

The Poetic Dream of Terrorism

by Kyle Petesch

Poetry is an alternative form of terrorism unadulterated by violence. First to understand this, one must understand the premises on which this argument follows. First to be understood is the concept of terrorism. Next, it is necessary to understand the term, regime, and how it applies to the entire understanding of the concept of terrorism. Only after the complete understanding of these two components, and any loose ends they leave in their wake, can an individual understand how poetry harnesses the dream of change that terrorism stems from without the violence.

The concept of regime is highly important to the understanding of terrorism necessary for this discourse. A regime can be understood by Krasner as a set of, "implicit or explicit principles, norms, rules, and decision-making procedures around which actors' expectations converge in a given area of international relations"(as qtd in Ainley and Brown 141]. This sets down very finite limitations to the concept of a regime. But, what if one expands this definition in some areas and confines it in others; molding it to fit the situation as long as the spirit or essence of the concept of regime is maintained. Let us define a regime as a collective group of people's way of thought converged on a given topic. This is then broken down into three different arenas of thought: mental, literary, and national.

The next concept to understand is terrorism. Terrorism can be defined as the subjective action against an objective regime. This is of course absent of one major key principle, which is fear. This understanding does not include fear. Fear is still present though in this concepts application. Fear stems from the lack of control a target has over the change inflicted upon it. This fear is created from the inability of the target to prevent the act or any of its products. Change is still the main motivator in this concept of terrorism but fear is always present and is thus a byproduct of the action.

An example of a mental regime is the writings of Lao Tsu, famed author of the Tao Te Ching. For Western thought, if a teacher asks their students, "What is a book"? The students will reply with examples of different books, all drawing back to a basic form within the student's mind. This is the Western, Platonic, way of thought at work; there is always a point of reference for the individuals. This is a direct contradiction to the thoughts invoked through Lao Tsu within his first poem. This poem states, "The name that is named is not the eternal name". Here it can be seen that for Eastern thought, there does not have to be a point of reference. The Tao is a terrorist activity because it acts against the regime of Western thought. The only question left is does intent matter? It can easily be assumed that Lao Tsu did not intent to strike fear with his words. It is not the intention that from which derives fear, fear exists regardless. It is the action that creates the fear, whether intended or not. Fear is created due to the logic gap between cultures. Lao Tsu is a terrorist through his poetic Eastern philosophy.

The next regime represented is the literary regime, which is thus shown in example by Lord Byron, a Romantic poet. Through the classic Romantic lines of "She Walks in Beauty", it can be seen that Lord Byron does commit an act of terrorism. This is a terrorist action because it acts against the previous literary regime, or movement. Byron's Romanticism is reactionary to the earlier regime of Neoclassicism. Neoclassicism idealized logic and reason. On the other hand, Romanticism idealized emotion and

imagination; the direct contrast to the previous literary movement. With such a contrast, this work of poetry can be clearly seen as a work of terrorism against the Neoclassicism movement.

The final regime, national, can be shown through the works of Country Joe McDonald and the Fish, a music group around the time of Woodstock. Through the song, "I Feel Like I'm Fixin' To Die Rag", it can easily be seen as a terroristic action against the regime of War. McDonald's words create the terrorist aspect when it conflicts and contradicts the 19th century understanding of war effort contributed by Karl von Clausewitz. For Clausewitz, war was made up of three aspects: "animosity directed against the enemy, which is provided by 'the people'; the management of contingency; which is the role of the army; and the aims and objectives of the war, which are determined by the political leadership"(115). The emergence of a theme such as anti-war effort clearly contradicts the regime under which Clausewitz's theory was founded. Thus this contradiction creates unwanted and uncontrollable change in the Clausewitz War regime and thus fear is born. It is clear that this song from Country Joe is a terroristic action.

When a concept as subjective as terrorism is created, there will always be room for interpretation. In their own respects, Lao Tsu, Lord Byron, and Joe McDonald are all very inspirational poets. But, within the wrong lens, they can be construed as terrorists. This means that their writings can cause fear, but this fear is not from a violent action such as an explosion or mass murders, this is the proposition of an idea that brings about unwanted change. Poetry is simultaneously the act of terrorism while still being unadulterated by violence