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Polysemous Tradition as a Common Basis for Ideological Resistance in *Windsor Forest* and *The Communist Manifesto*

Rory Mullen

This paper delves into the nuanced use of tradition as a foundation for ideological resistance in Alexander Pope's "Windsor Forest" and Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels' "The Communist Manifesto." Despite their divergent contexts—Pope's text emerging from early 18th-century England and the Manifesto from mid-19th-century industrializing Europe—both works leverage historical and literary traditions to critique and resist dominant ideologies of their times. "Windsor Forest" subtly confronts ideologies of Protestant ascendancy and anti-Catholic sentiment prevalent in England following the Glorious Revolution of 1688, promoting peace and the unity of Great Britain under Queen Anne's Stuart monarchy as alternatives to war and division. Through literary devices such as allegory and panegyric, Pope employs tradition not only to question the contemporary political and social landscape but to posit the Stuart dynasty as a symbol of national prosperity and harmony.

Contrastingly, "The Communist Manifesto" openly challenges the capitalist ideology that Marx and Engels argue perpetuates class struggle and exploitation of the proletariat. The Manifesto calls for a revolutionary overhaul of the social order, drawing on traditions of socialist thought and the historical precedent of class struggle to justify its radical aims. Despite its revolutionary stance, the Manifesto similarly relies on the manipulation of tradition—both embracing and rejecting it—to articulate a vision of communist society.

Both texts, therefore, are situated at the intersection of literary expression and ideological conflict, illustrating how tradition can serve as a versatile tool in the articulation of resistance. Whether through the invocation of historical continuity and national identity in "Windsor Forest" or the revolutionary call to arms in "The Communist Manifesto," tradition is employed to critique existing social and political orders. The abstract underscores the complexity of these texts' engagement with tradition, highlighting their shared emphasis on the transformative potential of ideological resistance. This comparison illuminates the rich dialogues between literature and politics, demonstrating how textual analysis can reveal deeper insights into the mechanisms of ideological critique and resistance.

Alexander Pope's *Windsor Forest* and Marx and Engels' *Communist Manifesto* are two texts whose grounds for comparison can from the outset appear uneven. *Windsor Forest* covertly resists the prevailing ideologies of Protestant ascendancy empowered by anti-Catholicism and parliamentarianism which reviled monarchy. The tumultuous events of the 17th century had damaged the institution of monarchy irrevocably. The Whigs- the political appendage of the ideologies which Pope resists- were inclined to continental war to weaken Catholic enemies.¹ What is more, the balance of power was shifting in their favour: the emergence of the military-fiscal state, the decline of traditional agrarian relations and the virulent hostility towards Catholicism stoked religious, social, political, cultural and class enmities in England. For Pope, peace alone fostered prosperity and no war, civil or continental, was conducive to this; Anne of Great Britain, the last of the Stuart dynasty, was the only one who could achieve this, uniting a bitterly divided nation. Both texts are perhaps most profoundly connected by their use of tradition as a basis for ideological resistance, although the precise traditions with which they deal and the ideologies which they fervently resist differ.

Alexander Pope subtly resists contemporary ideologies in *Windsor Forest* by leveraging literary and national traditions. He paints the Stuart dynasty in a positive light, praises their achievements, and criticizes the political turmoil that disrupted their reign. His critique sometimes carries Jacobite and Tory implications, showing his opposition to the dominant political views of his time. Furthermore, it celebrates the peace brought about by the treaty of Utrecht as opposed to the spoils of the war.² Envisioning a prosperous future of Stuart governance, Pope portrays Anne as a 'via media' whose shrewd stewardship holds the promise of a glorious, fruitful future for newly unified Great Britain, reconciling civil and continental divides. Pope enlists and revives literary traditions of panegyric, iconography,

1 Brian Young, 'Pope and Ideology', in *The Cambridge Companion to Alexander Pope*, ed. Pat Rogers (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 125-126.

2 David Wheeler, "The Personal and Political Economy of Alexander Pope's "Windsor-Forest"". *South Atlantic Review*, 75(4) (2010): 1-20. Retrieved from <http://www.jstor.org.ezproxy.lib.gla.ac.uk/stable/41635650>

allegory and topographical poetry organised in heroic verse to resist this prevailing ideology.

Contrastingly, *The Communist Manifesto* makes no secret of its intention to inspire resistance to capitalistic ideologies which have kept the proletariat in check throughout history, and now aggravate class relations beyond measure such that only revolution will suffice. Its very appellation is a call to arms and declaration of its resistance, an alternative to a hegemonic ideology which, for Marx and Engels, must be upended. It engages with literary as well as traditions of socialist thought in order to reform a social order that sees workers as means of production only.

Perhaps the most salient illustration of this binding force of ideological resistance in the texts is offered by defining how texts interact with ideology:

*“Literary texts do not simply or passively ‘express’ or reflect the ideology of their particular time and place. Rather, they are sites of conflict and difference, places where values and preconceptions, beliefs and prejudices, knowledge and social structures are represented and, in the process, opened to transformation.”*³

In defining ideology, Bennett and Royle capture the essence of ideologies in opposition. It is apparent how this applies to *the Manifesto*. It is a bold, emphatic denunciation of an ideology which it seeks to utterly transform, resisting it at all costs rather than just representing it. Similarly, *Windsor Forest* is a site of ideological conflict, but it is less inclined towards revolution; instead, Pope wishes to interrogate the zeitgeist and its characterisation of recent history and Monarchy, offering alternative renderings which challenge ideological primacy. In any case, both texts do more than simply express ideology; they resist, using tradition to support their ideological resistance.

Born in the year of England’s ‘Glorious’ Revolution which saw the deposition of James II and William of Orange’s accession, Alexander

³ Andrew Bennett and Nicholas Royle, *An Introduction to literature criticism and theory*. 4th edn. (Harlow, UK: Pearson/Longman, 2009), 177.

Pope inherited his father's faith and its concomitant social caveats. Some viewed the events of 1688 invasion and as a usurpation; many others viewed it as liberation from Catholic absolutism- no one disputes the ramifications.⁴ William III of England may have been dead when Pope wrote this, but his ideological mark remained indelible.

The events of 1688 saw anti-Catholicism, which was already a popular sentiment in a largely Protestant England, stoked further by its codification; Catholic rights were stripped away and government fomented violence towards them. The Act of Settlement passed, prohibiting Catholics from inheriting the throne. It was the Whig ideology, the mistrust of Catholics from whose Popery England must seek deliverance, which justified the domestic persecution of Catholics and deliberate attempts to weaken England's Catholic rivals on the continent and, for Pope, the interruption of a grand Stuart line. Pope interrogates an ideology of Protestant ascendancy in his allusion to William the Conqueror's usurpation of the English throne in 1066:

“Proud Nimrod first the bloody chace began,
A mighty hunter, and his prey was man:
Our haughty Norman boasts that barbarous name,
And makes his trembling slaves the royal game...
The fields are ravish'd from th' industrious swains,
From men their cities, and from Gods their fanes”⁵

The hunter of mankind's tyranny abounds in the forest; subjects are persecuted as Nimrod, William I, rules with an iron fist. Rogers suggests the allusion to William I's easily merits comparison with William III, hence 'barbarous name'; the name itself is charged. Both Williams, for Pope, are invaders- they are illegitimate claimants and stand in the way of peace. Pope is alerting us to analogousness of

4 Jonathan Israel, *The Anglo Dutch Moment: Essays on the Glorious Revolution and its Impact*. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 105.

5 Alexander Pope, Windsor Forest, in *The Poems of Alexander Pope*, ed. John Butt, (London: Methuen, 1968), lines 61-65.

1066 and 1688; both constitute usurpation and invasion. Nonetheless, he is careful not to invoke William directly, most viewed the events of 1688 positively; he must encode his resistance through allegory and allusion. Ideology and its political progeny- propaganda- helped played down 1688 as bloodless liberation. It was, of course, anything but that.⁶

“In ecological terms, William disrupts the harmony of the forest ecology”.⁷ The forest itself is a nuanced allegory for an England, abused by foreign usurpers and despotic governance. The forest could also be construed as a royal lineage which flourishes not whilst the throne is occupied by illegitimate monarchs. For Pope, only a legitimate Stuart monarch can restore the forest through shrewd governance and pursuit of peace:

“Rich Industry sits smiling on the plains,
And peace and plenty tell, a Stuart reigns.”⁸

This is more than a panegyric for Queen Anne; it is one for her dynasty. Tradition is being deployed as an illustrious precedent here-Stuart kingship. There is a return to the Jacobean ideal her father was denied. The iconography and allegory of ‘peace and plenty’ link Anne to the great Ruben’s painting, “The apotheosis of James I”, asserting her divine right. Under James, England and Scotland flourished architecturally, artistically and literarily- largely free from conflict. Further, dynastic precedent recalls James’ address to parliament in which ‘peace, plenty and love’ in uniting two kingdoms are the given as his ultimate aims.⁹ Anne is the inheritor of a tradition of Stuart peace through consanguinity, fulfilling an ambition of uniting the kingdoms

6 Jonathan Israel, *The Anglo-Dutch Moment*, 185.

7 Wes Hamrick, “Trees in Anne Finch’s Jacobite poems of retreat.” *Studies in English Literature, 1500-1900*, vol. 53, no. 3, (2013), Gale Literature Resource Center, 541.

8 Alexander Pope, *Windsor Forest*, lines 41-42.

9 Pat Rogers, *The Symbolic Design of Windsor-Forest: Iconography, Pageant, and Prophecy in Pope’s Early Work*. (Newark: University of Delaware Press, 2004), 107.

which James had at the beginning of his reign and presiding over the peace of Utrecht.

Pope is also drawing on his recent literary forebears such as John Dryden who enlists it in his own royal panegyrics for Stuarts, paralleling Claudian who venerated Roman emperors, heralding a Pax Romana as Anne heralds a Pax Britannia.¹⁰ Pope is using tradition to resist ideology which held the Stuarts and the very notion of monarchy in contempt. He is recasting them as capable and shrewd stewards, legitimising Stuart reign and appealing to continuity and tradition. In other words, tradition is his basis for resisting ideologies.

Correspondingly, Marx's use of tradition still forms the basis for his resistance; however, some traditions are consciously departed from. Tradition is polysemic: tradition in a critical and literary sense is something to which he- like Pope- owes a great debt, allowing him to synthesise and signal the communist ideological resistance:

*“The Manifesto synthesized generations of reflection on the root causes of social injustice and conflict”.*¹¹

Throughout history the means of production have reformed, but one constant tradition and end has prevailed: the class struggle. The manifesto presents: ““The history of all hitherto existing society is the history of class struggles.”¹²

It is this tradition of struggle which begat hegemonic capitalistic ideology upheld by bourgeoisie, we are implored to resist. Tradition in this sense still forms part of the basis for ideological resistance.

It is, however, critical and artistic tradition as a basis for resistance which chiefly binds the two texts. *The Manifesto* emerges from a

10 Ibid., 194-195.

11 Murray Bookchin ‘The Communist Manifesto: Insights and Problems’, *New Politics* 6 (1998).

12 Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, (1992). *The Manifesto of the Communist Party* (Oxford World's Classics), Ed. David McLellan. (New York: Oxford University Press, 1992), 1.

period of radical reformation and revolution. Its form is inherently ideological. Formalistically, it is a way of setting out opposition, resistance to ideological models of social relations and production. In titling this a manifesto, Marx makes it abundantly clear that this is programme of an oppositional party:

*“The immediate aim of the Communists is... formation of the proletariat into a class overthrow of bourgeois supremacy, conquest of political power...”*¹³

The Manifesto, the locomotive of history’s social revolutions is being used to signal resistance. The ruling ideas, Marx opines, are those of the ruling class.¹⁴ To alter those ruling ideas, we must revolt against the ruling class; only a full revolution can fully resist capitalistic forces:

*“the manifesto marks the point of impact where the idea of radical egalitarianism runs up against the entrenchment of an ancien regime”*¹⁵

The Manifesto’s genre alone represents a challenge to ideological primacy of the ancient regime’s successor- the capitalistic bourgeoisie epoch. It owes itself to the tradition of the manifesto encapsulated in the revolutionary pamphlets of the French and American revolutions.¹⁶ Revolution begins with the presentation of an alternative. This tradition provides the basis for ideological resistance. *The Manifesto* is this alternative: a potent political tradition to signal ideological resistance; it is, as Anne is, emboldened, legitimised by tradition, a basis for resisting prevailing ideology. It is the ultimate, traditional genre of ideological resistance.

Similarly, there is a critical heritage in other attempts to articulate the communist vision. However, Marx altogether rejects these. This tradition of socialist thought upholds many of the social conditions of

13 Ibid., 17.

14 Ibid., 24.

15 Janet Lyon, *Manifestoes: Provocations of the Modern*, (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1999), 1.

16 *The Declaration of Independence and The Declaration of the Rights of Man.*

capitalism. *The Manifesto* is:

*“the distillation of... confrontations with the thinkers most influential in the Germany of his times: Hegel, Feuerbach, Proudhon”*¹⁷

For Marx, these are reactionary and utopian socialists. Their failure to address class struggles and to resist capitalism is a basis for his own attempt. This tradition of socialist thought is one he must decry:

*“They hold fast by the original views of their masters, in opposition to the historical development of the proletariat. They, therefore, endeavour to deaden the class struggle and to reconcile the class antagonisms”*¹⁸

Pre-Marxist communist tradition does not recognise the need for revolution; they are reactionaries, railing, not revolting against an oppressive social condition. If the ruling ideas are those of the ruling class, *the Manifesto* must go much further, aiming to make the proletariat the ruling class.¹⁹ This tradition is, nonetheless, the basis for his ideological resistance, it fails, much like the ideology itself, to properly address the class struggle.²⁰

Tradition is used as a meaningful precedent, as in Pope, to parallel events, but it is also recognised as something from which Marx must break, socialist thinking of the epoch and the tradition of class struggle itself, if he is to achieve revolution. Marx may reject some tradition, but this does not compromise its basis for ideological resistance. Moreover, it is not entirely divorced from *Windsor Forest*.

Both texts resist ideologies gaining ascendancy, becoming more severe. As we have seen, anti-Catholicism and contempt for the Stuart monarchy intensifies in Pope’s England. Similarly, Marx resists a

17 Aijaz Ahmad, “The Communist Manifesto in Its Own Time, And in Ours.” *Nineteenth-Century Literature Criticism*, edited by Lynn M. Zott, vol. 114, (Gale, 2003). Literature Resource Center.

18 Marx and Engels, *The Communist Manifesto*, 36.

19 Ibid., 24.

20 Ibid., 36.

predomination of capitalistic ideology. That is, class cleavage, which has always been an oppressive force, reaching a point in capitalistic ideology where it can no longer be controlled, dominating its subjects.²¹ These texts demonstrate that enlisting, as well as consciously departing from tradition, both constitute its basis for ideological resistance.

Form and prosody similarly reveal a route to ideological resistance in *Windsor Forest*, striving for perfection in its metrical composition and in its rhyme:

*“Blank verse had become associated with high Miltonic aspirations. [...] But couplets were quite another thing. They were well-bred, gentlemanly, elegant.”*²²

Pope is consciously departing from Miltonic tradition; Milton had aligned himself with republicans during the interregnum. This parliamentarian, republican, puritan ideology, which still held sway, for Pope, promotes disharmony and is associated with blank verse. Eschewing such a verse form strengthens Pope’s efforts to present a peace achieved by a royal Stuart, reflecting the apotheosis of peace-Pax Britannia- which Anne’s stewardship has enabled:

“At length great Anna said “Let Discord cease!
She said, the World obey’d, and all was Peace!”²³

Pope aligns the Stuarts with concord rather than discord, contrary to the ideology which prevailed in England- ideological resistance is encoded in the abjuration of Miltonic tradition. Formalistic harmony, the perfect heroic couplets, in turn, are the harmony of the nation under Anne. Traditions, as in Marx, are both upheld and upended; in each instance, they are the very basis for ideological resistance.

21 Marshall Berman, ‘Tearing Away the Veils: The Communist Manifesto,’ *Dissent: A Quarterly of Politics and Culture* (2011).

22 Pat Rogers, “The Politics of Style”, published in *Essays on Pope*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), 96.

23 Alexander Pope, *Windsor Forest*, lines 325-326.

Ultimately, it is the engagement with and departure from complex political, cultural and artistic tradition that forms the basis of ideological resistance in these texts, recognising how what tradition constitutes is as salient as what it excludes. Pope resists anti-Catholic and anti-monarchy ideologies, appealing to manifold traditions to rehabilitate the House of Stuart's prestige and virtue. He implores us to see the Stuarts as the architects of providence, prosperity and peace. Similarly, Marx resists the bourgeoisie capitalistic ideology, an altogether more exploitative successor of the traditional class antagonisms, engaging with revolutionary tradition, but condemning Utopian socialism that is incapable of full resistance. Whether they are resolved to engage with it or depart from it, both texts compellingly utilise tradition as a basis for ideological resistance.

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