anne Surma, you have re-shaped humanitarianism as a social practice (Surma 519). You have reinforced the need for action; the need for readers to realise their own agency in order to shift the terrain of oppression. It is crucial that we examine ourselves at our most vulnerable.

I have been lucky enough to enjoy a position of privilege in Australian society where my right to autonomy is undisputed. Through your work I have come to realise that accepting this without question constitutes complicit blindness. Your words cannot be examined

without readers interrogating their inherent perception of the self and the systems they support. Most importantly, your work illustrates the need for individuals to scrutinise how they contribute to the oppression of others. *No Friend but the Mountains* is necessary; it is necessary in that it reclaims the dignity of human life and suffering. You have given your readers a gift, and I can only hope to do it justice in showing that your voice has been heard and understood.

Elvira

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Dear Behrouz Boochani,

No Friend but the Mountains is the most sincere and immediate evocation of the refugee identity and a deeply epistemological analysis of the socio-political systems in which the refugee is persecuted. I admire the way you interweave prose and poetry, creating an eclectic reading experience. I particularly admire the epigraphs that begin each chapter. The significance of your novel, as Anne Surma notes, is the "reinscription of the refugee" (Surma 523) but I consider this as secondary to your "Manus Prison Theory" (Boochani 362) with regard to the multifaceted notion of a "Kyriarchal System." An evolution of the "prisoner's dilemma," the aim of "Manus Prison Theory" (MPT) is to dehumanise and debase those incarcerated and to sever all pursuits of epistemological knowledge. Through psychological manipulation, the prisoners are reduced to fearful primates whose very purpose is diminished by The Kyriarchy which exerts control over every aspect of their lives. Such baseless torture and manipulation is relatively unknown for "the general public have yet to grasp the horrors of systematic torture integral to the detention system" (Boochani 362).

While the Stanford Prison Experiment exposed mankind's inherent desire to control and abuse power, your MPT exposes a system of governance in which the prisoner is debased and reduced to a numbered cog that the system desires to make redundant. The Kyriarchal System is the best representation of such governance as it elicits the

notion of "intersecting social systems of domination and oppression" (Boochani 370), self-reinforcing and self-replicating. The Kyriarchal structure of Manus Prison has one purpose: "returning the refugee prisoners to the land from which they came" (Boochani 165). Ubiquitous in your novel is the threat of deportation which looms over every single prisoner. People who assumed life-threatening measures to escape persecution in their homelands were debased and vilified by Australia's "Border Industrial Complex" (Boochani 365). Such threats mainly took the form of psychological warfare. From the onset, you and your fellow prisoners were told about the "Manusian cannibals" (Boochani 146), violent predators who stalked the land on which you were incarcerated. These fears were reinforced by the Mansuian custom of masticating betel nuts, which stain teeth red "like a predatory animal" (Boochani 146). The first time you saw them you felt you were "in a blockade of real-life cannibals … mouths laughing and filled with blood" (Boochani 146), which The Kyriarchy hoped "would scare [you]" (Boochani 146). A form of psychological warfare which is part of the systematic abuse and manipulation of prisoners by The Kyriarchy.

The MPT is a strong evocation of such a structure as the prisoners' free will is usurped by their transgressors who dictate when they can eat, sleep, communicate and receive medical attention. A potent example of the psychological warfare invoked by the oppressors is that of temporality. Waiting, as you say, "is a mechanism of torture used in the dungeon of time" (Boochani 62), a method employed by The Kyriarchy to usurp any sense of control the prisoners have. Food, water, medicine, cigarettes and external communication are all timed, timed in terms of use and timed by which one has access to them. When the prisoner is forced to endure "long, pulverising queues" (Boochani 189) they lose control of time, a resource they have in abundance. By relinquishing control of their time, the prisoners become subservient to The Kyriarchy, dependent on the very system that abuses them and leaves them without time to pursue any epistemological attempts at gaining knowledge. The Kyriarchal System desires suffering, it demands that you "endure affliction" (Boochani 311), so much so that you advocate for your own deportation, relinquishing any responsibility Australia's Border Industrial Complex has for your safety.

You note that "self-harm has become established for some in the prison as a kind of cultural practice" (Boochani 317), so ubiquitous that "when someone cuts themselves, it elicits a form of respect among the prisoners" (Boochani 317–18). In terms of the MPT, self-harm becomes a form of protest, a rebellion against The Kyriarchy that has usurped everything but the blood of the prisoners. "Witnessing these kinds of violent scenes during the nights becomes normal" (Boochani 316), almost an attraction, a "theatre of blood" (Boochani 317) which incites rebellion: "Human blood, the element of affliction" (317). Such acts of violence induce a sense of euphoria among the perpetrators, for when "a prisoner spills his blood, he appears to enter a state of ecstasy" (Boochani 318), an "existential moment emitting the scent of death" (Boochani 318). The deaths resulting are not suicides, they are murders, murders committed by The Kyriarchy that usurps the prisoners' free will and leaves them with nothing but their blood and bones. "A killer is a killer" (Boochani 143), there are no two ways around it, violence begets violence and those members of The Kyriarchy who control the prison are killers, entities from whom "violence oozes out" (143). Their blatant disregard for the wellbeing of the prisoners of Manus is the result of a rigid bureaucracy which debases the refugee and relishes their suffering.

You note that the "prisoner constructs his identity against the concept of freedom" (Boochani 299), for his freedom is paramount yet unattainable. The MPT operates in defiance of epistemology, organised in such a way that it stifles pursuits of truth and understanding, culminating in the "apex of hopelessness and disenfranchisement" (Boochani 125). As a result, the social structure of the prison becomes that of a Kyriarchy, an oppressive regime that usurps any power the prisoners hold and denies any chance of attaining knowledge. Through the systematic abuse of power and the belligerent vilification of the refugee, the MPT reveals the machinations of warfare; it is a system in which the oppressors torture and debase the prisoners with the singular goal of relinquishing responsibility for the refugee through their deportation. Despite a plethora of torturous experiences and years of hardship, you managed to reject The Kyriarchy and refused to be dehumanised, for "at every moment [your] life is shaped by the notion

of freedom" (Boochani 299). Whilst not entirely free, you no longer have to suffer under the egregious banner of Australia's Border Industrial Complex. On behalf of every enlightened and informed Australian, I sincerely apologise for the hardship you've endured and I thank you for your critique of our unjust immigration system.

Sincerely,

Matthew

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Dear Behrouz,

Your philosophical meditations on mortality and life intrigued and confronted me. As something which all must and do experience, mortality acts as a unifying feature of your novel between you, the world and me. You were able to look at the experiences and lives around you, and create a representation of human nature. Your anti-genre novel acts as a form of self-discovery for you—of your values, beliefs, desires—and for me. This self-discovery is evident throughout your novel, *No Friend but the Mountains*, and is what I consider to be the most important and significant aspect as it timelessly illuminates life as a mountain where the peak is overcoming oppression through self-sacrifice.

Your meditations on death are confronting as they come from one who has been on the brink of death and barely escaped, acting as a lesson on mortality. And yet your discussion of death also disappointed me: "there's no difference between dying in defence of one's homeland, dying for a greater cause, or dying for the sake of ice cream on a stick" (Boochani 76). You have used anaphora to connect the ways in which we can die, making death the ultimate equaliser of humanity. It is fundamentally human to desire a meaningful death—we want to know we died for something reasonable, that it was not in vain. You state that, in the end, it all culminates in the fact that "*Death is death*" (Boochani 76) and it is inescapable. You state this as an incantatory

mantra, as if your confrontation with death gave you a semblance of its reality and left you utterly disappointed with its truth.

These remarks on mortality have given me a remarkable insight into life. You have proven that although death can be "a flash of light up in the great expanse of a dark night," it is a flash of light to be remembered and honoured (Boochani 76). Your memory of The Blue Eyed Boy is a testament to this: "*The ocean has performed its sacrifice* … The Blue Eyed Boy is dead" (Boochani 44). Death is not simple, and this is because of our great desire to live: "I decide that my own death must involve an act of the will—I resolve it within me, in my very soul. Death must be a matter of choice" (Boochani 30) and, most importantly, because of our great desire to remember those who have passed. In this, death is not simply death; it is the way others can be inspired and given purpose. Your parting statement in the novel, "They had killed The Gentle Giant" (Boochani 258), does not merely state The Gentle Giant's death. Instead, you provoke a feeling of injustice in the reader, you promise that it will not be in vain and you illuminate how you will "avenge" his death by making Australia understand its actions against refugees through your book and words.

This feeling of injustice is given strength through your representation of strong and hopeful characters who illuminate how The Kyriarchy can be overcome as long as individuals continue to strive for good. In your novel, you theorise "kyriarchy" in the prison as an oppressive force which utilises hate, fear, anger and boredom to dehumanise people and force them to submit. You consider this a metaphor for Australian society at large (Boochani and Tofighian 281). But the examples of heroism and morality in your novel provide hope that there is more to Australia, and humanity in general, than this compulsive desire to oppress. A confronting moment in your novel sees the unjustified death of The Blue Eyed Boy. His act of letting others get to safety before him is the epitome of sacrifice in the face of others who only seek their own comfort: "He should get on the boat as quickly as possible, but he holds back saying, 'No, let others get on, don't worry'" (Boochani 49–50). Looking back at this moment, when safety was so close, I see a beauty in his desire to put others before him, which challenges The Kyriarchy's belief that the world is bound by

oppression. The Blue Eyed Boy shows that the will is a force which can contend with The Kyriarchy.

I see this humanity and goodness resonating most strongly in The Gentle Giant who retaliates against The Kyriarchy in a way which seems as natural as breathing to him. The Gentle Giant was the opposite of the Manus Prison mentality, "when The Giant gets hold of some fruit he offers it to others without any expectations, a gesture of courtesy in the manner of a child" (Boochani 185). Instead of seeing oppression, he saw the opportunity to bring light and hope into the world of others. I see this as a testament to the goodness within humanity. Instead of seeing a hopeless Kyriarchal System which has its claws within Australian society, I see a message from The Gentle Giant to the world that, even in the dimmest situations, good can come: "The Gentle Giant challenges this way of thinking with his childlike generosity. He confronts them with a different way of being, he offers them new horizons" (Boochani 185). By representing The Gentle Giant in your novel, you have not only immortalised him, but also his deeds which act as an inspiration to fix the injustice in the world.

For this gift you have given me, for this message of hope, for this testimony of the reality of life, with both death and suffering and goodness, I must thank you Behrouz. In your novel, *No Friend but the Mountains*, you have taught me that humanity and life is something that must be cherished against oppression. Your novel illuminated the injustice within Australian society, but instead of leaving us in despair, you gave us the hope and the example to overcome this. For that, I thank you.

I hope we meet in the future,

Anna

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Behrouz,

No Friend but the Mountains is a solitary novel. You don't expect or want letters. You don't need them. And that's why I am writing to you. Because you don't need me. The opposite could be said, in fact. I need you. Because I am the one in prison.

There is one scene in *No Friend but the Mountains* that strikes me as emblematic for the Western reader—or at least for us Australians. Emboldened, perhaps, by the night you spent on the roof next to the mango tree that grows alongside the fence, where you write of feeling "emancipated … emancipated from the prison, emancipated from the prison system … witnessing the jungle and the ocean … evaporat[ing] into the darkness" (Boochani 252), you take advantage of another invitation offered by nature (which you are so attuned to) while it is raining and "the place is completely abandoned" (Boochani 301), to simply and deftly leap the wire fence. Drawn by the sound of the ocean, which is the one thing that, night after night, consistently passes through the walls that keep you imprisoned, you feel your way through the undergrowth until you arrive at the shore. "When I reach the waves," you write, "I look back for the first time. I turn around to see the prison. With all its agony, all its nightmares the prison can hardly be made out through the layers of branches and leaves. Only a few flashes of light are visible. Under the weak light of the lamps, it looks like a forlorn village in the heart of a remote jungle. … I peer over at the prison, piercing it with glistening eyes" (Boochani 301–02). Reading your book is like this. Clambering over a wall and looking back to see, to comprehend—for the first time—the prison from which you have just escaped. And knowing at the same time that you can't remain outside forever—that eventually you will have to return to the other side of the fence.

It is akin to that moment in a horror story where the monster finally makes its appearance. A monster, following convention, that has been hidden in plain sight for the duration of the story, right under the characters' noses, perhaps simulating benevolence, perhaps even gaining their trust. Our prison, the one that has incarcerated us for years without us being able to see it, is what you call The Kyriarchal

System. You capitalise it to "give it agency" (Boochani 124 n6), anthropomorphising it as if to point out, by inversion, its function of de-anthropomorphisation. It doesn't have a centre and its walls are invisible. It maintains its power through misinformation, paranoia, competition, distrust, and misdirection. It creates irrational rules and declares them rational. It organises space and time, regulates the body, responds to basic needs with bureaucracies, gets under your skin, and infiltrates your mind.

I had never heard this term before reading your book. In a translator's note, Omid Tofighian describes it as "a theory of interconnected social systems established for the purposes of domination, oppression and submission" (Boochani 124 n6), the term itself having been coined by the Catholic feminist theologian Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza in 1992. A close contemporary of intersectionalist feminism, the notion of Kyriarchy interrogates the simple binary of patriarchal oppression in the service of a far more complex, interlaced network of oppressive behaviours that "criss-cross subject positions" (Fiorenza 123) in which power is "interlinked, interactive, co-constituting" and relational (Matsuda 1189). As Natalie Osbourne puts it, "Kyriarchy describes the power structures intersectionality creates" (Osborne 17). From your descriptions in the novel, I understand it as occupying an interstitial space between what Foucault would call a disciplinary society and what Deleuze would call a control society. It is subtle, which partially accounts for its invisibility. Bureaucracy is one of its principal tools of oppression. "Bureaucracy pertains to the very essence of a prison such as Manus," you write in your reply to Anne Surma, "[b]ut I imagine that the place I have been calling Manus Prison is a replica of thousands of other constructions that control Western societies: universities, schools, army barracks, governments" (Boochani 528). And in "Manus Prison Theory" you tell us that you can see The Kyriarchal System "in all of the structures in Australia," so much so that it "represents how Australia thinks" (Boochani and Tofighian 282; 281). So many of us have simply internalised it—like The Cow, whose daily existence revolves around ensuring his place at the front of the queue. Rather than questioning the existence of the game, he accepts its rules and plays by them in order to "win," triumphant in his

servitude. Then there are others among us who are more like Maysam the Whore. We invest in simulations of resistance. We fool ourselves into believing that we are free in our rebellion. But this, as you write, is just another form of compliance, supported by that "same old simple trick habitual to all humans—escape from fear by lying to oneself" (Boochani 136).

Your description of The Kyriarchal System as a "spider's web" (Boochani 209) spun from a chain of command so baroque, so bloated with mediators (each of whom is "just following orders") that the source of its power is completely obscured, reminds me of Mark Fisher's portrayal of the "late capitalist" phenomenon of the call centre as "a world without memory, where cause and effect connect together in mysterious, unfathomable ways, where it is a miracle that anything ever happens," and where "the building rage [that one experiences when trying to navigate it] must remain impotent because it can have no legitimate object, since—as is very quickly clear to the caller—there is no-one who knows, and no-one who could do anything even if they did" (Fisher 67–68). Fisher would write figuratively of the jungle as a space of resistance to colonialist systems of control and repression, and it seems to me that, despite its distance from the cold mountains of Kurdistan, it operates in a similar way for you. You teach us (as you write of the "indomitable" Manusian workers) how to "wear the scent of the jungle" (Boochani 145), how to cease conspiring with the networks of power and bad faith that keep us from real resistance, how to form alliances based on economies of secret cigarettes, how to pass things through the walls, and how, finally, to leap over them and gaze back at our prisons from the terrifying freedom of the jungle.

This term I am teaching utopian fiction and we are reading Ursula Le Guin. *No Friend but the Mountains* has altered the way I read, and even in the very first chapter of Le Guin's novel *The Dispossessed*, I see the world that you have taught me to see:

> Like all walls it was ambiguous. … Looked at from one side, the wall enclosed a barren sixty-acre field called the Port of Anarres. On the field there were a couple of large gantry cranes, a rocket pad, three warehouses, a truck

> garage, and a dormitory. The dormitory looked durable, grimy and mournful; it had no gardens, no children; plainly nobody lived there or was even meant to stay there long. It was in fact a quarantine. The wall shut in not only the landing field but also the ships that came down out of space, and the men that came on the ships, and the worlds they came from, and the rest of the universe. It enclosed the universe, leaving Anarres outside, free. Looked at from the other side, the wall enclosed Anarres: the whole planet was inside it, a great prison camp, cut off from other worlds and other men, in quarantine. (Le Guin 1)

Through your incantations you have performed a sort of exorcism—you have dispossessed us of our illusions of agency. But you, Behrouz, you are a more an agent than all of us. A master of both escape and standing firm.

Amy

NOTES

1 This is a compilation of some of the letters written as part of a Take Home Exam for UNSW's ARTS1030 Forms of Writing course, which Amy Ireland and I taught in Term 1, 2020. At the time of writing, Boochani's whereabouts were unknown to us. It is with great joy and relief that we have since learned of his safe asylum in my former hometown of Christchurch, New Zealand. We hope that everyone in Australia's immoral and illegal detention system will similarly soon be free.—S.J.

2 We follow Omid Tofighian's use of capitals when referring to The Kyriarchy and The Kyriarchal System, which evokes the idea of an active spirit overseeing Australia's detention system understood as a coherent, self-reinforcing system of power and domination. In his supplementary essay to the book, "Translator's Reflections," Tofighian explains that by means of this naming technique, Boochani "brings into existence a new abstract entity, ... a being that represents the multi-structural nature of Australia's border-industrial complex—a being that orchestrates the systematic torture inflicted in Manus Prison" (Boochani

369). More details about the conceptual underpinnings of The Kyriarchy are found in Amy Ireland's contribution at the end of this series of letters.—S.J.

3 You said that there's great power in calling things for what they are, and that really resonated with me. In this letter I'll refer to Manus Island Off-Shore Processing Centre as Manus Prison as you do—especially as it seems like there was as much processing getting done as maintenance of the toilets, which is to say bugger all.—O.D.

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