

A Mysterious Closeness: Africa and Europe in Kirsten Thorup's *The God of Chance*

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Abstract *The God of Chance* by the Danish author Kirsten Thorup is a novel about a meeting between Africa and Europe that turns into a confrontation. The main characters are a Danish professional woman, Ana, and an African girl from Gambia, Mariama, whom Ana decides to sponsor after having met her on the beach while on vacation in the African country. The article examines how and why a conflict develops between Ana and Mariama after the young girl has come to London to pursue higher education. Stress at work has caused Ana to become one-sided, limited and phobic, or xenophobic. She develops an obsession with her own “other”, Mariama, and tries to preserve a fixed image of the girl in her mind, disallowing the girl to grow and refusing to see her as an independent, grown woman. Ana grows increasingly apprehensive and phobic when faced with the multiethnic urban environment of London. By contrast, Mariama resolves her relationship to her own race and to the white race. A dream sequence epitomizes the transcendence of racial differences, posing the “rainbow” as the multicolored spectrum from which transparency and knowledge emanate. At this point the narrative likewise erases the border between narrator and character, artist and artwork, utopia and dystopia.

Key words Africa; the corporation; black and white; transparency and opacity; self and other; transcendence.

What is pure art according to the modern idea? It is the creation of an evocative magic, containing at once the object and the subject, the world external to the artist and the artist himself.

—Charles Baudelaire

The letters “m” and “n” are phonetically so close that they may signify sameness and difference at the same time. Mariana, called Ana, a Danish woman in her early forties, is on a brief vacation in Gambia, West Africa, to take time off from her stressful job

as financial entrepreneur with the corporation Rower International; on the beach she is approached by a fifteen year old Gambian girl, Mariama, who is selling local products in order to help her aunt, Rosie, support a large family consisting mostly of younger brothers and sisters. The opening pages of Kirsten Thorup's novel *The God of Chance* (*Tilfældets gud*; 2011) subtly indicate a mixture of similarities and differences between contemporary corporate structure in the world of global finance and African family structure, the most notable similarity being that of the presence of a powerful figure lurking in the background as the one in charge, a mostly anonymous corporate executive, in (Mari)Ana's exclusively work-oriented life, centered on Copenhagen and London, and "Big Man" in Mariama's family-oriented life in Serra Kunda, Gambia. From the very beginning of the complex narrative Thorup brilliantly posits a number of detailed, intricate rhetorical comparisons manifesting the indistinct, insoluble nature of sameness and difference, socioeconomically, culturally and, not least, racially. The rhetorical ingenuity of the text suggests that, although the two structural relationships outlined above may be similar, there are also significant differences, the major difference being that the African girl possesses a sense of belonging, purpose and integration despite her poverty and near-emaciation, while the Danish woman is approaching a complete nervous breakdown owing to the pressures of her job that alienate her from herself, conducive as they are to a sense of non-integration with self and milieu.

At the same time it is indicated, by way of subtle rhetorical patterns imbedded in the text, that the dialectics of African family structure and European/global corporate structure is not a simple bipolar dialectic; rather, it is a dialectic whose poles are inextricably mixed up with one another so that it becomes virtually impossible to "evaluate" which side is positive and which negative, although one would tend to "favor" the African pole. However, if one favors the African pole one should keep in mind that the text also suggests a potential cause-effect relationship, demonstrating, perhaps, that a deeper anthropological relationship may exist between "Africa" and "Europe", the "world of finance", in the sense that the latter may have "inherited" the power structure of the former; on the other hand, of course, this may be reversed so that the "correct" interpretation would be that postmodern and postcolonial corporate structures have invaded African family and work relations causing them to deteriorate and, even, collapse; from this point of view the narrative emerges as a text on economic and political oppression intimately tied up with psychological, emotional repression. I am suggesting that Thorup's novel is a form of ingenious testimony to the "sameness" in the "difference" between socio-dynamics and psychodynamics. I would also suggest that moral deterioration and degradation has become endemic to contemporary corporate finance to the point where the entire world is turning into a

“business” devoid of ethical substance; in turn, this moral degradation is invading postcolonial Africa and in so doing creating a new form of oppression: an oppression emanating from “within” the corporate world itself, and from *within the mind of the individual*, in *casu Ana*, who is suffering from emotional and moral deprivation. Oppression in the 21st century, then, is a double-edged sword directed at Africa and Europe or “the West” at one and the same time. I see clear signs of this in the text, most notably in Ana’s reflections on herself and on her motives for “adopting”, i.e. sponsoring Mariama and taking her to London.

Ana asks herself the following question:

Det var så mærkelig uvant for hende at være bundet til noget uden for Rower, at være indfanget af en hidtil ukendt følelse for et andet menneske. Hvad var det for en mystisk nærhed, hun følte til dette pigebarn fra et kontinent hun kendte ganske lidt til?

(It was strangely unfamiliar to her to be bound to something outside Rower, to be caught up in a hitherto unknown feeling for another person. What was the nature of this mysterious closeness she felt to this young girl from a continent she knew so little about?)

(Thorup 267; translations from the Danish original are mine)

The answer to Ana’s question cannot be arrived at intellectually, just as the multiple sessions she is undergoing with Rower’s professional therapist are ineffectual owing to the perversely rational and rationalizing nature of the therapeutic “treatment”. The answer is to be found somewhere else; in fact, it is present already as the narrative opens. Lying on the beach Ana hears Mariama’s voice for the first time, asking (in English): “Want something?”—The voice enters Ana’s ear, penetrating her mind as it indeed offers her “something she wants”, making her melt like a snowman in the spring sun—an implied allusion to Hans Christian Andersen’s “The Snow Queen”—and prompting her to react strongly as she gives in to the voice: “En overjordisk skønhed, en sølvklokkes fine klang opfyldte hende/An other-wordly beauty, the delicate chiming of a silver bell filled her” (15); another allusion to Andersen, this time to the story “The Bell”. These allusions are of course not only aesthetic in the sense of constituting intertextuality; they imply the loss of “the other world”, not as a romantic loss of the ideal placed outside or above the individual but as a loss of mind itself understood as individual *and* universal. The composite, mutually inclusive essence of *individual* and *universal* in *mind* works in Thorup’s text as a revelation, the purpose of which is to disclose the deviations, social and cultural, of global finance, the deviation of “Rower” as “power”: power in the raw, power as ruthless, power

“roving” throughout the world, i.e. wandering aimlessly in a futile, materialistic pursuit.

In meta-psychological, philosophical terms, Rower International is also a projection from within, a projection of an outside which is finally separated from the inside with the advent of language. Ana is a consummate believer in language, reason and the material, physical world. It is logical that she gravitates towards Rower International; the corporation confirms the final impervious border between the inside (pre-verbal) and the outside (verbal). Yet that border may be pervious, i.e. penetrable. In *The Powers of Horror* Julia Kristeva writes:

“... there would be witnesses to the perviousness of the limit, artisans after a fashion who would try to tap that pre-verbal “beginning” within a word that is flush with pleasure and pain. They are *primitive man* through his ambivalences and the *poet* through the personification of his opposing states of feeling—but also perhaps through the rhetorical recasting of language that he effects ...” (Kristeva 61)

To Ana, the non-material world does not exist prior to the meeting with her namesake on the beach. Ana is herself an artificial product, *kunstprodukt* (Thorup 106), a so-called donor child, a fact she discovers by accident at a student graduation party. She is the *anonymous* creation of semen and egg, and anonymity in the sense of the erasure of identity and personality governs Rower. To Ana and Rower chaos is hell. Ironically, chaos, the “heart of darkness”, invades Ana’s life on the beach in Gambia as she is out late one night and witnesses a scene of otherworldly beauty, “overjordisk skønhed” (37).

Women decorated with jewels and artful headdresses are dancing around a fire; the narrator describes the scene as sinister and passionate; the security guard who had been accompanying her is gone. An old woman assures her that she is in good hands and entices her into the inner circle close to the fire. Ana is prepared to give in to the ritual, recognizing that it is taking place in another world. The ritual intensifies; children seated close to the fire start screaming and yelling as they endure the pain of burnt feet, and to Ana it is as if “de høje skrig og klagelyde kom fra hendes eget indre og sprængte sig ud gennem hjerneskallen/the loud shrieks and moaning sounds came from her own inner consciousness, exploding through her skull.” (39).—The verbal and the pre-verbal are no longer separated by an impervious wall; the wall has become pervious, practically transparent, as the poles of rational language and ritualistic images collapse and co-mingle. Later, the security guard claims that the ritual must be a figment of Ana’s imagination; however, whether imagined or not, the scene remains

real. Moreover, the ritual is powerful enough to move Ana and the “poet”, i.e. the narrator, beyond the mere personification of opposing states of feeling, represented by Hans Christian Andersen’s “bell” and Joseph Conrad’s “heart of darkness”. A “rhetorical recasting of language” is effectuated whereby (Mari)ana comes ever closer to Mariama—“ana” turns into “ama”, *l’âme*, spirit, mind.

The rhetorical recasting of language makes the text into a palimpsest. Situating this textual move in history one could call it a postcolonial palimpsest. Africa, here Gambia, is and is not the “Other” of Europe, or the West as represented by Rower International. The text viewed as palimpsest would then wipe out, erase the border between the pre-verbal and the verbal, as I have suggested above; layers superimposed upon layers would produce a composite image that is opaque and transparent at the same time. The blend of opacity and transparency makes for a singularly complex text; the interesting question here is whether the text itself valorizes transparency or opacity, and whether the characters themselves, especially Ana, possess transparency or not. The more transparency the more insight, and the text itself may certainly be said to opt for transparency, and Ana indeed approximates a state of transparency, insight into herself, the corporation and Africa. But she does not get close enough. Her reflections on the meeting with Mariama tend in the direction of rationalizations and are done on the premises of Rower; she reflects on Mariama while sitting in her deckchair on the beach outside the luxurious hotel, calling the girl her “soul”, the “missing link”, i.e. “den manglende brik hun havde ledt efter i sin individuelle udvikling hen imod at blive “et helt menneske”, som var et af firmacoachens mantraer”/”the missing piece she had been looking for in her individual development towards becoming “a whole person”, one of the mantras of the company coach.” (Thorup 50).

In other words: Ana is still thinking about her place in the company, thinking in rather trivial, contrived psychological terms and not wanting to pursue the problematic of self and mind far enough to get to the bottom of things. Ana is holding back. She maneuvers energetically and intelligently to obtain the sponsorship of Mariama, to get her out of Gambia and away from aunt Rosie and Big Man and finally succeeds in getting the girl set up in London where she will attend college; but she lets her friends Ben and Bea, an English couple she had met in Gambia, take care of the girl instead of inviting her to stay in her own London flat, despite Mariama’s wish to live with her “sponsor”. Sponsoring the African girl becomes a project of conversion, Ana’s personal project of getting the girl “integrated” into Western society. This turns out to be extremely problematic for Mariama as she has assumed the dual burden of pursuing higher education and working part-time to send money to her younger siblings in Gambia. Mariama finally moves in with Ana, but at this point the girl is

taking Diazepam to alleviate stress symptoms; she is experiencing the same work-related stress as Ana who has been taking potent sleeping pills for a number of years and is suffering from chronic insomnia.

In this increasingly difficult situation photographs come to play a significant role. Mariama had not wanted Ana to take snapshots of her on the beach in Gambia, claiming that photos steal the soul and that snapshots may be manipulated and exploited by evil powers. In London, Ana—who contrary to her expectations was not offered a job by the London branch of Rower—becomes increasingly paranoid and is obsessed with the thought that two photos of her, left out in the open at Mariama's mother's place in Gambia, may be used against her by evil spirits. Ana's irrational state of mind causes her to develop a serious case of phobia and xenophobia; she starts noticing the practically ubiquitous presence of black people in the streets. Rather than breaking through to the state of higher insight and transparency offered by the text; and rather than incorporating or even understanding the ethical perspective proffered by the narrator (or implied author) in objective terms, *qua* the mimetic function of the text, Ana sinks into an opaque, subjective abyss where "Africa" really becomes "the Other" in a sinister sense. The discrepancy between narrator function and character function emerges here as a disjunction between the knowledge and perception of the character and the knowledge and perception of the narrator. This disjunction is especially apparent in the case of Ana. Mariama, the younger woman, approximates the knowledge of the narrator to a much higher degree. It is perhaps interesting that Thorup did not choose the "I" form for the novel, making it into a first-person narrative; in that case we would have had *character narration*, a discourse described by James Phelan in *Living to Tell About It*: "In reading character narration, we regard the character functions as more prominent than the narrator functions." (Phelan 28).

What is intriguing, though, and hard to explain, is that in Thorup's text character functions assume primary importance, both in the case of Ana and Mariama (I will comment on Mariama in more detail a bit later); one reason for the valorization of character over narrator is, obviously, that it is virtually impossible to construct an objective ethical discourse. The moral and psychological problems imbedded in the text do not derive from the narrator. They derive from the characters and their subjective experience on the basis of which they are trying to construct an ethic and a way to live. Yet the narrator's voice speaks consistently in the third person and, mostly, the past tense. At this point the prefaced citation from Baudelaire echoes in our ears: pure art as an "evocative magic" containing "the object" and "the subject", world and artist alike. The borderline between subject and object, art and world has ceased to exist.

Umberto Eco suggests a reason for this in *The Open Work*:

The artist realizes that language, having already done so much speaking, has become alienated to the situation it was meant to express. He realizes that, if he accepts this language, he will also alienate himself to the situation. So he tries to dislocate this language from within, in order to be able to escape from the situation and judge it from without. Since language can be dislocated only according to a dialectic that is already part of its inner evolution, the language that will result from such a dislocation will still, somehow, reflect the historical situation that was itself produced by the crisis of the one that had preceded it. (Eco 154)

Not violating language would amount to expressing a false integrity. This integrity is propagated, dishonestly and unethically, by Rower International's "coach" as a "mantra" making up, in the case of Ana and Mariama, a Platonic whole. Thorup violates language by preserving the narrator function only to undermine it by letting the persistent voices, the "character function", of Ana and Mariama resound powerfully from the written words. And Ana cannot be captured, not even photographed, as she finds out already as a young girl at a portrait session; the frustrated photographer fails repeatedly in the attempt to take pictures of Ana's face. There is quite simply no imprint on the photographic plate in the camera. Irritated, the photographer claims that Ana cannot be photographed because she has no soul.

Later, in London, Mariama and Ana go through a conflict, a confrontation. At this point Ana has lost control of herself and is roaming the streets searching for Mariama who has disappeared. Ana thinks back to a frightening experience she had as a child when her parents took her to the circus and she became scared out of her senses by the *white* clown; now Ana realizes that it is the color white she is afraid of, not black. And Mariama has a dream consisting of a dialogue between herself and her friend Janet; in the dream a similar reversal of colors occurs:

... ud af stilheden kom Janet hende i møde indhyllet i sort klæde. "Du er lys, jeg er mørke," sagde hun. "Jeg har ledt efter dig så vi sammen kan mane ånden i jorden," svarede Mariama. "Gå ikke ud. Når solen står højest på himlen, forsvinder din skygge og med den din sjæl," sagde Janet blidt som en søster. "Jeg var nødt til at forlade ånden i englændernes hus," beklagede Mariama. "Jeg hoppede ud af rammen. Jeg ville ikke være et billede på væggen," sagde Janet. "Du må hente ånden, så de hvide kan få fred," insisterede Mariama. "Jeg kan ikke give dem fred." Janet skiftede farve, først til rødt, så til gult og til hvidt, og endelig var hun igen den sorte farve der indeholdt alle regnbuens farver. (Thorup

310)

(... out of the quiet Janet was walking towards her, wrapped in a dark cloth. "You are the light, I am the dark," she said. "I have been looking for you so that we can lay the spirit in the ground together," Mariama said. "Don't go out. When the sun is at its highest in the sky your shadow and with it your soul will disappear," Janet said, gently as a sister. "I had to leave the spirit in the house of the Englishmen", Mariama complained. "I jumped out of the frame. I did not want to be a picture on the wall", Janet said. "You have to go get the spirit so the white people may have peace of mind," Mariama insisted. "I cannot give them peace." Janet changed colors, first to red, then to yellow and white, and finally she turned black again, the color containing all the colors of the rainbow.)

Janet represents total transparency on more levels than one; having stepped out of the "picture frame" she has turned into pure spirit, translucent mind, composed of all the colors of the rainbow and combining all races—native American, Asian, white European, African—in a heterogeneous unity, *the immanent, endemic unity of all colors in one: black*. The transparent rainbow is a result of Janet stepping out of the frame and appearing to Mariama in dreams only; a parallel rhetorical move may be indicated here: the narrative "jumps out of" its own framework, endowing the characters with knowledge, thus shifting that knowledge from narrator to character. The illumination of the mind of the character is complete in the case of Janet, and, possibly, in the case of Mariama. It is only potential in the case of Ana.

We need to find out why this is so. The passage, i.e. dream sequence quoted is preceded by significant changes in the lives of Ana and Mariama. Trying to find Mariama who has disappeared owing to visa problems and problems at college, Ana "descends" into the most racially mixed district of London, looking almost like a homeless woman. She has no idea which country she is in, neither in the UK nor anywhere else on the world map. She gives up trying to guess where people around her are coming from because the mixture of races is perplexing to her, and she reflects as follows: "Hun befandt sig et sted ude i fremtiden, hvor alle nationaliteter var smeltet sammen til én mangfoldig menneskehed/she existed some place in the future where all nationalities had melted into one manifold humanity" (292). But Ana does not experience this "manifold humanity" as something positive; rather, it is threatening and tends to increase her xenophobia. At one point she spots a white woman in the crowd at a local market; she recognizes her vaguely, but it seems to her that the woman's face is a mask hiding her identity in an attempt to become someone else, perhaps someone whose mind is possessed by evil spirits; also, Ana is asking

herself whether all the black people around her might not actually be white people who had painted their faces black. Even worse, she herself may have turned into a black person already.

The scenes described above clearly show Ana's inability to embrace "manifold humanity" by throwing off her own mask. She does not achieve the transparency and insight potentially present all around her. She denies the possibility of a utopian future where all races are one. By contrast, Mariama has developed into a mature young woman who is able to handle a part-time job, college—even though her education is temporarily suspended—a boyfriend, and the increasingly difficult situation at home in Gambia, described in a phone call by her mother as violent and chaotic as the president has instigated a virtual witch hunt. All this hardship has not prevented Mariama from experiencing life at present as "*en mærkelig turbulent og vægtløs tid, en regnbue- og rosentid/a strangely turbulent and weightless time, a time of rainbows and roses*" (297).

Mariama is spotted, finally, by Ana in a soup kitchen run by monks, and after having been followed by Ana for some time, Mariama in turn recognizes her "sponsor", encountering a new Ana, a woman looking like a "plucked bird", a "naked human being", a person, in short, like herself. Mariama is relieved to see Ana like this. But the meeting develops into a confrontation, Ana accusing Mariama in harsh terms of neglecting her studies and wasting her time with a boyfriend. Mariama responds that she is no longer the young girl, the child Ana found on the beach in Gambia. She has grown into a responsible woman able to handle herself. Ana persists in accusing Mariama, finally striking her so that she falls and hits her head on the pavement. The sound of ambulance sirens closes the scene.

The dream sequence consisting of the dialogue between Janet and Mariama contains significant clues to the motif of transparency versus opacity. The opening line of the dialogue indicates the light-dark complementarity embodied by Mariama and Janet respectively, or rather, embodied by the two of them together. The next line is an allusion, once again, to a story by Hans Christian Andersen, this time "The Shadow" in which the learned young man, a poet, steps out of the house at noon and loses his shadow, i.e. his "soul". The blinding light of the sun obliterates the color black, turning man into a specimen of "one-dimensional man", man become mask, a clown wearing a white mask, empty, hollow inside. This emptiness is felt acutely by Ana but she does not know how to work her way out of it; there is no "therapy" for this kind of pain. She reacts to it with a mixture of phobia, anger and aggression. By contrast, Mariama succeeds in growing. Initially, she is afraid of the "spirit" in the English couple's, Ben's and Bea's, house—the spirit of Janet who had been adopted by the couple. Her fear of the spirit who "jumped out of the frame" prompts her to study in a

cafeteria nearby; Mariama handles the situation but she still insists, as she says in the dialogue, that Janet fetches, gets hold of the spirit so that white people may have “peace of mind”. But Janet cannot give them peace of mind.

Why not? Because the “spirit” or mind present only in Ben’s and Bea’s house to begin with has now become ubiquitous. It literally *haunts* white people and cannot be controlled or stopped by Janet. The spirit originally contained by Janet as *individualized* has become *universal*, a manifest unfolding of the future in the present. The spirit is the rainbow, all colors in one, indistinguishable from one another. Ana’s and other white people’s bi-polar thinking would isolate and separate black and white from one another, thus creating a state of opacity instead of transparency. The opaque mask hides an empty mind, and an empty mind is prone to be haunted by a “spirit”. Janet cannot give white people “peace” for they do not know how to find it in themselves. Instead, she vanishes into “den rene, klare luft, der ophævede tiden/the pure, clear air that suspended time” (310).

A deft rhetorical maneuver accomplishes a transition from chronological narration to non-chronological narration; time is suspended in the narrative as Janet merges with the “pure, clear air that suspended time”. The suspension of time occurs in the consciousness of the characters—Janet and, with her, Mariama—and in the mind of the narrator *simultaneously* so that we have a convincing, ingeniously executed example of what Baudelaire calls “pure art”; transcendence manifests itself as a moment in time outside of time where all races blend into the colors of the rainbow, thus also mixing narrator and character. The narrator is, in a sense, eliminated here, and James Phelan’s “disjunction” between narrator function and character function is transcended so that the mind that is so powerfully present in the dream sequence, Janet’s mind (i.e. Mariama’s mind actually), becomes mind itself, a differentiated, heterogeneous yet universal and unified mind. *Mind* is the rainbow, mind is clear light coming from within and from without at the same time, thus forming a stark contrast to the blinding sunlight in Andersen’s “The Shadow” that tears light from shadow, self from other, in a cruel polarizing act creating the modern split subject and producing hegemony and dictatorship in society.

The dream sequence affirms Baudelaire’s statement about pure art in the modern sense and about the artist merging with his artwork—and both of them merging with the world. In Thorup’s novel the entire passage leading up to, or rather containing the dream sequence as a poetic culmination, is a mixture of “subject” and “object” as anticipated by Baudelaire; text blends with milieu—or, milieu becomes text and vice versa. Chronology is suspended; past, present and future become mixed in a temporal rainbow, so to speak, as Ana wanders aimlessly through the unfamiliar, *uncanny* district of London where “everywhere” has turned into a “nowhere”. The mixing of

time dimensions in the text is a clue to the dream sequence where, as I have argued, Janet (and Mariama) assume a role superior to that of the narrator. This unusual move in the discourse signifies a crossing of the borderline between artist and artwork, text and world, author, narrator and character. This particular feature in Thorup's fascinating novel is unique in that it attains transformation and transcendence by evoking a pure light pointing to the utopian yet *real* universe of the artwork; that real universe may be hidden in the so-called "real" world, which means, of course, that the artwork *is the real world in the true sense of the word*.

The passages culminating in the dream sequence are a kaleidoscope conducive to the recognition that there is no identity, racial, ethnic, or individual. The self is an illusion. As long as "white people" wear the mask of identity, the clown's mask, they do not enter the rainbow, the clear air of timeless mind. In his *The Philosophy of Literary Form* Kenneth Burke offers "Twelve Propositions". Proposition 4 reads:

The purely psychological concept for treating relations to symbols of authority, possession and dispossession, material and spiritual alienation, faith or loss of faith in the "reasonableness" of a given structure's methods and purposes and values, is that of "identity". (Burke 306)

Ana holds on to the traditional notion of identity, personal and racial, and to the Platonic concept of the whole person as integration with self. Her perspective on Africa in general and on Mariama—Mariama as African and as *l'âme*—is skewed by her Cartesian *ratio*. Ana deviates from mind by clinging to self.—Burke's proposition 5 reads:

In this complex world, one is never a member of merely one "corporation." The individual is composed of many "corporate identities." Sometimes they are concentric, sometimes in conflict. (307)

Written in the year 1941 Burke's proposition on identity is strikingly innovative. Thorup's text goes further, however, and succeeds in achieving transparency and heterogeneity, the rainbow and the pure air that "suspends time". These are the levels and dimensions of the mind that we find in Mariama and Janet, who is, in a sense, Mariama's own voice, addressing her from within. The suspension of time and identity is, indeed, the future Ana observes on the streets of London. And yet time re-enters the narrative, violently and abruptly, in the form of *chance*.

Chance, indeed the "god of chance" enters the universe of Thorup's novel as *violence*, and this violence is perpetrated by Ana. Applying Emmanuel Levinas'

thought on violence and the other may prove helpful here. In his essay on Levinas, "Violence and Metaphysics", Jacques Derrida says that "the nudity of the face of the other —this epiphany of a certain non-light before which all violence is to be quieted and disarmed—will still have to be exposed to a certain enlightenment"(Derrida 105). This enlightenment consists of, among other things, the insight that *thought*, as anterior to language, is "a relation to an irreducible other who summons me without possibility of return from without, for in this order is presented the infinity which no thought can enclose and which forbids all monologue ..." (129).

In a revealing conversation with Mariama, Ana tells the girl that there has not been time for love in her life, omitting any reference to an affair with a colleague at Rower in Copenhagen, Hans. Ana adds: "Til gengæld har jeg held i spil/However, I am lucky when I gamble" (Thorup 239). Mariama ironically asks whether Ana believes in "statistics", and Ana replies: "Hvis jeg endelig skal tro på noget, så tror jeg tilfældet styrer os/If I have to believe in anything, then I believe chance rules us." (loc. cit.) Opposed to that, of course, we have Mariama's belief in the "spirit", which I see as Levinas' irreducible other. The two perspectives collide although chance initially seems to be on Ana's side. While waiting in line in the soup kitchen run by monks, she sees Mariama in front of her, and the narrator comments, "... hvis Ana virkelig bekendte sig til tilfældets gud, nærmede øjeblikket sig, hvor hun skulle falde på knæ/ ... if Ana really had faith in the god of chance, the moment was approaching where she would drop to her knees" (300). As we know, finding Mariama only leads to a violent confrontation where chance is twisted and loses its sense of unique opportunity. Ana hits Mariama and that is the end of the recognition of the "irreducible other", the sudden insight that would "disarm" violence. Thus chance does not rule Ana; Ana tries to rule chance, thus repressing the potentially benevolent force of the "god".

Faced with unemployment and with a dwindling savings account, Ana resorts to gambling after the violent confrontation. She still wants to sponsor Mariama (if Mariama, indeed, has survived the incident) and plays for high stakes at a local casino. At the roulette table she places significant amounts on the number 3, her lucky number, because she believes in the magic of numbers (*talmagien*), and she is not an atheist, "snarere en hedning, der levede magisk i verden/rather a heathen living magically in the world" (313). She ends up losing five thousand pounds, gambling on the color red, when the ball hits the color *black* after striking red seven times.

The irony is obvious. Ana loses because of her own violent interference with chance, or rather, her twisting around of chance, inverting it so that it becomes violence. The irreducible other, *black* as the fusion of all the colors of the rainbow, strikes back at her relentlessly, asserting itself as the ultimate "god of chance".

A dystopian ending? Perhaps. But it contains a utopian promise.

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