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May 2012

### **A Study of Leadership in Literature**

What makes a leader powerful? Is it his wit? Her intelligence? An intangible aura around one's being? While it may be difficult to pinpoint the exact causes of effective leaders, there are a myriad of leadership theories and powers that seek to detail the trait make-up of a superlative commander. It is through these models that authors build their characters and shape their stories.

One of the most significant leadership philosophies is the Great Man Theory. The Great Man Theory states that there are certain leaders, usually men, containing inherent abilities that make them strong influencers and more apt to lead. In *The Last Temptation of Jesus Christ*, Nikos Kazantzakis takes arguably the greatest man of all, Jesus, and shrouds him in doubt. This historical figure that many believe to be the Messiah, the greatest of all men, is now conflicted with rage, antagonism, and undeniable self-loathing. Kazantzakis weaves a tale of a man who tries his best to elucidate the desires of a God he does not quite understand. The following passage comes from the very mouth of the inspiration of the Great Man Theory, yet sounds nothing like what mankind expects from a leader:

“No, I won't be still!” said the overwrought youth. “Now I've started and it's too late. I won't be still! I'm a liar, a hypocrite, I'm afraid of my own shadow, I never tell the truth – I don't have the courage. When I see a woman go by, I blush and lower my head, but my eyes fill with lust. I never lift my hand to plunder or thrash or kill – not because I don't want to but because I am afraid. I want to rebel against my mother, the centurion, God – but I'm afraid. Afraid! Afraid! If you look inside me, you'll see Fear, a

trembling rabbit, sitting in my bowels – Fear, nothing else. That is my father, my mother, my God” (Kazantzakis, 1960).

It is in this scene that Jesus confesses his innermost fears to his Uncle Simeon, a rabbi. For two decades the rabbi fails to understand his nephew, yet recognizes that his affliction is at the hands of God rather than the devil. After Jesus runs away to the desert to become a monk, thus eluding God forever, his uncle asks him “why did [he] come to the monastery?” (Kazantzakis, 1960). Jesus replies that he aims “to save [himself]...from God” (Kazantzakis, 1960). As the words trickle from his mouth, his secrets begin to flood outward and the deluge of mighty waves ransacks the poor young man’s soul.

Kazantzakis describes Jesus as an “overwrought youth,” continuing the trend of never calling him by his name, but rather calling him the “Son of Mary” or the “youth” (Kazantzakis, 1960). This decision adds to Jesus’ identity crisis and elicits a greater emotional response from the audience when his name is finally uttered. Describing Jesus as “overwrought” by the shame of his confession adds another layer of humanity to the character usually associated with divinity. The poor man toiled in the heat for two days in his quest to join the monastery to rid himself of his constant eagle-headed companion that keeps him from finding peace. In his attempt to come clean from his multitude of “sins,” he pleads with his uncle that he has “started, and it’s too late” to turn back from his guilt. (The word “sins” is in quotation not because it is found in the text, but rather because Jesus is eternally recognized as the one man without sin.) After explaining his many shortcomings – that he is a “liar, a hypocrite” and “afraid of [his] own shadow,” – he confesses to his uncle that he “never tell[s] the truth” because he lacks the “courage” to do so. Each label he gives himself reveals his inner character and distorted sense of reality. He calls himself a liar, yet he never tells lies. He claims he is a hypocrite, yet he fails to

act as one. He says that he is afraid of his own shadow, yet rather than his shadow his true fear is that of the unknown entity that follows him wherever he goes. Even his belief that he lacks the courage to tell the truth is misguided, as his grasp on the reality of his circumstances is limited. It must be recognized that at this point in the novel, Jesus is unaware of the reasoning behind his affliction with God; he has no idea that he is the Son of God as well as the Son of Mary. His only conception of a personal relationship with God involves the searing pain he feels in his scalp when he believes God claws him from above. In Jesus' continued expulsion of guilt, he mentions his reaction to viewing a woman results in his "eyes fill[ing] with lust" yet his previous night spent with his cousin, a prostitute named Mary Magdalene, includes no longing for anything other than her forgiveness. Never once does he desire her flesh or mention a particular carnal need. He furthers his admission to his uncle by stating that he doesn't "plunder or... thrash or kill" because he is "afraid." This plaguing fear also stymies his rebellion against his "mother, the centurion, [and] God." Three more times he exclaims that he is afraid. Why the repetition? Not only is this Jesus' first time mentioning his pent-up fear aloud, but this marks the first instance he relies on another individual to unburden his pain. He likens his paralyzing fear to a "trembling rabbit, sitting in [his] bowels." This physical description adds to his image of a frightened, oft-fainting, harmless boy. His fear "sits" in his weakest and most vulnerable spot, his bowels, and acts as his "father," "mother," and "God." He lumps his father and mother with God as a reference of his desire to run away from the authoritative figures that ask too much of him.

Kazantzakis' portrayal of Jesus' inner conflict in this part of the novel is fascinating because he makes great pains to elucidate his shortcomings. However, as most theologians agree, Jesus contained not one of these faults. So what does this reveal? Kazantzakis paints Jesus as a man with the basic human conflict of a self-identity crisis. He is the son of man, as evidenced by

his crippling self-doubt, but he is also the Son of God. As a side note, Kazantzakis' mentioning of Jesus' facial blemishes adds to his realism, resulting in a version of Jesus that is not only believable, but one that provides the audience with a common ground to identify with the title character. Additionally, it further emphasizes the grandeur of his mission – a man that singlehandedly follows the will of God and acts on behalf of Him. He wrestles with his love for and fear of God and Kazantzakis taps into Jesus' ignorance of his own divinity. His struggle to understand his affliction is mirrored by his uncle. As a rabbi, it is a foundational aspect of his profession to read ancient texts and look for the day the Messiah comes to claim God's people. Yet he is unable to recognize that the hands he grabs are actually those of the Son of God.

This character, Jesus, seems to live in opposition of the Great Man Theory. This theory maintains that the traits needed to become a great leader are intrinsic and arise when a need for leadership is discovered. Though Jesus does contain the attributes that distances himself from those around him – an additional aspect of the Great Man Theory – his physical weakness, fear, and self-proclaimed cowardice are in direct conflict with the theory. He seems to lack the needed leadership traits to become the “Messiah” the world has fashioned, yet on the most basic level, Jesus is a man who yearns to understand God's will, loves his neighbors more than he loves himself, and completely abstains from sin. Directly after his period of confession with his uncle, Jesus demonstrates his desire to follow God's plan regardless of the consequences. Judas secretly plans to murder the “cross-maker” that aids in the crucifixion of his brethren, and corners him in a trap. Rather than plead for his life, Jesus lights up and thanks God for allowing him the opportunity to die with cleansed and purified heart. Unlike the other leaders in our cluster of Islamic books – the mayor from *God Dies by the Nile* and the overseer and alley protectors from *Children of the Alley* – Jesus doesn't brandish the knife to showcase his strength. Instead, he

offers his bare neck to Judas to demonstrate his complete security in God's will for him: the basic tenet of his future leadership platform. However afraid he was a youth, Jesus eventually becomes the man who embodies the epitome of a great man. He is the "Messiah...who loves the world." The Messiah "who dies because he loves the whole world" (Kazantzakis, 1960). In an attempt to explain how and why he leads this personal revolution of brotherhood and peace, he states "If I were fire, I would burn; if I were a woodcutter, I would strike. But I am a heart, and I love" (Kazantzakis, 1960).

In *Children of the Alley*, Naguib Mahfouz introduces five characters that reflect and emulate five of the most influential leaders of all time. One of these men is Gabal – a man representing Moses. Gabal utilizes a skills approach to leadership, which centers on a leader's technical, human, and conceptual skills. The core competencies of this type of leader include problem-solving skills, social judgment skills, and knowledge, and they generally are effective problem solvers and perform well under pressure (Northouse, 2010). As described in the novel, "he was the first to rise up against the oppression of our alley...He attained such a degree of power that no one could contend with him, yet he shunned bullying and gangsterism and self-enrichment from protection rackets and drug dealing. He remained a model of justice, power, and order among his people" (Mahfouz, 1996). Rifaa, a Jesus-like man, instead chooses to follow the path of referent power. Referent power emanates from a leader whose followers identify with him or her (Northouse, 2010). Additionally, these leaders tend to lead over those who personally like them. Unlike Gabal, the predecessor before him, Rifaa recoils against violence and spreads his message of love and mercy. Ironically, it isn't until his brutal murder that his reverence is fully understood. When he finally came into power of the alley, "the truth is that these were the happiest days of Rifaa's life. Everyone in this new neighborhood called him 'sir,' and they said it

sincerely and lovingly (Mahfouz, 1996). They knew that he expelled demons and gave health and happiness for free, only to please God. No one before him had ever acted so nobly, which was why the poor people loved him as they had never loved anyone before” (Mahfouz, 1996). Both of these men relied on two very different leadership philosophies to maintain their status in the alley, yet both generations of villagers responded positively to the men.

Within the same novel, Qassem (Muhammed) believes it to be his duty to uplift the alley into a land of peace and harmony from the violent and poverty-stricken Hell that it currently is. He utilizes personal power - the theory that recognizes the influence capacity a leader derives from being likeable and knowledgeable in the company of his followers (Northouse, 2010). Qassem speaks to his terrified wife about why he must never abort his mission regardless of the threats he receives from the thugs that rule the alley. He tells her “even in the dark times...he never loses hope” (Mahfouz, 1996). This juxtaposition between dark and light is a repetitive device used in the novel, and his distinction that hope is light and despair is dark illuminates the light in his soul. Similarly, in a time plagued by brutal “protectors” who rule the alley with blood lust, Qassem distances himself saying that “even if [he seems] alone” he has “so many good friends” (Mahfouz, 1996). Unlike the overseer, Qassem maintains a power to lead while still forging friendships based on honor and brotherhood as opposed to fear tactics and violence. Qassem furthers the dissimilarity between himself and other leaders in his alley by stating that “courage” is the weapon that will defeat the terrible men in power rather than clubs and sticks. Additionally, in a region that views women as incredibly lesser beings, Qassem speaks to his wife with respect and views her as an intelligent partner, rather than just a woman that must succumb to his needs. Understanding that fact, it is stunning that he speaks to her as an equal, urging her not to tell him “to take the safe path” out of fear for his safety because she “wouldn’t

be happy” if her “husband [had] to live with the humiliation of cowardice” (Mahfouz, 1996). This last phrase is incredibly indicative of Qassem’s leadership style because he inherently believes that cowardice, rather than poverty, is the key to true humiliation. At the end of Qassem’s tale, the narrator describes how Qassem ruled over the alley after defeating the greedy overseer and the ruthless protectors. As opposed to the generations who only looked to the past for their hope, Qassem’s neighbors “looked to tomorrow as if it were the appearance of a full moon on a spring night” (Mahfouz, 1996). Unlike any other overseer in his generation Qassem divvied up the estate evenly as he promised, and even though “each person’s share was small” his people “enjoyed unbounded feelings of justice and respect” (Mahfouz, 1996). The word “unbounded” rings loudly in this passage because the alley is constantly considered a prison sentence for each person who lived there before Qassem took power. Suffice it to say, the freedom Qassem offered his people was unprecedented. This indicates that he utilizes aspects of the “great man theory” because he seems to have been born with the intrinsic ability to lead. Furthermore, he embodies trait leadership as well, after the narrator explains his influence derives from his “combined power and gentleness, wisdom and simplicity, dignity and love, mastery and humility, efficiency and honesty. In addition, he [is] witty, friendly and good-looking, kind and companionable. He [has] good taste, he [loves] to sing and he [tells] jokes” (Mahfouz, 1996). It is interesting that the “Desert Rats saw in him a kind of man that had never existed before” because his mission and actions echoed those of Gabal and Rifaa (Mahfouz, 1996). It is an ironic statement because the narrator continually ends each story reminding the audience that the alley is plagued with forgetfulness, thus explaining why each man’s death led to the removal of peace and the return of overseers and protectors. To fully understand Qassem and the traits he contained that caused (or resulted from) his ability to lead his people well, the

narrator explains that he embodies “dignity and love” which oppose the tactics of the Middle Eastern men towards the women, “mastery and humility” which oppose the traits of the protectors, and “efficiency and honesty” which oppose the characteristics of the overseers.

Men, however, are not the only characters in 20<sup>th</sup> century novels that express specific leadership tendencies. In Nawal El Saadawi’s *Isis*, the titular character emanates the process perspective of leadership. This implies that the simple interaction between specific leaders and their followers can become a learned behavior and greatly impacts the follower’s abilities to lead (Northouse, 2010). Isis not only leads by example, but she also focuses on process leadership. She explains her unwavering endurance for integrity and righteousness, explaining she “will not surrender... The night will not prevail over the light. Tyranny and anxiety will not overcome justice and courage... Desperation and death will not overcome hope and life” (Saadawi, 2009). After spurning her Seth’s affection, she flees to a fishing village and embodies the lifestyle she so fervently preaches. With high levels of support and low levels of direction, she bolsters and coaches her neighbors and rejects class levels and varying statuses. In order to demonstrate her desire for equality, she lives among the men and women and works alongside them. Her conscientious attitude towards egalitarianism is immortalized in her brief explanation of the lack of class structure in the village: “There are no masters and slaves in the village... People are all equal” (Saadawi, 2009).

Not unlike the process perspective Isis practices, the situational approach to leadership focuses on a leader’s ability to adapt how he or she leads when faced with different demands or situations. These leaders must “match their style to the competence and commitment of the subordinates” (Northouse, 2010). The four methods of leadership within this style are delegating, supporting, coaching, and directing. Each type of leadership correlates to either a high or low



focus on supportive and directive behavior. In Salman Rushdie's *Satanic Verses*, God maintains a very low standing in the eyes of his people because of His apparent failure to lead with a situational approach to ruling the universe. In fact, He is described in the following passage:

“There is a god here called Allah (means simply, the god). Ask the Jahilians and they'll acknowledge that this fellow has some sort of overall authority, but he isn't very popular: an all-rounder in an age of specialist statues...” “If you are for Allah, I am for Al-Lat. [Our] opposition to him is implacable, irrevocable, engulfing. The war between us cannot end in truce. And what a truce! Yours is a patronizing, condescending lord. Al-Lat hasn't the slightest wish to be his daughter. She is his equal” (Rushdie, 1989).

These two passages are found in the second section, Mahound. The first text derives from the omniscient narrator, assumed to be the Devil or Satan, whereas the second text is a conversation between Hind and Mahound. The narrator showcases the prevalence of monotheism, explaining that there is “a god” known as “Allah.” Recognizing that Biblical texts always notated God as *the* God or Alpha and Omega – furthermore, capitalizing any noun or adjective describing Him – this departure indicates God's lackluster presence in the novel's Islamic culture. Satan continues to indicate this point by expressing that “this fellow has some sort of overall authority, but he isn't very popular.” This colloquial description of God echoes Nawal El Saadawi's portrayal in *God Dies by the Nile*. Whereas God's wrath fails to strike fear in the villagers' hearts, the Mayor has the power to take their food, money, and life. Therefore, just as the Mayor maintains a higher status than God in Saadawi's novel, the many other “specialist statues” have much more spiritual strength than the “all-rounder” deity in *The Satanic Verses*. This early description of God's weakened standing lays the foundation for Mahound's journey to rejecting monotheism. More importantly, however, is Rushdie's attack on the origins of creation. Recognizing that “being

God's postman is no fun" and that "God knows whose postman I've been" opens the gateway to doubting the derivation of the Qur'an (Rushdie, 1989). If God is no longer the messenger's target, perhaps the devil has transformed the Divine Verses (Qur'an) into the Satanic Verses. This insinuates that the entire story is, in fact, an inversion of the Qur'an.

The Islamic religion relies heavily on monotheism and the refusal to worship other deities. Yet, rather than portray God as the all-powerful ruler that Islam considers Him, Hind compares Him to a chauvinistic, "patronizing, condescending lord." She firmly places herself in opposition of Mahound, stating, "If you are for Allah, I am for Al-lat." Additionally, she invokes her contradictory stance through her complete and utter dismissal of God, and instead, focuses on the deity who she considers His "equal." If aforementioned inverse relationship this novel shares with the Qur'an remains recognized, this denunciation of the Lord by a female insinuates that the Islamic God favors men and leaves no room for women. The narrator echoes this, stating, "From the beginning, men used God to justify the unjustifiable. He moves in mysterious ways: men say. Small wonder, then, that women have turned to me" (Rushdie, 1989). If Rushdie's fictional world is an insinuated inversion of the Qur'an, it begs the question: who is responsible? God? Man? The Devil?

Two imperative leadership styles found in 20th century literature include assigned and emergent leadership. Assigned leadership recognizes the position one has in an organization or group, whereas emergent leaders are chosen based off of the way followers respond to them (Northouse, 2010). In *Soul Mountain*, Xingjian Gao weaves a tapestry of two seemingly separate characters: You and I. When searching in a museum in Giyang, I discovers a crate of exorcist relics. After describing these masks in detail, he writes:

“Man cannot cast off this mask, it is a projection of his own flesh and spirit. He can no longer remove from his own face this mask, which has already grown like skin and flesh so he is always startled as if disbelieving this is himself, but this is in fact himself. He cannot remove this mask, and this is agony. But having manifested itself as his mask, it cannot be obliterated, because the mask is a replica of himself. It has no will of its own, or one could say it has a will but no means of expression and so prefers not to have a will. Therefore it has left man with an eternal face with which he can examine himself in amazement.” (Gao, 2000)

Though speaking of the exorcist masks, Gao clearly uses these artifacts as symbols for mankind’s fallacies. The mask covers up the true identity of man and acts as a “projection of his own flesh and spirit.” Upon attempting to remove the façade from one’s flesh, it is recognized that the mask has “grown like skin” and “cannot [be removed]...and this is agony.” As this novel’s gestation and publication occurred post-Revolution in Communist China, the prevalent ideology of the time focused on the dissemination of subservience and the suspension of self. Therefore, these masks act as tangible re-enforcements of the government’s declaration to silence independence and, in doing so, exorcise the creativity and uniqueness of the individual. I becomes “terror-stricken” at the recognition that the mask has become “a replica of himself” and is now a part of his identity. Though the reader acknowledges that this text has been translated from its original form, the short, staccato-like clauses have remained unchanged from Gao’s initial intent. These bursts of language charge forth and fuel the dramatic intensity. Even the description of the masks drive the disillusionment forward:

“The sides of the nostrils, the corners of the mouth, the upper and lower lips, the cheekbones, the forehead and the middle of the forehead indicate that the carver had a

sound knowledge of the human head...the two holes at the corners of the mouth reveal nature's scorn for man and show man's fear of nature. The face also accurately expresses the animal nature in human beings and the fear of this animal nature within themselves." (Gao, 2000)

Earlier in the novel, Gao picks up the fight between man and nature. The mask showcases "nature's scorn for man" and man's subsequent "fear of nature." Nature is an interesting topic for Gao to utilize because it acts as a symbol for the unbending and unchangeable constant in a revolutionary time. Though mankind tries to force nature to yield to its power, it fails to enact the type of change experienced in the social and political landscapes. A mountain-dweller explains to the protagonist:

"Young man, nature is not frightening, it's people who are frightening! You just need to get to know nature and it will become friendly. This creature known as man is of course highly intelligent, he's capable of manufacturing almost anything from rumors to test-tube babies and yet he destroys two to three species every day. This is the absurdity of man" (Gao, 2000).

It is with this passage that Gao fully expounds his theory on mankind's dual ability to create and demolish. The artists in the post-Cultural Revolution China were silenced in an attempt to force servitude and eradicate the self. Thus, the "absurdity of man" is the paradox between the constant desire to destroy and the innate need to create. Gao furthers his hypothesis with a rhetorical question:

"People love the self yet mutilate the self. Arrogance, pride, complacency or anxiety, jealousy and hatred, all spring from this. The self is in fact the source of mankind's

misery. So, does this unhappy conclusion mean that the awakened self should therefore be killed?” (Gao, 2000)

This understanding of masks and facades becomes more recognizable when considering the myriad leadership styles politicians and other world leaders assemble. Adolf Hitler wore one of the most horrifying masks of all time: a mask that represented hatred in the form of assigned, positional, and emergent leadership as well as coercive and reward powers. To remind emergent leaders are communicative, intelligent, confident, dominant, and are easily identified as leaders by their surrounding counterparts, whereas reward power is the method that focuses on a leader's ability to compensate his or her followers with gifts, money, power, etc. Hitler's catastrophic rise to power leads to Malrich's suicide in Boualem Sansal's *German Mujahid*. After searching for the truth of his father's role in the Holocaust, Malrich recognizes that he has “an appointment to keep” (Sansal, 2009). This euphemism proves that his suicide is deliberate and pre-meditated. In an effort to believe “that there [is] particle of good” in men, he determinedly sets out to “see to it that justice is done” (Sansal, 2009). Though Malrich experienced the effects of a sick leader that existed in history, many others shape their own antagonists with the help of the coercive power theory.

Coercive power simply results from a leader's ability to penalize or punish others (Northouse, 2010). Whereas the protagonists in *Children of the Alley* and *Last Temptation of Christ* demonstrated their leadership abilities by overcoming villainous leaders who specialize in coercive power, Nawal El Saadawi utilizes evil leaders to represent the oppression her people experience. In *God Dies by the Nile*, the corrupt Mayor utilizes coercive power to maintain his status of leadership over the people of Kafr El Teen. His chief concerns are money, power, and women. Thus, he abuses every relationship he has to achieve those three things, and dupes

Zeinab into sleeping with him by saying it is God's wish to cure her mother through her sexual servitude. His God complex and personal hubris eventually pave the way for his murder at the hands of Zeinab's aunt, Zakeya. When describing the Mayor's coercive influence, the village Sheikh explains, "In their hearts they don't fear God. What they really fear is the Mayor. He holds their daily bread in his hands and if he wants, he can deprive them of it" (Saadawi, 2007). For this is the Mayor! The man "above suspicion, above the law, even above the moral rules that governed ordinary people's behavior. They could have doubts about Allah, but about him... It was impossible" (Saadawi, 2007). [As Saadawi explains in *Isis*, "Obedience does not survive without terror, and terror does not exist without strong authority and dreadful fright" (Saadawi, 2009).] The Sheikh echoes this and recognizes that the coercive tendencies are powerful because it is impossible to discern when these loyalties may change, and it is never evident why a supposed ally would quickly morph into an enemy. The only underlying reason why this would happen is a simple threat from the Mayor or his minions. As a religious man, the Sheikh's priority is to honor Allah in all of his actions, yet he understands that the Mayor has more power than God because the Mayor has become their God – the giver of life. It is at the Mayor's disposal whether or not they will continue to live. And just as the people of the Old Testament blamed misfortune on God's wrath, the Sheikh recognizes that "if [the Mayor] gets angry their debts double" and the government will attack them with orders of summons (Saadawi, 2007). Similar to a tithe, the people pay portions of their livelihood to their protector in order to pay for his blessings. He is condemning the Mayor for being hypocritical but is doing the exact same thing by only speaking out against him behind closed doors. Yes, the Sheikh is aiding and abetting this criminal by allowing him to continue leading over the village. As much as the Sheikh may maintain that he is nothing like the Mayor and only serves Allah, he is just as guilty

by not standing firmly against him. Similarly to the Sheikh, in *Brave New World* John the Savage fails to enact any specific leadership style, though his popularity lends itself to referent power. Authorities recognize his intelligence and moral code, yet they are never swayed by his attempt to utilize expert power because of his foreign ideas. Though he alleges that he doesn't "want comfort," but instead wants God, poetry, danger, freedom, goodness, sin, "the right to grow old and ugly and impotent" and "have too little to eat," John never stands up against the authoritative heads with a strong sense of leadership (Huxley, 1946). As a result, John is destroyed by his inability to effectively lead those around him and ultimately commits suicide. Both his and the Sheikh's failure to fight for freedom against tyranny reveals that passively obeying is almost as terrible as offering power to coercive and evil leaders in the first place.

In literature written in the 20<sup>th</sup> century, leadership remains an imperative quality that all protagonists must practice with control and dexterity. The authors of these novels utilize a multitude of leadership theories and models to reveal everything from betrayal to oppression to God's true calling. It begs the question: how do you lead?

## Citations

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