you are sure of the ground upon which you are standing, had best be shunned.
devastated by U.S. bombs and Americans and Vietnamese intruders tried to install a primitive version of war communism by mobilizing a politically illiterate peasantry. Within three years of the Khmer Rouge takeover, as many as two million people died either by execution, torture or starvation. Both of these tragedies involved the release of tribal violence. Each country in turn became place without any vision of either future destiny or the horrors of history.

By analogy, Fawcett shows that in the global Village memory is also obliterated. Knowledge about both the Congo and Cambodia has somehow disappeared from public consciousness. It may surface parenthetically as one reads Conrad’s “Heart of Darkness,” or when watching a movie like The Killing Fields, but only to reenter the more quickly as we go about our daily life. That Cambodians, the Congo, Armenia, Auschwitz, and numerous other modern-day genocides can be effectively erased from the minds of a large portion of the world and comparatively educated population of the First World seems preposterous, especially since the people who live in this relative comfort insist on claiming that the history of their society and culture has never before occurred.

Yet the kind of information that is fed to us by the electronic media, says Fawcett, bears a striking resemblance to the historical amnesia enforced by the Khmer Rouge. After having taken the capital Phnom Penh, the Khmer Rouge evacuated a large part of its urban population into the countryside and to certain death. It then proceeded to wipe out the remaining Linga signs in the city: “traffic signs, advertising, street signs, identity markers of all kinds.” These transmitters of information were mediums without messages which pointed to the destruction of urban civilization. The analogue of the medium without the message, argues Fawcett, is found in the production of information by electronic media, for here we have signs that contribute to a different kind of mind-numbing darkness. Under the barrage of instant electronic stimuli, the depthlessness of the Great Vail retreats towards constantly expanding areas of fruitlessness as their direct ability to understand the world around them is replaced by an ease experience.

Fawcett’s argument is not designed to show how the white noise of the Global Village is drown out the last solitary texts of public discourse. Each chapter is a vignette, the focus of which is a different aspect of the process of rationalization which, as the chapter on “Malcolm Lowry and the Trojan Horse” makes clear, becomes the other major metaphor of the book. The Trojan Horse was the product of duplicative thinking that presaged on the one hand the technological domination of nature, and on the other, political control through the manipulation of abstractions and the sophistry of images. With the Trojan Horse, one may say, we have the beginning of Western rationality, and with the Global Village we have its triumph: an artificial world of images that constrains the will and confounds the sense of reality.

Some of these chapters are wildly funny. “The isimpression of God,” for instance, tells of Marshall McLuhan meeting St. Paul on the road to Damascus and convincing him to use the new medium of Christianity as a form of franchise capitalism. In another chapter, “Language in a Multilingual Mexico for Institute Professionals,” Fawcett, who is also an urban planner, envisions a Rambo-like scheme for the management of out-of-work professionals. In the end the mission turns out to be a comfortable Panopticon in which professionals nullify live out their unemployment [and presumably their lives] with the company of satellite dishes and their personal computers. Throughout these “investigative fictions” one is constantly disorienting the connections between text and subtext. The contrast between the two can often be stark. Nowhere is this more evident than with “Universeal Chickens,” wherein a comparison emerges between a fast food franchise—the “homogenized, blandfaced, humiliated of materiality”—and the carefully preserved bureaucratic hierarchy of the Khmer Rouge. Finally, “Fat Family Goes to the World’s Fairs” offers another disturbing contrast between individuals like Howard, who are mindful of Cambodia and still remember a world before it was reduced to the facetious insignificance of the spectacle, and those, like the members of the Fat Family, who are effortlessly integrated into the distractions of the Global Village. Howard commits suicide.

In our own civilized world, says Fawcett, civilization and memory have been masked for execution, and subjectivity, uniqueness and identity have little hope of survival. What this also tells us is that the proponents of the Global Village failed to recognize the link between mass destruction and marginalization: “that every outbreak of genocide in this century has coincided with the propandizing of tribal consciousness.” Nazi Germany was one, Pol Pot another. Yet there is something flambouyant wrong with this kind of argument. What went on in Nazi Germany or Pol Pot’s Cambodia cannot be easily explained by the large metaphor, “tribalization of consciousness.” The idea of seeing civilization as a thin veneer of protection against the statist roots of life owes a lot to Conrad as well as Freud, who makes the primal family the source of insperable violence, while civilization with its emphasis on control and self-understanding moves us away from the means of barbarism. This view of the world highlights the recurrent possibility of disintegration and hence is fundamentally apocalyptic. It also suits a facile dichotomy between civilization and barbarism. Such dramatic oppositions, while perhaps for fiction, makes for bad history and bad sociology.

Fawcett counts himself lucky that he is a Canadian colonial, “perhaps the only kind left.” He still remembers and can maintain an imaginative relation to the Imperium: “the libraries, museums and galleries of London, New York, Paris — the repositories of Western Civilization’s attempts to achieve self-understanding.” These two sound like the memories of a named past. Indeed, Fawcett treats on very fine line when his, somewhat self-indulgently, saves the notion of the marginal “colonial” in order to find kinship with the writers of what he calls “the interzone.” V.S. Naipaul and Joseph Conrad, to name two. Since all of these writers were or are marginal to the society about which they write, marginality becomes a kind of intellectual high-ground that permits writers to make sense of the disjunction they feel between experience and understanding.

But once again we should be careful of these kind of blanket statements. Marginality is a convenient concept precisely because it is remarkably vague. It can be all things to all people. For some, and Fawcett falls in this camp, marginality is a zone of skepticism and detached objectivity; for others, it is a sanctuary that shelters insertion and voyeurism; for others still, it is a source of frustration and vanguard that creates psychopaths like Hitler or Pol Pot. To be in the interzone, or to take on that posture, does not in any way give one a critical stance. Such a stance probably has more to do with the actions one takes rather than the place in which one stands vis-à-vis the power structures.

But Fawcett can certainly be granted this little indulgence, and even his large metaphor, for he has written an outstanding book. His idiosyncratic fiction is still undergoing development and one certainly hopes that he will continue on the singular path his fiction has taken him. Whatever shortcomings this book may have, in terms of vision and sheer imagination it easily surpasses the predictable conventions of Can Lit. Without a doubt, this book is a necessity for anyone who cares about the state of contemporary culture.

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