“George Anderson”: Notes for a Love Song in Imperial Time

In a time when many philosophers consider the world to have reached the “end of history,” or the realm of the postmodern, Peter Dimock’s novel, “George Anderson,” is written in an innovative form. The author uses blunt yet poetic language to deconstruct the dominion of American empire by calling out the architects, or intellectuals, who have been responsible for constructing a false language of (neo)liberalism and humanism upon which American imperialism is built. The novel is set as a letter written from Theo Fales, a book editor, to fellow Harvard classmate David Kallen. Listening to music at a friend’s funeral, Fales has an experience of self-realization; suddenly, he feels compelled to write to Kallen, who while working wrote and signed a memorandum to overturn a previous law that made torture by the US government illegal. Fales says, in the beginning of his letter, “I need to speak with you [Kallen] in person because I do not know how to live this history. My complicity summons angels singing - I know that you and I are the same person. Somehow our entitlement to rule continues” (10). Such is the catalyst for a short novel that acts as a guide for individuals to “resist empire, create reciprocity.” Fales devises a strategy through which an individual can take one history - the imperial empire of the United States of America - and commit to memory a new set of truths that combat the false narrative and recreate a master narrative based on true values of freedom and democracy.
The novel is broken into five weeks; each week is dedicated to a different part of the cycle of remaking history. When practiced in a disciplined manner, the weeks together make a process for an individual to live a new master narrative that denies the American bourgeoisie monopoly over the world and in turn creates spaces for a collective history that actualizes mutual consent and freedom for all citizens. The end product takes the form of a composed “love song” that ultimately allows the individual to transcend the hegemonic forces of American capitalism. This song is made of many components, including seven truth statements, each representing a different note in the song. The truth statements of Fales are provided by the likes of Aristotle, John Coltrane and Ralph Ellison. Amongst the statements include such mastery as:

The most important element of poetics is the structure of events, for tragedy is the mimesis not of persons but of life and action. Happiness and unhappiness consist of action and the goal is a certain kind of action and not a qualitative state. It is by virtue of character that persons have certain qualities, but it is through their actions that they are happy or the reverse. (36-7)

In addition to these truth statements, the individual must choose a new master narrative (Fales becomes “George Anderson,” a former slave) that is told through multiple governing scenes (different occurrences from Fales’ life), as well as several other components including constructive principles.

An exhaustive explanation or analysis of this process is pointless, not because of the time it would take, rather because only in reading the novel can one truly appreciate the radical, important and necessary project that Dimock has successfully brought to life in “George Anderson”. Ultimately, Dimock shows the reader the power of language in maintaining America’s empire, and the need to construct a new language that revises a
dangerously imperial lived history and establishes a new world order based on values of reciprocity and freedom. The truth with which Dimock writes pierces the soul of the reader; his comprehension of America is straightforward and genuine, so much so that his fictional song-writing process seems a possible remedy for the poison of imperialism. Highly imaginative in its form, and heartbreakingly beautiful in its language, “George Anderson” must be considered an essential piece of work in American Studies; it pushes the reader to imagine alternative American spaces.

Works Cited: