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Surveilled and Spied On

WATERMARK

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California State University, Long Beach

Watermark is an annual, scholarly journal published by graduate students in the Department of English at California State University, Long Beach (CSULB). We are dedicated to publishing original critical essays engaging with theory, literature of all genres and periods, as well as essays representing current issues within the field of rhetoric and composition. As this journal is intended to provide a forum for emerging voices, only student work is published.

All submissions must include a 250-word abstract and cover page consisting of the writer's name, phone number, email address, essay title, and a short biography (no more than 2 sentences). All essays should be no less than six pages, typed in current MLA format with standard 12-point font, and cannot contain the writer's name. All submission materials must be sent as separate Word documents. Please direct all submission materials and/or questions to csulbwatermarkjournal@gmail.com.

All papers have undergone a blind peer-review and editing process.

Land Acknowledgement

We acknowledge that CSU Long Beach continues to occupy ancestral land of the Gabrielino/Tongva peoples. We pay our respects to these communities who were removed unjustly and acknowledge how we at CSULB are beneficiaries of this removal. We honor and remember the Gabrielino/Tongva ancestors past and present and their connection to this land.

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Table of Contents

- VIII A Note From *Watermark*'s Executive Co-Editors
By Jade Saffery and Richmond Tran
- 1 Under His Eye: The Panoptic Surveillance of Feminine Bodies in *The Handmaid's Tale*
By Emma Melara
- 15 Blank, Lovely, Mad: The Rhetoric of Negation, Abjection, and the Gaze of the Feminine Other in Jean Rhys' *Wide Sargasso Sea* and Leonard Woolf's "A Tale Told by Moonlight"
By Pauline Menchavez
- 25 "The Monster Who Walks Upright": The Black Ape-Man Archetype and the Lynching Narrative of *Murders in the Rue Morgue*
By Ava DeVries
- 35 "Everything was Forever": Environmental Affect and Queer Temporal Play in Arundhati Roy's *The God of Small Things*
Randy Reynaga
- 47 Blasphemous Bodies: The Demonization of Female Sexuality and Autonomy in *The Exorcist* (1973)
By Samantha Rentfro
- 57 Surviving Cautiously: A Cripistemological Analysis of Blood Cancer Survivorship
By Maggie Hart
- 69 The Madwoman Reimagined: Uncanny Doubling and Visibility in Julia Armfield's "The Great Awake"
By Stephanie Rowitz

- 75 Selling the Body of Christ: How Sadomasochism Was Used to Advance Sententious Christian Ideology in the Medieval Text *The Life and Passion of Saint Margaret*
By Trever Ballaine
- 83 To Travelogue *The Blazing World: Feminine Counsel* and Dis/Re/Placement in Margaret Cavendish's Postbellum Imperialist Reform Fiction
By Drea Wineman
- 97 What a (Wo)Man Most Desires?: Operating Under Chivalry in *The Wedding of Sir Gawain to Dame Ragnelle*
By Rebekah Hahn
- 107 The Impact of Shame on Racialized Gender Identity: How Shame Informs Black Masculinity
By Stephanie Metz
- 121 "Honor in a shrouded hearse": The Props of Mourning in *Richard III*
By Chiara Aleman
- 131 United We Stand, Divided We Fall: Collective Resistance in *Egyptian Earth* and *Sea of Poppies*
By Baylie Jett Mills
- 145 A Plea for Trans/Multilingual Editing in Academic and Non-Academic Publishing
By Ellyssa Paik

A Note from *Watermark's* Executive Editors

We believe that the theme of this issue, “Bodies,” could not be more relevant because in 2026, our bodies are contentious. The effects of the Dobbs decision resound, rendering reproductive bodies vulnerable as access to necessary care is suppressed. The Israel-Palestine conflict continues to displace bodies and claim lives. A marked increase in ICE activity has reaped needless violence, divisive rhetoric, and a stifling air of fear and unrest, incarceration and deportation disrupting and destroying the lives of immigrants. When trans bodies are not being held under intense scrutiny, they are being erased from existence. Even the increased prevalence of GLP-1s have created new conversations about size, privilege, and beauty standards.

And in our discipline, things are changing, too. While funding for the humanities erodes, writing and scholarship is being created at all levels with the assistance of artificial intelligence. The fight to justify the importance of what we do as scholars and teachers feels all the more futile because people are seemingly losing the desire to learn and think for themselves. From our ideas to our ways of life, from our art and culture to our history, the humanities are crucial for understanding ourselves better. With this in mind, we set out to create an issue full of writing carefully crafted by humans exploring what it means to be human.

There is something magical about scholarship that centers the body, a site where many contradictions play out. It is resilient, yet incredibly fragile; it is part of what makes us who we are, but does not define us. Our bodies are not easily alterable, and yet, they undergo changes—gradually, as with aging, or suddenly, as with illnesses or accidents; either way, tending to change against our will. It is universalizing in that each of us lives inside a corporeal form and might experience similar physical phenomena over which we can identify with and relate to one another. But, that which we believe makes us diverse also appears on the body: gender identity and how that identity is or is not performed, (dis)ability and any visible or invisible bodily differences, the phenotypic presentation of the construct dubbed race or other physical manifestations of ethnicity and culture, and so on.

In contemplating the body, these inherent contradictions bubble to the surface, imploring us to think, struggle with difficult questions, and reconsider what we know. But most importantly, by focusing on the physical body, we bring what is sometimes erased, ignored, suppressed, or taken for granted into total visibility, our awareness thereby forced upon subjects that are often uncomfortable or difficult to discuss. The body makes the abstract real—tangible, concrete, undeniable. And like Samantha Rentfro asserts of Regan's grotesquely sexualized body in *The Exorcist* or Rebekah Hahn contends of Ragnelle's loathly ladyhood in *The Wedding of Sir Gawain to Dame Ragnelle*, sometimes, the body is made into a spectacle from which you cannot look away.

We are in awe of our fourteen contributors and thank them for creating works that made us think and feel; papers that clearly demonstrated their astounding expertise, their passion, and the utmost care they pour into their research and writing. We commend these authors' patience and meticulous efforts during the editing process and are excited to provide a forum for their compelling scholarship.

We are also indebted to a devoted staff that is truly representative of the very best the CSULB English department has to offer. This issue only materialized as a result of their enthusiasm, dedication, and intellect. We wholeheartedly thank them for their commitment to creating something wonderful. Thank you to Heather Ross and Christian Baca for helping us keep the website updated with information about *Watermark* and our archive of digitized issues. Thanks to the CSULB Print Shop team for preparing this issue for print. Lastly, we are grateful for the guidance of our *Watermark* and graduate advisor Dr. Dennis López, who is nothing but generous with his time, encouragement, and mentorship.

And to you, who reads this now—we thank you for your participation in the scholarly process. There is no more important time to bolster our support of liberal arts studies. We are elated to share this with you.

Jade Saffery and Richmond Tran
Executive Editors, 2026

Under His Eye: The Panoptic Surveillance of Feminine Bodies in *The Handmaid's Tale*

Emma Melara

To be seen—to be seen—is to be—her voice trembled—penetrated.

—Margaret Atwood, *The Handmaid's Tale*

I. Introduction

The structure of disciplinary mechanisms that operate within the dystopian theocracy of Gilead in Margaret Atwood's *The Handmaid's Tale* relies on the omnipresent emblem of the Eye, a metonym that warns civilians they are always being watched under Gilead's surveillance. The reminder pervades throughout society in everyday language, the phrase "Under His Eye" superseding former farewell expressions. While the phrase may be a reference to the watchful eye of God, it is also a staunch message that in parting from one's visual periphery, the state is always in control of their agency, whether physically present or not. Through these phrases, language itself becomes a surveillance mechanism of the state, as any deviation from the obligatory language alerts a deviation from the customs in place. Drawing from Jeremy Bentham's architectural prison model, the Panopticon, social theorist Michel Foucault posits that under a structure where there is a possibility of being watched at any given time, prisoners create a self-regulating consciousness under this order of constant surveillance or "permanent invisibility" that thus secures the power of order and discipline: "[the prisoner] is seen but does not see: he is the object of information . . . but never a subject in communication . . . this invisibility is a guarantee of order" (Foucault 200). Rooted in the invisibility of the watchtower guard lies the self-discipline of the prisoner. In the absence of explicit regulatory forces, self-regulation becomes the normative standard of the prisoner, extending from learned to innate behavior as populations develop. Such is the case within Gilead, where surveillance is evident but its surveillants are not, spanning the social sphere and beyond. In creating spaces of isolation, invisibility, and distrust through panoptic surveillance, systems of power consolidate its authority over its oppressed subjects

both structurally and personally, stripping each subject of its autonomous identity in order to become malleable and compliant to the oppressive system.

Set in a post-civil war United States, the Republic of Gilead operates in the majority of the nation with a firm customs system revolving around fundamental interpretations of the Christian Bible, prioritizing raising white birthrates and devout religious practices. The Gilead state disseminates a return to traditional, religious ways of life, drawing from the Old Testament as absolute law that governs society. In this respect, a convoluted interpretation of the Bible is the true power of Gilead. For Handmaids, simultaneously the most sanctified¹ and oppressed class, every action of their bodies is surveilled and accounted for, each body marked as a “national resource” due to its reproductive ability. Though they are constantly informed that they are being monitored, this surveillance is unlocatable and internal, producing an air of constant suspicion that polices Handmaids’ behavior, even in private. Drawing from the lived realities of the surveilled female body, Atwood aimed to replicate the “real-life” atrocities committed through the control of women’s bodies across the world, a stark “feature of every repressive regime on the planet” often utilized by hierarchical elites as a monopolized resource by which someone always profits (Atwood, “Margaret Atwood on. . .”). Within Gilead, it is the elite of the regime, rather the “surveillers”, who are in place to discipline Handmaids and diminish their identities as living beings.

Following a Foucauldian theory of Bentham’s prison model and other surveillance studies, the multilayered and intersecting panoptic schemas police the (un)conscious performances of the Handmaid body, rendering them bereft of their identity and bodily autonomy as a result. In reading *The Handmaid’s Tale* through the Foucauldian perspectives of *The Birth of the Prison* and *The Birth of the Clinic* (the latter extending to concepts of biopower²), an understanding of the female body emerges as both a reproductive vessel and a surveillance machine within speculative fiction and beyond. The Handmaid body becomes a pawn of the Gileadean state, regulating discipline and control within the Handmaid class sphere at its behest. I argue that in creating a wide sense of distrust through several sectors of panoptic surveillance, Gilead consolidates its authority over the feminine body in a way that is both structural and personal, allowing every facet of the body to be dissected and therefore usable to the state.

II. Foucauldian Traps of Visibility

The most overt manifestation of panoptic surveillance within Gilead’s institution of surveillance is the undercover police force and intelligence unit, aptly known as “The Eyes.” Essential to the theocracy’s tight disciplinary control, The Eyes are tasked with monitoring and persecuting any dissidents of the regime. The systemic administrative sector operates

¹ Here, the use of *sanctified* indicates a consecration of the Handmaid body due to its reproductive capability rather than its purity; strikingly, while being consecrated as essential to reproduction, Handmaids are seen as adulterated, sinful beings with no other purpose other than procreation.

² Term coined by Foucault that refers to the means that governing powers regulate populations and the reproductive body through technologies of power. In Gilead, it is utilizing the body as a national resource, conditioning violence upon the body.

under their jurisdiction, and they monitor not only civilians but governing classes such as Wives and Aunts as well. Much like other twenty-first-century dystopian fictive narratives, Jade Hinchliffe argues in “Speculative Fiction, Sociology. . .” that these governing classes are positioned as key “variables” that structure surveillance along these differential lines, explicitly differentiating the surveillance of Handmaids and higher castes (422). Whereas Guardians, Gilead’s routine police force, operate day-to-day surveillance and are visible to the public eye, The Eyes operate as an omnipresent force, reminiscent of The Eyes of God. Identities of The Eyes are unknown. When they are seen in public, they often dress in suits and dark sunglasses to obscure their faces and drive in black vans marked with the emblem of a winged eye in white (Atwood 21-22). Despite their anonymity, the moving force of The Eyes is undeniable; their presence etches an intense fear that freezes even non-dissident individuals until the van passes on. To civilians, The Eyes are “shark[s] on the prowl,” searching for its next victim to mutilate:

Two Eyes, in gray suits, leap from the opening double doors at the back. They grab a man who is walking along, a man with a briefcase, an ordinary-looking man, slam him back against the black side of the van. He’s there a moment, splayed out against the metal as if stuck to it; then one of The Eyes moves in on him, does something sharp and brutal that doubles him over, into a limp cloth bundle. They pick him up and heave him into the back of the van like a sack of mail. Then they are also inside and the doors are closed and the van moves on. It’s over, in seconds, and the traffic on the street resumes. (Atwood 169-70)

The guise of The Eyes operates as a “double obscurity” that parallels that of the Panopticon’s watchtower guard whose discernment of the prisoner works as a one-way mirror into their behavior and external performance (Atwood 22). The double-tinted windows on their vans and dark sunglasses limit observers from looking within whilst preserving their own visible observations of the civilian, creating an omniscient threat of the unknown “watcher.” As a panoptic prisoner, civilians are trapped within the confines of this unknown, regulating complicit behavior whether the Eyes are actively perceiving behavior or not. Whereas the mobilization of violence against civilians is public, the inflictors’ identities are not, extending a form of obscurity under the regime not permitted to others. They see but are not seen, able to mobilize as state entities rather than individuals and emphasizing the strict boundary between state and civilian. Thus, visibility becomes a trap that isolates each individual to the other, creating a stark contrast between hierarchical classes and their own respective modes of visibility (Foucault 200). Handmaids, specifically, are maximum security prisoners within panoptic surveillance. Mario Klarer argues that their limited status and order to speak in programmed responses strip them of identity and autonomous agency, using orality (or lack thereof) to restrict and suppress Handmaids under the regime (135). They are expected to perform without variation, functioning as hive machines with the same purpose: childbearing. In accordance with standard invariability, all Handmaids wear the same uniform: red gloves, shoes, an ankle-length and long-sleeved dress, completed with a white winged bonnet around the face that “keep [them] from seeing” and from being seen by lustful men. Drawing from Mary Magdalene’s association with blood red repentance in

biblical Christian teachings, the Handmaids' outfits are meant to represent their status as "fallen" women seeking atonement for their pre-Gilead sins through the act of reproduction; this, in turn, requires them to be compliant, docile, and conservative. Handmaid narrator Offred notes that this is what is desired by the Gilead regime, enforced by the watchful maneuver of The Eyes:

I glide with Ofglen along the sidewalk; the pair of us, and in front of us another pair, and across the street another. We must look good from a distance: picturesque, like Dutch milkmaids on a wallpaper frieze, like a shelf full of period-costume ceramic salt and pepper shakers, like a flotilla of swans or anything that repeats itself with at least minimum grace and without variation. Soothing to the eye, The Eyes, The Eyes, for that's who this show is for. (Atwood 212)

This pious performance and artificiality functions as a protective layer against the suspicious watch of The Eyes, rendering them protected by their strict adherence to the regime. They blend into an uninterrupted background of domesticity, "picturesque" and appeased with their newly established functions in society that does not draw attention, denote variation, or indicate distinguishable identity. They exist solely as a mass identity—not as individuals, but as a resource. While this "flotilla of swans" maintains their safety and survival within the tyrannical regime, it comes at the heavy cost of their own individuality, privacy, and livelihood, removing them from any sense of self or identity as individuals, as emphasized by Zahra Sadeghi and Narges Mirzapour in "Women in Gilead as Colonized Subjects. . . ." Forcibly conscripted to give up their individual names and rights, the Handmaids thus implicate themselves in survival processes of mimicry, replicating one another in composure, demurity, and the projected self (6).

The plainclothes operatives of The Eyes navigate society undercover, (mis)representing themselves as ordinary civilians amongst varying ranks. While all Eyes are susceptible to visibility by their fellow colleagues, their high-ranking status amongst civilians allows for a permissive disregard for Gileadean law and customs regardless of visibility. According to protagonist Offred, anyone in the household could be an Eye, even those perceived to be low-ranking; in her household, she suspects that her Commander's driver and Guardian, Nick, is an operative spy: "He's just taken a risk, but for what? What if I were to report him? Perhaps he was merely being friendly . . . Perhaps it was a test, to see what I would do. Perhaps he is an Eye" (Atwood 18). Nick, who is later confirmed to be an undercover Eye and a double agent for the resistance against Gilead, is of low status, his rank not high enough to be issued a wife, as noted by Offred. His subservient role within the household makes for an ideal illusion of discretion, especially for higher-ranking individuals such as Wives and Commanders who often bend the rules at their will. However, as seen through Offred's repetitive paranoia of Nick, a lack of precaution is not reserved for the low-ranking Handmaid, whose behavior and social conditions determine her very survival. Even in the solitude of her room, Offred refuses to write her narrative in fear of the discovery of writing, opting instead to record herself on cassette tapes as an act of self-preservation (Klarer 131). Though still against the regime, she subverts other attempts at silencing women whilst still being subjugated to the social conditioning of Gilead.

III. The Clinical Eyes of Gilead

The medical sector of surveillance concerns the clinical gaze upon the feminine body to survey reproductive health and sexual activity. Handmaids have monthly mandated clinic visits, in which they are closely examined alone by a male doctor and the Guardians tasked with escorting. Though Offred visits the clinic only once throughout the novel, this instance represents the Handmaid-clinician imbalance concisely and efficiently. As she enters the clinic room alone, she is greeted with the emblem of The Eyes of God above an image of a snake-laced sword on a folding screen, an additional unwavering reminder of the layers of authority present in Gilead. Pamela Cooper suggests that this emblem draws associations between authority and the phallic eye, much like Hippocratic integrity emblems that gender the medical sector as inherently masculine (52). As doctors within an affirmed patriarchy, the men wield a doubly powerful authority against Offred, a woman already on the cusp of fatal punishment.³

Offred's dynamic with her doctor is defined by imbalance; she wields no power, and he wields all, both in terms of reading and documenting her clinical body. As she lays on the examination table, her vision of the doctor is blocked by a hanging sheet, creating a one-way communication in which the doctor is permitted to see the most intimate areas of her body, but she is not permitted to see even who is examining her: "The [covering] sheet is lifted from my skin, a draft pimples me. A cold finger, rubber-clad and jellied, slides into me, I am poked and prodded. The finger retreats, enters otherwise, withdraws" (Atwood 60). The use of "poke" and "prodded" here suggests an invasion, a desecrated removal of humanity akin to the inspection of a farm animal. The phallic nature of the finger violates her in the same manner her Commander would, and her ability to consent is rescinded, given the mandatory nature of the exam. The presence of the sheet serves not only to "preserve" the sanctity of the Handmaid, but to "shield" her from seeing the medical authority in the room with her, reducing dominion to a pair of hands forcing into and upon the crevices of her body for inspection. He intrudes upon her without an acknowledgement of her as an individual human, but rather another reproductive system to upkeep. Though not permitted to converse with her unless necessary, Offred notes that he is "talkative," unconcerned with the regulatory rules due to his higher status. Here, the doctor takes the place of the watchtower guard, much like other "overseers of Gilead's regimented female 'herds,'" inspecting Gilead's most sanctified resource: the reproductive system (Cooper 52). Deriving from Foucault's *The Birth of the Clinic*, Cooper notes that the "tangible space of the body" becomes imbued with gender, privy to the clinical or "statutory" eye that spectates her fertile health (53). His negligence, or rather his intentional disregard, for this imbalance opens a pathway to sexual abuse of power, and he offers to impregnate her to "help" her avoid punishment (e.g. the Colonies). Due to the dangerous power imbalance, Offred feels reluctant to say no, as the penalty of being caught is death—Handmaids are not permitted to copulate with anyone apart

³ Handmaids are assigned three different postings over the course of three years, each posting requiring a maximum of one year to be successfully impregnated before being transferred to the next post. If a Handmaid is unable to fall pregnant after three postings, she is considered a sterile "Unwoman" and exiled to perform mandatory labor on environmentally hazardous death camps known as the Colonies.

from their assigned Commander in monthly mandated events called “The Ceremony.” When she says she will consider it, she does so only because she cannot outright say no, stating:

I must leave the impression that I’m not offended, that I’m open to suggestion. He takes his hand away, lazily almost, lingeringly, this is not the first word as far as he’s concerned. He could fake the tests, report me for cancer, for infertility, have me shipped off to the Colonies⁴, with the Unwomen⁵. None of this has been said, but the knowledge of his power hangs nevertheless in the air as he pats my thigh, withdraws himself behind the hanging sheet. (Atwood 61)

Here, we see Offred self-regulating behavior to the clinical gaze of the doctor, starkly aware of the impression that she must adhere to for her own survival. She must pretend to consider as opposed to outright rejecting his advance, playing the role of the pious and devout Handmaid to avoid grave consequence. Citing *The Birth of the Clinic*, Cooper extends the metaphor of the clinical eye to the finger “prodding” Offred, representing the phallic male as penetrating her in more than gaze, but in physicality: “The glance is silent, like a finger pointing, denouncing . . . The clinical eye discovers a kinship with a new sense that prescribes its norm and epistemological structure; this is . . . the index finger palpating the depths. Hence the metaphor of ‘touch’ (*le tact*) by which doctors will ceaselessly define their glance” (Cooper 55). Like the visual gaze of the systemic sector penetrating her, the medical gaze takes a step further, raping her not only through the visual gaze of her intimate body, but through the unspoken coercion with the doctor’s ability to forge her health at his fingertips. Further complicating surveillance beyond sight, the documentation of a Handmaid’s medical record reads her value as a reproductive vessel and functional capabilities to bear healthy, “desirable” children. Her body thus becomes a political playground for the doctor to toy with the regard of it as a ward of the state, wielding the power over her life like a weapon. The doctor is not only a high-ranking political authority over a low-ranking vessel, but a “superior” male against the “inferior” female sex. His biological identity marks his dual capacity as “both scientist *and* man”, beyond clinical towards a “more intimate and erotic register” when he sexually propositions Offred, thus shifting his “clinical eye” to a more predatory, lustful eye (Cooper 55). He maintains his arms in between Offred’s legs throughout this encounter, only removing them when he feels that the opportunity has passed. He does not sense Offred’s discomfort, palpable fear, or hesitation. Due to his own inner desires, he chooses to cross professional boundaries and standard clinical surveillance of the reproductive body into a voyeuristic “seeing” of her body. Though not outwardly disdainful, his comment of re-attempting “next month” indicates a forceful, coercive recurrence in the future (Atwood 61). The doctor, in his purview, extends his power of surveillance into the realm of sexual gratification, further reducing Offred as a Handmaid to her bodily function and sexual capabilities.

⁴Death camps located on radioactive wastelands. “Undesirables” of the regime are exiled there to perform environmental labor until they perish from the hazardous toxic conditions.

⁵ The lowest ranking class in Gilead, comprised of women deemed irredeemable and subversive to social integration into the Gilead regime. They are stripped of all human rights and are exiled to the Colonies.

IV. Hypervisibility of the Fertile Vessel

Beyond the physical clinic, the birth of any child to Handmaids into Gilead is highly ritualized through events called Birth Days, the bodies of Handmaids becoming hypervisible on these days. Transcending the once private and intimate act of childbirth, Birth Days are widely publicized and an event of spectacle and exhibition where “everyone⁶ in [the] district” is permitted to attend and observe the inner workings of the Handmaid body (Atwood 117). Surrounding Handmaids are alerted to the births at the call of the Birthmobile, a red ambulance-style vehicle that collects Handmaids in the district. Attendance for Handmaids is mandatory, regardless of prior obligations, as the event of Gilead births takes precedence. When Offred arrives at the house along with the other Handmaids, she notes that the birth process varies drastically from the clinical births pre-Gilead, favoring a more “natural” approach to parturition. Handmaids are not given any form of anesthetic to ease pain. Further, labor is not induced under any circumstance, and they are not stitched up following birth. Instead, the Handmaid is surrounded by other communal Handmaids, forced to labor in intense pain with their child taken away the moment they are expelled from her body (126). Offred cites the Aunts’ reasoning for the lack of medical resources as stemming from consideration of the collective health of Gilead’s children, as well as adhering to a Biblical interpretation: “*I will greatly multiply thy sorrow and thy conception; in sorrow thou shalt bring forth children*” (114). Rather than viewing a Handmaid’s body as a sanctified site of creation that should be made comfortable for the pregnant woman, the Gilead state upholds its view of the pregnant woman as a vessel of procreation that prioritizes the fetus above all. Even beyond the “medical eye” of the spectating doctor, all Handmaids are subjected to witness each other’s violations and thus presented with their own violations that will succeed them.

The birth of Janine’s (also referred to as Ofwarren) child exemplifies both the internal and external violence that occur at the hands of the state, Handmaids and Aunts all subject to those same violations. Offred’s description of a birthing Janine’s physical appearance aptly reflects the agonizing process of childbirth forced upon her: “Janine groans again, her head bent over so all we can see is her hair. Crouching like that, she’s like a doll, an old one that’s been pillaged and discarded, in some corner, akimbo” (Atwood 124). Janine’s body becomes a site that has been conquered by her Commander, the use of “pillage” by Offred referring to the open violence of routine rapes resulting in pregnancy. The women watch as Janine toils around, attempting to make the process more bearable, softly chanting words like “breathe” and “expel.” As Janine breathes in and out, the Handmaids match their chants to her breathing pattern, expanding the ritual into a communal act of birth, removing any individuality of Janine’s birthing process. Everyone in the room is a spectator of Janine’s, watching her every move as she intensely labors: “Our eyes are on Janine. In the dim light, in her white gown, she glows like a moon in cloud” (126). The collective gaze on Janine in her white gown signifies the end goal for Handmaid enlightenment, the epitomization of a successful, “safe” Handmaid in the regime, having fulfilled her biological and state-

⁶ In reference to “everyone”, Offred is indicating to the female population of Gilead, from Wives to Aunts to Marthas, as well as Handmaids who are required to be in attendance. Men are not permitted in the Birth room, and mobile doctors wait outside the home and are only permitted to enter in cases of medical emergencies that threaten the life of the child.

mandated duty. In contrast to the average red habit, the white gown worn by birth givers is meant to establish the blessed event of bringing new life by God's will, a repentance added to the Handmaid's list of atonement. She is not seen as an individual acting out self-agency, but as an incubator committing a sacred act to raise the state's birth rates. The bodily spectacle and witnessing of Janine's birth thus creates a communal discipline to aspire to, an angelical Handmaid spared from the atrocities of state violence.

In addition to this, the Wives' roles in the laboring process includes a simultaneous tea party celebration as the Handmaid labors, entering the room once active labor begins and mimicking the Handmaid's movements as if the Wife herself is giving birth. Adjusting herself above the Handmaid's head, she frames the Handmaid, claiming the act of birth without the burden of pregnancy and pain (Atwood 125). Immediately following the birth of the child, Janine is dismissed, having fulfilled her purpose and no longer serving any value. The spectatorship of her body shifts to the baby and Wife, who is congratulated and given credit for the birth. The echoes of value and contribution follow the excitement of the birth, etching a sense of failure amongst the group of observant Handmaids as they yearn for their own child—not for their own happiness, but their assured survival in never being exiled to the Colonies, a finite death sentence slowly mobilized on the female body. In the wake of excitement, the other Handmaids are faced with the grim reality that they are unprotected by their nonpregnant status and their approaching realities of becoming Unwomen. Now, the eye of the state moves back onto the nonpregnant Handmaids, creating a sense of self-consciousness in their own capabilities: "We might be bundles of red cloth. We ache. Each of us holds in her lap a phantom, a ghost baby. What confronts us . . . is our own failure" (Atwood 127). As a result of the constant pressure to procreate, the Handmaids collectively adhere to the psychological, omnipresent panopticism, self-regulating to desire for a child not of respective desire, but out of instinctual survival.

Rather than viewing a child a personal joy, the Handmaids view the child as a life vest that assures them a life free of untimely death. Their performance of the act of a "dutiful" Handmaid does not fall within their sense of self, but their sense of survival. Foucault asserts that this shift away from individuality is a direct result of surveillance mechanisms at the hands of the principle power, as constant observation allows for a deep analysis in behavioral structuring: "The Panopticon is a privileged place for experiments on men, and for analyzing with complete certainty the transformations that may be obtained from them . . . alter their behavior, impose upon them the methods he thinks best" (204). Thus, Birth Days not only serve as a grand celebration meant to publicize the acts of birth, but also to publicly create a sense of failure within Handmaids that have yet to procreate, forging a higher sense of determination to achieve pregnancy. Offred's consciousness of the altered behavioral experiments within the act of Birth Days is not only representative of her own psychological change, but over Handmaids as a collective, allowing the sociological imagination to reflect the relationship between the inner life of a protagonist and the "greater whole of social historical reality" (Hinchliffe 420). She does not desire another child' stuck within the

⁷ In reference to Offred's first child Hannah, kidnapped by Gilead Guardians during the coup d'état and sent to live with an unknown Commander and his Wife.

tyrannical regime, but knows that without proof of active fertility, her livelihood is at risk. The Handmaids become psychologically complicit in the systems that seek to keep them oppressed figures, reaffirming the tight hold of control in reconciling with the fertile function required of them to fulfill while self-regulating behaviors and isolation even amongst their own peers, complicating their own panoptic participation in their oppression (Keck 5).

V. Symbiotic Spectatorship

Extending further into the social aspects of panopticism beyond visual witness, panoptic surveillance within Gilead is equally present within the symbiotic relationship between Handmaids. Each Handmaid is assigned a fellow shopping and walking partner that is present with them at all times in public, daily tasks outside of the household; rather than companionship, each Handmaid is meant to keep one another under supervision. Offred asserts that while the state maintains its mandate of partners for protection, Handmaids are “well-protected” and likely the most protected social class due to their reproductive value. They are meant to serve as “spies” for each other, prohibiting dissident activity whilst away from the household (Atwood 19). The presence of panoptic “seeing” is perhaps most distinguishable in the Handmaid-Handmaid relationship that is of Offred’s relationship with her walking partner, Ofglen. At their first introduction, neither appears keen on creating any sort of bond—a phenomenon that stems from their shared performance of piety. Without knowing if their social spaces are safe to share their true opinions of the regime, they are forced to serve as devout mirrors that create emotional distance—Offred cannot speak her mind due to the “risk” of being reported, and neither can Ofglen: “She may be a real believer, a Handmaid in more than name. I can’t take the risk” (Atwood 19). Their programmed responses establish a robotic sense of self that is detached from meaningful conversation. Even if one side attempts in a friendly, non-programmed manner, the other distrusts their kind disposition as a “visibility trap” (Foucault 200). The visibility trap thus disengages any meaningful connection and discourages any form of coalition building against the regime: “The same technology that threatens the autonomy of the individual seems destined to frustrate attempts to re-establish community and shared responsibility because it destroys the essential components of trust and accountability” (Marks 23). The very proponents that produce an omniscient supervision on Handmaids become replicated within their own communities, promoting the isolation of one another on the basis of mistrust. On Ofglen, Offred states, “I think of her as a woman for whom every act is done for show, is acting rather than a real act. She does things to look good, I think. She’s out to make the best of it. But that is what I must look like to her as well. How can it be otherwise?” (Atwood 31). The closing sentence indicates that there is no circumstance in which a simple friendship does not oppose the regime. The Handmaids are given no choice but to perform. Isolated from one another, they are bound into calculated surveillance, keeping the regime in order. Foucault points directly to this isolation tactic, arguing that forms of confinement work to facilitate supervision and keep dissidence at a minimum: “From the point of view of the guardian, it is replaced by a multiplicity that can be numbered and supervised; from the point of view of the inmates, by a sequestered and observed solitude” (201). In a society where everyone operates as

a surveillance machine for the state, social barriers assure Gilead's power through forced self-regulation, even in perceived normalcy.

The isolating nature of the Handmaids' feminine performance becomes a burden that becomes heavy to hold, as there is only so much a Handmaid can do in terms of self-preservation; for Offred, it is in her orality. Her recording of her individual thoughts and opinions through the cassette tapes allows her some measure of control (Klarer 132). For Ofglen, it is speaking in coded language, testing to see who is "safe" and who is not. While Offred initially doesn't comprehend this coded language, her later remark speculating about God's omnipresent Eye raises enough trust in Offred to reluctantly reply to Ofglen that she does not believe God is truly omnipresent. With this pointed vulnerability, the women cross the invisible line together and grow beyond the mental, isolating panoptic schema. Despite Offred's eagerness to connect with another Handmaid, her paranoia of Ofglen as a potential undercover spy is still present in the narrative. She is reluctant to fully trust the other, but the dearth of human connection incites release from the internal, self-regulating prison: "It occurs to me that she may be a spy, a plant, set to trap me; such is the soil in which we grow. But I can't believe it; hope is rising in me, like sap in a tree. Blood in a wound" (Atwood 169). Following this breakthrough, Ofglen reveals to Offred that she is part of the resistance movement known as Mayday. Their vulnerability in this moment signifies a deeper connection beyond walking partners and surveillance chaperones, breaking apart from the self-induced Panopticon that seeks to oppress them. They become each other's closest companions until Ofglen's sudden replacement appears during a routine walk into town. Offred's paranoia returns when she is unable to ask about Ofglen's whereabouts to the "new" Ofglen: "How do I find out without showing too much concern? We aren't supposed to form friendships, loyalties, among one another" (283). The panoptic psyche returns as quickly as it was abandoned, and the symbiotic surveillance of Handmaids repeats itself in the recurring civil relationship. Offred questions the new Handmaid's dedication to the regime and tests with coded language, maintaining a distanced, albeit curious demeanor. New Ofglen (as referred to by Offred), either from true piety or panoptic fear, is steadfast in her commitment to the Handmaid performance, which causes Offred to probe her further. She thinks, "I should give it a week, two weeks, maybe longer, watch her carefully, listen for tones in her voice, unguarded words, the way Ofglen listened to me. Now that Ofglen is gone I am alert again" (Atwood 284). In true cyclical nature, the symbiotic and distanced relationship between Handmaids, the pious, panoptic mirrors remain unshattered, taut, and compliant to the regime, enforcing discipline and obedience within the Handmaid class.

VI. Complicity Within Self-Regulation

Through acts of self-preservation stemming from the regime's intentional isolation of Handmaids, Handmaids become, in part, complicit in the very regime that seeks to diminish and suppress them. Offred often references her own weakness and desire to "blend" into the background to avoid any sort of punishment, to keep in line with expected behavioral protocol: "I wish this story were different . . . I wish it showed me in a better light, if not happier, then at least more active, less hesitant" (Atwood 267). While Offred's act of recorded oral storytelling may be seen as an indicator of resistance against the regime, it is defiance

that leads to no action, and functions instead as an act of self-preservation and commitment to memory.

In her relationship with the first Ofglen, Offred insists that, while she was aware of Ofglen's dissidence, she did not partake in it and therefore is not guilty in the same aspect as Ofglen. As previously referenced, another key representation of Offred's self-regulated complicity is revealed after Ofglen's revelatory statement. While this interaction stirs hope in Offred, her initial reaction is repudiation, not anticipation. Offred's regulated panoptic self takes over, and she considers reporting Ofglen's dissidence to the regime:

In the past this would have been a trivial enough remark, a kind of scholarly speculation. Right now it's treason. I could scream. I could run away. I could turn from her silently, to show her I won't tolerate this kind of talk in my presence.

Subversion, sedition, blasphemy, heresy, all rolled in one. (Atwood 168–69)

Offred becomes the “stinking pious” for which she previously criticizes Ofglen, despite herself not truly believing in Gileadean doctrine (168). Her hypersensitive reaction stems from the widespread belief in the specter of a public display of a devout version of herself. Her symbiotic spectatorship of Ofglen allows Offred to wield a small but effectual power that has a potential to shift into complicity to the state. In turning in Ofglen to the authorities, she protects herself at the cost of maintaining her status as a prisoner in the Gileadean Panopticon.

Similarly, other transgressions against the regime that may be interpreted as resistance are defined by her physical body and uphold the institution of “system[s] of sex, power, and corruption” that serve to uphold Offred's representation as a mere vessel for childbirth and male sexual pleasure (Stillman and Johnson 76). This becomes apparent when she is given the opportunity to escape the regime. Offred sees it as a trivial decision, as her position in her secret affair with Nick is her sole desire: “‘We could get you out,’ she says. ‘We can get people out if we really have to, if they’re in danger. Immediate danger.’ The fact is that I no longer want to leave, escape, or cross the border to freedom. I want to be here, with Nick, where I can get at him” (Atwood 271). Offred's compliance with these “system[s] of sex, power, and corruption” becomes apparent through her disinterest within the narrative, leading Ofglen to lessen her campaign to acquire information on Offred's Commander, a high-ranking figure in Gilead's government (Stillman and Johnson 76). In this change of behavior, Offred finds a sense of pseudo-relief. Her inaction against the regime that she formerly wishes to escape from suggests a “social reward” that emphasizes and solidifies her complicity (Keck 4). Keck's essay provides a model in which inaction is still shaped as a complicit action, even under “undemocratic political conditions” where resistance is sensitive and costly; in the case of Offred, her complicity lies within her dissident behavior, opting for internal survival at the cost of her autonomy (4). Following Ofglen's disappearance, Offred grows increasingly paranoid throughout the shopping trip with New Ofglen, imagining a scenario in which she is interrogated and defiled by The Eyes. Here, she acknowledges both weakness and complicity, reaffirming her loyalty to only herself: “I'll say anything they like, I'll incriminate anyone. It's true, the first scream, whimper even, and I'll turn to jelly, I'll confess to any crime, I'll end up hanging from a hook on the Wall. Keep your head down,

I used to tell myself, and see it through” (Atwood 285). She returns to distrustful behavior, reverting any positive development made through her friendship with Ofglen. Even their apparent close relationship dissipates when Offred learns of Ofglen’s suicide, who opted to hang herself when she learned The Eyes had sent for her. Without an initial reaction of shock, disbelief, or grief, Offred thinks only of herself: “So she’s dead, and I am safe, after all. She did it before they came. I feel a great relief. I feel thankful to her. She has died so that I may live. I will mourn later” (286). Rather than mourning her only friend in the regime, Offred’s preoccupation with her own safety surpasses grief, viewing Ofglen’s death instead as a worthy cost to protect her own knowledge of the resistance (Narges & Mirzapour 8). Through these interactions and reconciliation with her resistance (or lack thereof), Offred is steadfast in her aim to survive the regime no matter the cost, including internalized regulation at the loss of herself.

VII. Conclusion

The Eyes of Gilead, in the Foucauldian framework, function as a panoptic system that regulates the complicity, discipline, and obedience of the citizens of Gilead, its tightest sector constricting the Handmaids’ reproductive body as Gilead’s most precious resource. Through the sectors of systemic, medical, and symbiotic surveillance, the multilayered intersection between state surveillance and the feminine body not only serves to regulate obedience and subservience, but to force women into a gendered performance of piety. It strips bodily autonomy, agency, and identity from them and reduces the body to a vessel whose value comes from its functional capabilities of reproduction. Moving beyond speculative fiction, this gendered reading of the female body as a surveilled object mirrors socially realistic notions of gender in dominant hierarchical patriarchies, imbuing the functional capabilities of the female body as both a necessary and exploited resource by ruling classes. In creating a wide sense of distrust amongst all subjects and social classes, the Gileadean regime consolidates its power with paranoia whilst simultaneously encouraging its use of the female body as birthing vessels. Its subjects are used as peer surveillance operatives, creating an isolating structure of learned disciplinary control that exists internally. Within a freer discourse amongst Handmaids and oppressed women within the regime alike, the personal and the structural are rediscovered, channeling effective modes of resistance against the suppressive Panopticon.

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Blank, Lovely, Mad: The Rhetoric of Negation, Abjection, and the Gaze of the Feminine Other in Jean Rhys' *Wide Sargasso Sea* and Leonard Woolf's "A Tale Told by Moonlight"

Pauline Menchavez

Existing at the intersections of race, gender, and colonialism, both Jean Rhys' novel *Wide Sargasso Sea* and Leonard Woolf's short story "A Tale Told by Moonlight" exemplify the reciprocal relationships between feminist, psychoanalytic, and postcolonial discourses in their interrogations of identity, power, and narrative authority. Doubly marginalized by the overlapping structures of imperialist and patriarchal domination, Rhys' Antoinette and Woolf's Celastinahami embody the tensions indicative of an emerging postcolonial sensibility of both gender and racial identity. Their lack of textual agency consequently highlights the psychological and cultural dissonance caused by these hegemonic ideologies. Reflected in the ambiguous and multiperspectival techniques of Rhys and Woolf, Antoinette and Celastinahami therefore also demonstrate how narratives do not merely delineate the realities of empire, but also have the power to both uphold and destabilize imperialist systems. As Rochester's perspective interrupts, fragments, and contests Antoinette's narration—and as Jessop's and Reynolds' colonial voices silence Celastinahami's native one—both *Wide Sargasso Sea* and "A Tale Told by Moonlight" position narration and perspective as sites of negotiation where narrative control becomes synonymous with agency and authority, demarcating who is permitted to speak, whose version of reality is valued, and who is rendered silent or unintelligible. Neither Antoinette, in her racial ambiguity and cultural hybridity, nor Celastinahami, in the affective unease she elicits from the narrators of her story, fit within the dominant colonial and patriarchal discourse, and therefore represent the multiplicity of identity and traumatic residues of imperialist violence that these structures refuse to integrate or acknowledge. Subsequently dismissed as mad, naive, or pitiful, they each embody Julia Kristeva's theory of the abject: a psychoanalytical, foundationally feminist concept that describes what must be expelled or excluded for a coherent sense of identity to be maintained. Discussed alongside David Spurr's idea of negation—in which he uses writing as a metaphor to explain how the Western gaze ascribes imperialist fantasies onto their colonized subjects, inevitably shaping and reinforcing imperial power—this paper explores how Antoinette and Celastinahami are discursively constructed through the imposing narratives of the Western male gaze, asserting that their resulting tragic ends demonstrate how narrative functions as oil for the gears of empire.

Viewing the construction of identity through the lenses of abjection and negation, however, requires understanding the influence of Jaques Lacan's theory of the gaze on both psychoanalysis and postcolonial discourses, particularly in their articulations of absence. In his lecture, "The Split Between the Eye and the Gaze," he describes "the gaze" as an ontological phenomenon wherein the subject is aware of the perception of others, resulting in an anxiety indicative of the subject's cognizance—though perhaps pre-linguistic or inarticulable sensation—of their lack or split from the symbolic order: "I see only from one point, but in my existence I am looked at from all sides" (72). Lacan uses the concept of mimicry to illustrate this idea, explaining that some animals evolve to imitate their environment, alluding to humanity's natural inclination to assimilate or dissolve into the visual field. However, mimicry is never a complete reproduction or exact replica—the eyes on the wings of a butterfly are an aesthetic performance of visibility, not true vision. For Lacan, this behavior signifies an existential submission of the subject to the gaze of the world—a point that the subject cannot master or control. Kristeva likewise writes in "Approaching Abjection" that "the abject simultaneously beseeches and pulverizes the subject," suggesting a tenuous relationship between the subject and the structures that define it: a liminal space where meaning collapses and identity is constituted of both attraction to and repulsion from that which threatens its coherence (5). This ambivalence echoes Lacan's gaze, in which the subject is interpellated by an external point of view that it cannot fully assimilate to or evade. Both Lacan and Kristeva gesture towards a fundamental absence experienced by the subject in relation to its encompassing structures. Lacan asserts that the subject's awareness of this lack causes anxiety due to their cognizance of the gaze, while Kristeva emphasizes the subject's complex, affective reaction to the abject as a confrontation with what they must expel in order to sustain a stable identity and psychological coherence.

Similarly, Spurr's postcolonial interpretation of negation highlights the tension between the colonial subject and dominant, imperialist structures by demonstrating how Western discourse systematically leverages this absence through rhetoric that defines the colonial subject precisely through what they lack under the scrutiny of the Western gaze. This process of negation "conceives of the Other as absence, emptiness, nothingness, or death," as a means of "conquering the space of consciousness with the exclusionary and divisive structures of representation" to "recapitulate the historical process of establishing and maintaining colonial rule" (Spurr 92-93). This concept aligns with Kristeva's notion of abjection, where the subject is expelled to preserve the dominant order, and with Lacan's gaze, where the subject is denied control from an outside perspective. These psychoanalytic and postcolonial processes coalesce in the marginalization of Antoinette and Celastinahami within their own narratives, revealing how negation and abjection sustain colonial power by defining who is permitted to exist meaningfully in the symbolic order, and who must be excluded from it.

Other scholars have also discussed Kristevan psychoanalytic theory in tandem with postcolonial themes to approach the writing of Rhys and Woolf, often focusing on the structure or critique of the narrative form itself. Kristy Butler, R. McClure Smith, and Teresa Winterhalter each use the intersections between psychoanalysis and postcoloniality in *Wide Sargasso Sea* to emphasize that Rhys' fragmented, ambiguous narrative technique

deconstructs Antoinette's conception as Bertha in *Jane Eyre*, and reimagines madness as colonial trauma to show how voice and identity are negotiated within the unstable structures of colonial rhetoric. In "Narrative Technique and the Rage for Order in *Wide Sargasso Sea*," Winterhalter, in particular, argues that the complex and ambiguous narration of the novel exemplifies the idea that giving voice to the colonial subject is a more nuanced endeavor than simply illuminating a specific perspective. Rhys' fragmented narrative intentionally challenges readers to also orient themselves within the unstable, tenuous space between the binaries of colonizer/colonized, male/female, and speech/silence, consequently demonstrating that the madness in the novel represents the destructive capabilities of being trapped within imposing binaries, of negotiating between the fascination and disgust for the abject. Winterhalter writes, "But it is 'the madwoman,' the person disempowered, or disoriented, by proclaimed difference, who becomes the victim of the process of definition," arguing that "codifying otherness" is the true perpetrator behind Antoinette's mental deterioration (227). Regarding Woolf's "A Tale Told by Moonlight," critics such as Anindyo Roy, Catherine Nelson-McDerMott, and Douglass Kerr highlight Woolf's subtle commentary on the imperialist project via his use of narration and the ambiguous death of Celastinahami. Kerr, for example, writes in "Stories of the East: Leonard Woolf and the Genres of Colonial Discourse," that Woolf presents "the orient as a spectacle of abjection" through the different genres of his colonial writing: letters, diary entries, novels, and short stories (263). He emphasizes the distance between observer and subject that Woolf creates between the native subject and himself and his narrators, reading this distance as an intentional critique on the illusion of colonial expertise and control.

As the colonial rhetoric of negation depends on the colonizer's ability to simultaneously erase the colonized subject's substance and have them invest in their own abjection, Antoinette and Celastinahami represent anomalies that threaten to destabilize the symbolic structures that define the racial and gendered colonial order. As a Creole woman, Antoinette's hybridity and ambiguity deviate from the expectations of the dominating structures, hindering her ability to participate in mimicry, and fit within society's predetermined narratives. The tension between her multiplicity and the expectations of the gaze reveal her inability to submit to the dominating, colonial and patriarchal systems, leading to her perceived madness. Celastinahami, a Sinhalese woman, however, dies in Western mimicry, highlighting the instability of colonial hegemony. Discarded and rejected by Reynolds, the state of her body "bobbing up and down in her stays and pink skirt and white stockings and shoes" reflects the violence of colonialism's penetration, showing that submission to the gaze also has catastrophic consequences (Woolf 14). Exemplary of the passive, empty vessel in which the Western gaze fills with their imperialist fantasies, she contains the competing depictions of Reynolds' fetishized, sentimental idea of the East as well as Jessop's more cynical view of the inevitable failure of the East to fulfill Western, imperialist desire. As figures who can neither be fully assimilated into the symbolic order of colonial discourse nor completely expelled from it, I argue that Antoinette and Celastinahami's fates of madness and death therefore illustrate the structural instability of the imperialist project. Through their narrative marginalization and representational fragmentation, Rhys and Woolf expose the ontological violence embedded in colonial, patriarchal systems of meaning, where the

object is not only what is cast out, but what returns to haunt the boundaries of empire as the negated, colonized, feminine Other gazes back.

Predetermination and Sensational Stories

Wide Sargasso Sea offers a postcolonial prequel to Charlotte Brontë's *Jane Eyre*, rewriting the story of Bertha—the “madwoman in the attic” and Mr. Rochester's first wife—as she navigates the tumultuous landscape of racial tension, cultural dislocation, and gendered oppression. Known then as Antoinette Cosway, the novel begins in her perspective and moves from a childhood marked by loss and ostracization to her precarious marriage to an unnamed Englishman, implicitly presumed to be Rochester. As Rhys ambiguously transitions to and from Antoinette's, Rochester's, and later, Grace Poole's perspectives, she constructs a narrative structure that reflects the image Antoinette associates with herself: a “white cockroach,” an anomaly to both the Jamaican natives and the English colonizers, a pest and a spectacle (20). As Winterhalter notes, Rhys' intentional narrative disorientation creates an apparatus for readers to be mindful of a “middle space” where the stories of the narrators “center upon the insufficiency of their preconceived notions of order” (220). The fragmented and shifting points of view offer readers different versions of reality, especially in regards to information about Antoinette's possible madness. Daniel Cosway, for example, corresponds with Rochester via letters asserting the madness of both Antoinette and her mother. He writes:

This young Mrs. Cosway is worthless and spoilt, she can't lift a hand for herself and soon the madness that is in her, and in all these white Creoles, come out. She shut herself away, laughing and talking to nobody as many can bear witness. As for the little girl, Antoinetta, as soon as she can walk, she hid herself if she see anybody. (88)

In this account, Daniel associates madness with both their race and their femininity. First, he implies that all white Creoles are predisposed to madness; second, he critiques Mrs. Cosway and Antoinette's refusal to socialize, highlighting their skepticism of others and insinuating that this behavior is not befitting of a woman. He interprets their dispositions as a refusal to adhere to the social conventions of femininity; therefore, they must be mad. His adverse reaction to these identities—and his codification of these characteristics as ‘other’ and consequently ‘mad’—also indicate an abjection of these qualities from the dominant, colonial systems. This suggests that Antoinette's madness and marginalization relies on her split from the symbolic order.

These sensationalist letters from Daniel color Rochester's already precarious view of Antoinette and their marriage. As a second son with limited inheritance prospects, Rochester agrees to marry Antoinette because it offers him financial security and social advancement; however, racial and cultural differences eventually give way to suspicion of Antoinette and her family history and quickly lead to distrust. Exacerbated and reified by Daniel's letters, Rochester grapples with what to believe. He contemplates,

How can one discover truth I thought that thought led me nowhere. No one would tell me the truth. Not my father nor Richard Mason, certainly not the girl I had

married. I stood still, so sure I was being watched that I looked over my shoulder. Nothing but the trees and the green light under the trees (94).

As Rochester considers the ramifications of his marriage to Antoinette, he turns to the perspectives and expectations of his father and Mr. Mason—Antoinette’s stepfather who offered him a sizable dowry for her hand—unsure of who or what to believe. Still, even as he distrusts the white, male figures in his life, he seems to distrust Antoinette even more. In this deliberation, he displays an awareness of the colonial, patriarchal structures he abides by, the same ones that Antoinette defies, and therefore exemplifies the anxiety described by Lacan’s gaze. Christophine affirms this and explains to Antoinette that he is “not a bad man, even if he love money, but he hear so many stories he don’t know what to believe. That is why he keep you away” (103). Here, she asserts that Rochester’s suspicion of Antoinette and resulting anxiety stem from his inability to reconcile Antoinette’s identity, and therefore his marriage to her, within the conventional systems of colonial patriarchy. His failure to navigate the conflicting narratives about Antoinette—her lineage, madness, and otherness—mirrors the Lacanian experience of being overwhelmed by the gaze: a subjectivity destabilized by being seen, judged, and defined from multiple perspectives. As a result, he retreats into the dominant structures and symbolic order he seeks to uphold. His suspicion of Antoinette and his subsequent cruelty emerge not out of reasoned judgment, but from colonial logic that frames Antoinette’s difference as a threat to society’s coherence.

The competing narratives surrounding Antoinette due to her racial and cultural ambiguity, as well as her femininity, lead Rochester to distance himself from her, pushing her further into the periphery, eventually reaching the status of abjection. Rochester describes:

I hated the mountains and the hills, the rivers and the rain. I hated the sunsets of whatever color, I hated its beauty and its magic and the secret I would never know. I hated its indifference and the cruelty which was part of its loveliness. Above all I hated her. For she belonged to the magic and loveliness. She had left me thirsty and all my life would be thirst and longing for what I had lost before I found it. (156)

Echoing the hatred and beauty he associates with both the Jamaican landscape and Antoinette, he reveals a frustration with her liminality and elusiveness: a figure he cannot control. Even as he unconsciously recognizes the fractures and instability of the patriarchal, colonial symbolic order, his integration into those dominant systems prevent him from acknowledging this rupture—as evident in his complex, affective comparison between Antoinette and the landscape through which he displaces his anxieties onto Antoinette, casting her as both enchanting and dangerous. This association leads him to a symbolic recoil, wherein abjection becomes the mechanism through which he attempts to restore order. Consequently, Rochester’s aversion is not only personal but structural, and Antoinette then embodies the colonial consciousness he cannot master—a haunting presence and reminder of the limits of imperial logic and the fragility of masculine authority. The narrative of Antoinette’s madness—constructed through Daniel’s letters to Rochester and perpetuated as Rochester attempts to restore symbolic order by asserting his dominance over Antoinette—is also reflected in the fluidity of narration in the novel’s structure, highlighting

narration as an agent of empire. Susceptible to the predetermined identities prescribed to her by colonialist and patriarchal structures, Antoinette's inability to adhere to any acceptable version of reality leads to her abjection.

Negated by both Reynolds and Jessop, Celastinahami, too, more explicitly demonstrates the violence of narrative and the role sensationalist stories play in the construction and perpetuation of imperialism. "A Tale Told by Moonlight" opens with Jessop's—a hardened, blunt, and seemingly jaded novelist—narration of the marriage between Reynolds, a boyish and naive European novelist, and Celastinahami, a Sinhalese woman they meet at a brothel. While Reynolds views Celastinahami as a vessel through which he can live his exotic fantasies of the East, Jessop regards her as representative of the inevitable failure of the East to fulfill Western, imperialist desire because she is unable to satisfy Reynolds. Celastinahami, although she tries to mimic the role of an ideal wife, cannot participate in the conventional, English structures of femininity. Jessop's dehumanizing rhetoric describes her as one of those "slow, big-eyed women of the East" whose gaze is comparable to that of "an animal, dumb and stupid and beautiful," and whose love was like "that of an animal, as a bitch loves her master," that she could only enact "the love of a slave" (12–13). Discarded of her humanity, this lack of substance ultimately prevents her from successfully playing the role of an appropriate wife for Reynolds. Evident in the Western mimicry they find her body in, Celastinahami's death signifies the culmination of her failed assimilation into the colonial, patriarchal order. Her body, adorned in garments meant to indicate domestic propriety and civility, instead becomes a grotesque spectacle—an object of pity and dismissal, stripped of subjectivity, abject, discarded, and effectively written out of the narrative.

Each perspective reduces her to a blank slate on which to project colonialist desires. Reynolds' overt sentimentality and Jessop's more subtle longing for an Eastern fantasy therefore present two sides of the same coin, with both projections negating the humanity of the Other and reducing the native to an object within the imperialist narrative. Spurr states that "the relation between absence and desire, or between nothingness and imagination, has to do with the very nature of writing," and Jessop's less romanticized approach to storytelling does not spare him from participating in the inherent sentimentality of narrative that contributes to the colonialist structures of his time (93). Mediated through the gazes of Reynolds and Jessop, Celastinahami's voicelessness, mimicry, and death gesture towards the entanglement of narrative and imperial power—a system in which the colonized woman is both an object of desire and evidence of its failure. Her death more closely offers narrative convenience rather than an effective conclusion, as its cause remains ambiguous. While Celastinahami is largely regarded by both Jessop and Reynolds as a blank space, her death uncomfortably resonates with the listeners to Jessop's story. Nelson-McDerMott, for example, also argues that the contrasting perspectives in narration regarding conceptions of the East in Jessop and Reynolds result in an ambiguous, affective, unresolved tension that leaves the reader unsure of who the real victim of the story is—Jessop, in experience-hardened cynicism and bitter detachment, Reynolds, in the shattering of his idea of love and exoticism; or Celastinahami, in her dehumanization and death. She asserts that the dismissal of Celastinahami's death by the listeners of Jessop's tale as "sentimentality" characterizes them as "emotionally viscous" (200). Therefore, as the imperialist cause of her death goes

unacknowledged, Celastinahami becomes a symbol of abjection, of a figure who threatens the coherence of the narrative, colonial, symbolic order.

“Big-Eyed Women”: Gazing Back

Although both Antoinette and Celastinahami experience marginalization within their own narratives, they leave traces of resistance whose ghosts haunt the unconscious of their oppressors. Reynolds, for example, is first attracted to the “deep, dark and melancholy” of her eyes “which looked as if they knew and understood and felt everything in the world” (9). Rochester, on the other hand, appears averse to Antoinette’s gaze: “She lifted her eyes. Blank lovely eyes. Mad eyes. A mad girl” (154). These contrasting instances in which the Western, male colonizer stares into the eyes of the negated, abjected, colonized, feminine Other reveal the unstable power dynamics required of the colonial symbolic order. Reynolds projects depth and mystique onto Celastinahami’s gaze, romanticizing her unknowability; yet, this projection dissolves under the weight of his own unmet expectations. Rochester, however, reads Antoinette’s gaze as threatening, unmooring, and unintelligible, indicating to him a madness that he must contain and silence. In both cases, the colonizer confronts a gaze that disrupts the illusion of mastery, momentarily unsettling their sense of control. Though lacking narrative agency, the eyes of Antoinette and Celastinahami function as visual ruptures, penetrating and exposing the fragility of the colonial imagination—sites where the Other silently speaks back.

The difference in agency between Antoinette and Celastinahami, however, lies in the cognizance of their own abjection. While Celastinahami passively succumbs to the negation and abjection by the gaze of the colonizer, Antoinette seems to use abjection as a means of transcendence. Towards the end of the novel, she contemplates on her own reflection:

There is no looking glass here and I don’t know what I am like now. I remember watching myself brush my hair and how my eyes looked back at me. The girl I saw was myself yet not quite myself. Long ago when I was a child and very lonely I tried to kiss her. But the glass was between us—hard, cold, and misted over with my breath. Now they have taken everything away. What am I doing in this place and who am I? (162)

The presence of a mirror as a barrier suggests that Antoinette is unable to escape the awareness of her own otherness, as well as the impossibility for reconciliation of her racial and cultural hybridity. The lack of a mirror in the attic Rochester locks her away in underscores her negation and abjection as he seeks to conceal her in order to maintain the coherence of colonial, patriarchal order. Yet, it is in this space that Antoinette leverages this abjection as she realizes the inescapability of her own marginalized state: “What am I doing in this place and who am I?” Unlike Celastinahami, whose story ends in silent death, Antoinette’s ends in a fire of her own doing. Kristeva writes:

...one can understand that [abjection] is experienced at the peak of its strength, when that subject, weary of fruitless attempts to identify with something on the outside, finds the impossible within; when it finds the impossible constitutes its very *being*, that it is none other than the abject. (5)

As the definition of her identity is caught within the constant flux of narrative perspective, the deterioration of Antoinette's sanity reflects the weariness that Kristeva mentions. The oscillation and narrative exhaustion she experiences leads to her eventual cognizance of the impossibility for her to exist within the hegemonic structures and ideologies of colonialism, of her own abjection.

Antoinette and Celastinahami leave vestiges of resistance—echoes that cannot be realized within a dominant, patriarchal and colonial order—but that gesture towards a postcolonial sensibility. Through narrative fragmentation and perspectival ambiguity, Rhys and Woolf reveal and critique the methods of abjection and negation that colonial discourse uses to perpetuate systems of oppression via the feminine, colonized figures of Antoinette and Celastinahami. Informed by Kristeva's theory of abjection, Lacan's gaze, and Spurr's concept of negation, both *Wide Sargasso Sea* and "A Tale Told by Moonlight" expose the psychological and discursive mechanisms through which imperial structures maintain power: by conceiving of the Other as empty, unknowable, or mad. Still, Antoinette's conscious confrontation with her own marginalization and fragmented identity, as well as the haunting presence of Celastinahami's looming cause of death, demonstrate that what is cast out inevitably returns. The feminine Other therefore resists through presence, through the affective, unsettling gaze that exposes the colonial symbolic order as a likewise fantastical enterprise.

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“The Monster Who Walks Upright”: The Black Ape-Man Archetype and the Lynching Narrative of *Murders in the Rue Morgue*

Ava DeVries

Loosely adapted from Edgar Allan Poe’s 1841 short story of the same name, Robert Florey’s Universal horror film *Murders in the Rue Morgue* (1932) furthers the paranoid racial messaging set forth in the original plot. In Poe’s story, a mother and daughter are brutally murdered inside their Paris home. Police are unable to solve the crime, as such a murder would require inhuman strength and agility; C. Auguste Dupin, the story’s pre-Sherlock-Holmes detective prototype, eventually deduces that the murderer was an orangutan who escaped from captivity. In the film adaptation, a mad scientist named Dr. Mirakle kidnaps women and fatally injects them with the blood of his captive gorilla, Erik, in an attempt to prove man’s evolutionary proximity to apes. Invoking much greater personal stakes than in the original story, Dupin must rescue his own fiancée, Camille, from both Dr. Mirakle and the ape.

In her influential reading of Poe’s story, Elise Lemire argues that “The Murders in the Rue Morgue” leveraged the racist association between apes and Black men and reinforced white readers’ anxieties surrounding interracial sex. The 1932 film makes that fear even more explicit; indeed, the film functions as a lynching narrative, coding Erik as a dangerous Black man who sexually desires a white woman and will harm anyone who gets in his way. I examine Erik as a representation of the derogatory “Black ape-man” archetype, which both resulted from and furthered the widespread belief that Black men were evolutionarily similar to primates and therefore innately prone to raping white women. I argue that Erik’s desire for Camille and Dr. Mirakle’s forceful injection of ape blood into white women represent interracial rape and miscegenation;¹ in other words, the horror of the film is rooted in the prejudicial fear of bestial Black male sexuality and of “Black blood” contaminating white female purity. As a result of this transgression of racial and sexual boundaries, Erik’s death at Dupin’s hand functions as a symbolic act of lynching, restoring hegemonic order and reaffirming the notion of a racial hierarchy. The film denigrates Black bodies as subhuman, savage, and driven by animal instinct. Ultimately, *Murders in the Rue Morgue* confirms its

contemporaneous white audience's fear of miscegenation and endorses the necessity of lynchings to protect white women's sexual virtue.

Poe's short story invokes the erroneous but commonplace nineteenth-century belief that apes were more closely evolutionarily linked to Black people than to white people. Tommy Lott writes that this myth began during the Enlightenment period, when the concept of the "great chain of being"—a hierarchical structure of the natural world which positioned white men at the top—was popular (7-8). Naturalists sought to identify the "intermediary" or "missing link" in the chain between white people and primates; many posited that Black people were this missing link (Lott 8). In an attempt to corroborate this belief, eighteenth- and nineteenth-century scientists claimed that the "facial angles" of primates and Black people resembled each other more closely than those of white people (Lemire 185). To further rationalize and reinforce their ideology, as Lemire writes, "Blacks were repeatedly drawn in profile with exaggerated facial angles by scientists and artists alike in order to denigrate them for their supposed relationship to nonhuman primates" (185). In the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, developments in these ideas led to the Darwinian classification of "primates as the highest animals and black people as the lowest humans," a belief that was used to rationalize a racial hierarchy by "appeal[ing] to the natural order" (Lott 8-9). As far back as the seventeenth century, travel accounts by white naturalists perpetuated the myth that apes were "extremely libidinous with a preference for human females," which supported the idea that Black male sexuality was animalistic and threatening to white women (Lott 9). Consequently, popular media often depicted Black characters as ape-like in appearance and behavior, and sometimes, apes were used as a stand-in for bestial, violent, and lustful Black men.² Thus, the Black ape-man archetype was born.

In "The Murders in the Rue Morgue," as Lemire argues, Poe draws on these familiar stereotypes and "raises the specter of interracial sex" between Black men and white women (195). The ape enters the women's bedroom and kills them in their nightgowns before shoving one of the bodies up a chimney. According to Lemire, the description of a wild ape enacting such violence toward white women—in particular, surprising them in the intimate location of their bedroom and simulating forceful penetration with the body in the chimney—evoke images of interracial rape, reinforcing the harmful stereotype that "[w]hite women were at risk when in proximity to black men because these men were animals who, like the animal to whom they were supposedly related, had monstrous sexual desires" (195-96). Melissa N. Stein discusses the stereotypical view of black men as sexually aggressive in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. She writes that nineteenth-century American medical scientists "attempt[ed] to prove that racial hierarchy was biological and permanent" and characterized Black men as "overly libidinous and aggressive, prone to racially specific perversion that drove them to rape white women" (Stein 217-18). These scientists "explained black men's supposed propensity toward rape as rooted in their biology," an innate drive that marked them as a sexual threat (Stein 220). At the time, as Lemire writes, both Black people and primates were thought to sexually desire "the women above them in the Chain of Being," and "any reference to primates instantly conjured up notions of interspecies rape" (190). Although this myth began when naturalists erroneously claimed that primates sometimes tried to rape and mate with African women, it eventually expanded to include white women (Lemire 190).

In other words, when “The Murders in the Rue Morgue” was first published, Poe and his white readers would have readily associated apes and Black men alike with sexual violence toward white women.

The Black ape-man archetype persisted and flourished in popular culture well into the twentieth century, particularly in film. For example, the original *King Kong* came out in 1933, only a year after the release of Florey’s *Rue Morgue*. Both films see a monstrous Black ape-man taken from an exoticized non-Western environment and brought into a Western city, where he kidnaps the object of his sexual desire—a white woman—and kills anyone who tries to stop him. Thus, both films also reinforce racial paranoia surrounding interracial rape, portraying Black male sexuality as an imminent danger to the sanctity of white womanhood.

Rue Morgue retains Poe’s setting of nineteenth-century Paris, though the lead cast did not attempt to cover their American accents, negating any distance Florey may have attempted to create from the current American political moment. In the opening scene, medical student Pierre Dupin (Leon Ames) and his fiancée Camille L’Espanaye (Sidney Fox) attend a carnival and marvel at the sideshow acts, many of which center exoticized nonwhite people, such as sexualized Arab dancers and “bloodthirsty” Native American men. The final attraction they encounter is “Erik the ape-man,” a caged gorilla exhibited by the mad scientist Dr. Mirakle (Bela Lugosi). The barker advertises Erik as “The monster who walks upright and speaks a language even as you and I. The ruler of the jungle, whose giant hands can tear a man in half [...] The beast with a human soul” (00:04:30–00:04:54). This description positions Erik as somewhere between animal and man, but emphasizes his brutality above all. Dr. Mirakle tells the audience that he is attempting to further evolutionary theory and prove the “kinship” between humans and apes by mixing Erik’s blood with “the blood of man” (00:10:03–00:10:20). After the show, when the couple approaches his cage, Erik is entranced by Camille and tries to attack Dupin, suggesting that he views Dupin as a sexual competitor. Upon observing Erik’s attraction to Camille, Dr. Mirakle instructs his henchman, Janos (Noble Johnson), to follow her home. Notably, Janos is also a Black man—listed in the credits as “Janos, The Black One”—and the film denigrates him, like Erik, as less-than-human. He walks hunched over with his mouth slightly agape and remains mute for nearly the entire film, only speaking one word to warn Dr. Mirakle of “police!” (00:54:37). Janos is blindly obedient to Dr. Mirakle throughout the film, conforming to a different stereotype of the Black man as docile, subservient laborer; his animalistic characterization further dehumanizes Black men within the film.

Shortly thereafter, the viewer learns that Dr. Mirakle has been kidnapping white sex workers and injecting them with Erik’s blood in a series of fatal experiments. After witnessing Erik’s response to Camille at the carnival, Dr. Mirakle sets his sights on Camille as his next subject. Dupin examines the bodies of the three deceased women which were dumped in a river, perplexed by the injection markings on their arms. He discovers that they did not drown, but died after being injected with ape blood. Meanwhile, Dr. Mirakle visits Camille’s house, but when he is unable to convince her to leave with him, he encourages Erik to abduct her. Erik then climbs in through Camille’s window, kills her mother, and carries her off to Dr. Mirakle. Dupin, having figured out that Dr. Mirakle’s experiments caused the other women’s deaths, discovers Camille’s disappearance and leads the police to Dr. Mirakle’s

laboratory. The police break in, shooting Janos in the process, but Erik kills Dr. Mirakle and escapes with Camille. Dupin, the police, and a mob of townspeople follow Erik as he runs across rooftops holding Camille. Dupin finally shoots Erik and rescues Camille. The film caters to the audience's prejudiced fear of the Black ape-man's desire for a white woman as well as the horror of their blood literally being mixed. Because the film—and its source material—were produced at a time when white Americans associated both apes and Black men with a supposed innate and violent desire for white women, it is clear that *Rue Morgue* works to amplify the audience's paranoia surrounding miscegenation and interracial rape.

The character of Dr. Mirakle is a particularly important addition to the film when considering these prevalent fears of miscegenation. In Poe's story, the orangutan escapes from a sailor who captured it, transported it across the sea with plans to sell it, and kept it in line by the use of a whip. This clearly evokes an image of the sailor as a slave trader, and the orangutan as an enslaved Black man whose escape poses a threat to surrounding white people, a parallel that is only made more explicit when the sailor is referred to as the orangutan's "master" (9, 39). Florey does away with the sailor in his adaptation, and instead substitutes the mad scientist figure of Dr. Mirakle. The film's nineteenth-century setting and Jim-Crow-era release allows for a dual reading of Dr. Mirakle's character: he is a vilified figurehead of both the abolitionist movement and of the white Americans who opposed segregation and anti-miscegenation laws in the twentieth century.

At the carnival, as Dr. Mirakle unveils the caged ape Erik, he tells his audience: "I am not exhibiting a freak, a monstrosity of nature, but a milestone in the development of life. The shadow of Erik the ape hangs over us all. The darkness before the dawn of man [...] Listen to him, brothers and sisters. He is speaking to you. Can you understand what he says, or have you forgotten?" (00:06:13–00:07:16). Dr. Mirakle claims that he has "relearned" Erik's language and he translates the ape's story for the audience: "My home is in the African jungle, where I lived with my father and my mother and my brothers and sisters. But I was captured by a band of hairless white apes and carried away to a strange land. I'm in the prime of my strength. And I am lonely" (00:07:18–00:08:13). As an evolutionary scientist, Dr. Mirakle disturbs his white carnival audience by insisting upon their proximity to apes and thus unsettling their hegemonically dominant position in the racial hierarchy. By using language such as "brothers and sisters," comparing white men to "hairless white apes," and insisting that their shared language is merely forgotten, Dr. Mirakle works to erase the perceived distance between white people and primates—and thus between white and Black people. The audience's discomfort is heightened when Dr. Mirakle announces his plans to advance evolutionary theory: "I tell you, I will prove your kinship with the ape. Erik's blood shall be mixed with the blood of man" (00:10:03–00:10:20).

Dr. Mirakle insists not only on breaking down the notions of a strict hierarchy of species and races, but also on initiating miscegenation between the Black ape-man and white women. Nineteenth-century anti-abolitionists saw the "abolitionist directive to socially interact with blacks" as "a directive to 'amalgamate'" (Lemire 195–96), and Dr. Mirakle is a personification of these anti-abolitionist fears. Jessica Metzler similarly refers to Dr. Mirakle as an "agent of miscegenation, the third-person enabling role often applied to nineteenth century abolitionists" (38). In the film's original screenplay, Metzler notes that the ape was

explicitly said to mate with a human woman (40). Though the direct references were cut, “interspecies sex is still suggested throughout the film,” and Dr. Mirakle encourages Erik’s desire for Camille while also facilitating the literal mixing of their blood (Metzler 40).

Metzler’s identification of Dr. Mirakle as a villainized abolitionist figure coheres with the film’s nineteenth-century setting; however, to the film’s contemporaneous audience, his character might also translate to a white man opposing Jim Crow laws. Metzler writes:

By the 1930s, a social order that placed white Americans above black American Others in an artificially imposed hierarchy was firmly entrenched and shored up by legally condoned discrimination, and antimiscegenation laws existed in thirty states. Holding the potential to unsettle such racial divisions and the hierarchies built upon them, miscegenation served as a lingering site of fascination and anxiety. (33)

Within both the film’s diegesis and the context of its release, Dr. Mirakle represents a threat to the racial hierarchy by facilitating miscegenation between the Black ape-man and helpless white women. As a “mad” evolutionary scientist, he jeopardizes the firmly established social order by attempting to prove the precariously close connection white people have to the Black ape-man in the “chain of being.” As a consequence of his transgressions of racial boundaries, Dr. Mirakle is ultimately killed by Erik. His death functions as a warning to white viewers to oppose social integration with Black people: because of his proximity to and kinship with the dangerous Black ape-man, Dr. Mirakle is fated to die when Erik inevitably rebels against him.

In its portrayal of Dr. Mirakle’s experiments and Erik’s lust toward Camille, *Rue Morgue* strongly alludes to interracial rape. Metzler identifies Dr. Mirakle’s “forcibl[e]” injection of ape blood into a sex worker (Arlene Francis) as a depiction of nonconsensual miscegenation which results in “mixed blood” (40). Dr. Mirakle and the sex worker are both white, but his phallic syringe and involuntary insertion of Erik’s DNA portrays him as the agent through which interracial rape occurs. In this scene, the woman, wearing only her undergarments, is restrained in a manner that calls to mind both crucifixion and sexual bondage; such religious imagery emphasizes the transgressive nature of Dr. Mirakle’s experiments. Dr. Mirakle has seemingly already injected her with ape blood and she is crying in pain from its effects; she struggles and screams as Dr. Mirakle takes a blood sample from her to test the result of his experiment. Looking at her blood under a microscope, he is enraged to find “clots” and “black spots,” which he declares is a result of her previous sexual transgressions: “You—your blood is rotten—black as your sins. You cheated me. Your beauty was a lie!” (00:16:47–00:19:26). As he berates her, she falls silent and dies. Dr. Mirakle believes that her death—and the failure of his experiment—is due to her lack of sexual purity; however, the inclusion of “black spots” in her blood suggest that the actual cause was, as Metzler phrases it, the act of “sacreligious and abnormal miscegenation” (40). Still, Dr. Mirakle decides to target a more idealized, sexually pure white woman, villainizing him in the eyes of the audience even more than if he continued to enact harm on sex workers.

The film heavily emphasizes Camille’s racial and sexual purity in order to make the notion of miscegenation more horrific. Indeed, her sexual virtue is sometimes directly conflated with her whiteness. Early on in the film, Dupin waxes poetic to Camille on her

mother's balcony: "Camille, I love you. Let me look at you. You're like a flower: *soft* and *fragrant*, *pure* and *beautiful*. And you're like a star, too. A *white* morning star" (00:13:45-00:14:05; emphasis added). In other words, Camille is the very ideal of white, delicate femininity. This scene also directly contrasts Dupin's love for Camille against Erik's lust for her, as it follows the scene at the carnival in which Erik takes Camille's white bonnet—as Metzler frames it, "a marker of white, delicate femininity"—and attacks Dupin for "com[ing] too close to his prize" (38). Camille is the object of both Dupin's and Erik's gaze in these back-to-back scenes, but the film portrays Dupin's desire as wholesome and romantic and Erik's as lecherous and harmful. During the balcony scene, Dr. Mirakle spies on the couple from below and hears Dupin's praise of Camille's "soft[ness]," "pur[ity]," "beaut[y]," and "white[ness]." It is immediately after he leaves Camille's house that Dr. Mirakle kidnaps the sex worker, injects her with Erik's blood, and subsequently rebukes her for her "black" blood. To Dr. Mirakle, Camille is the ideal candidate for his experiments because of her perceived purity. Unlike the sex worker he kills earlier in the film, Camille is not "black" under her white skin; her beauty is not "a lie." It's not entirely clear why Dr. Mirakle attributes the failure of his experiment to the woman's perceived lack of virtue. However, the contrast between Camille and the sex worker does serve a very specific purpose: while the film's white audience may be less offended by the idea of miscegenation occurring with a woman they already believed to be a sexual transgressor, the idea of it occurring with an idealized upper-class white woman such as Camille would be horrifying.

After his failed experiment with the sex worker, Dr. Mirakle arrives at Camille's residence, attempting to seduce Camille on Erik's behalf: "He talks only of you. He can't forget you. There is something you must know" (00:41:00-00:42:13). When she turns him away and shuts the door, Dr. Mirakle returns to his carriage, where Erik is waiting. As Camille prays in front of a crucifix in her bedroom, Dr. Mirakle encourages Erik to climb into her window, crossing the closed boundary of her home—a symbolic act of penetration which foregrounds the threat of rape. Erik enters Camille's bedroom as she sleeps; here, Camille is at her most vulnerable. The film's liberal use of Christian imagery lends itself to Camille's characterization as the embodiment of purity. She is almost always seen wearing a cross around her neck, and in this scene, a crucifix hangs illuminated on the wall over her sleeping body as Erik approaches. Just before she wakes, the shadow of Erik's outstretched hand looms over Camille, briefly darkening the appearance of her pale skin. She awakens, screams, and faints in horror, the epitome of a helpless white damsel in distress. When Camille's mother rushes into the room, Erik attacks and kills her, presumably for getting in the way of his kidnapping or rape of Camille. By the time Dupin and the neighbors break down the door, Erik has shoved Camille's mother's body up the chimney and carried Camille through the window to Dr. Mirakle's carriage.

As Dupin and the police approach Dr. Mirakle's lab, the doctor tells Erik that Camille's blood is "perfect" (00:54:30-00:54:37). He kneels by her unconscious body and caresses her; Erik, in his cage, chatters in excitement or anger. When Dr. Mirakle lets Erik out of his cage, the ape-man strangles the doctor, just as he had tried to strangle Dupin at the carnival. For the second time, Erik displays aggression toward a white man whom he perceives as a sexual competitor. While the violence toward white women in Poe's story is simply a mystery for

Dupin to solve because he does not know the victims personally, the film positions Erik as a rival to Dupin by involving Camille. In both iterations, the character of the Black ape-man signifies fears of interracial rape, but the film accentuates the conflict between the white male protagonist and the Black ape-man who undermines his sexual authority.

As Dupin and the police break in, Erik picks up the unconscious Camille and carries her onto the roof. Neighbors from the surrounding houses gather in the street and follow him from below. The women scream, the men jeer and point; it seems the entire town has gathered to watch the spectacle unfold, just as the white spectators paid to observe the sensationalized exhibition of racial difference at the carnival. Dupin seizes a policeman's gun and climbs onto the rooftops, pursuing Erik to a dead end at the edge of the river. Erik sets Camille down and looms over Dupin, who then fatally shoots him. Dupin pulls Camille up and into his arms while the crowd cheers below; in a struggle over the white woman's virtue, the white male hero triumphs over the Black ape-man, restoring hegemonic order.

This ending predates the incredibly similar final sequence of *King Kong*, in which another Black ape-man carries another white woman to the top of a building before being shot down. Lott aptly describes the final scene of *King Kong* as a "symbolic lynching scenario" (10). He writes that "lynchings of black men have been rationalized in the social consciousness as punishment for insolence, for violence toward whites, and gained a special justification as revenge for sexual transgressions against white women" (Lott 10). Similarly, Stefanie Affeldt writes that the "climate of lynchings" at the time of *King Kong*'s release inevitably "connected it to the 'black beast rapist discourse' that 'rationalized white lynchings of black men as a moral duty to protect white womanhood'" (Hill qtd. in Affeldt 141). In both *King Kong* and *Rue Morgue*, the Black ape-man poses a violent threat to the safety and sexual purity of the white woman, which justifies the necessity of his equally violent death. In *King Kong*, the U.S. military executes the Black ape-man; however, in *Rue Morgue*, Dupin takes matters into his own hands and literally seizes the means to kill from the largely unhelpful police. The crowd which cheers him on evokes the image of a lynch mob observing and encouraging the vigilante murder of a Black man who has been accused of interracial rape. In this way, *Rue Morgue* can be read as a more blatant lynching narrative than its successor *King Kong*; Florey's film makes the argument that white civilian violence against Black men is not only warranted but necessary in order to protect white women.

As Stein, Affeldt, and Lott write, white Americans justified lynching Black men through the belief that it was instinctive and inevitable for Black men to rape white women. According to Stein, white medical scientists in the early twentieth century "took as a given that the rape of white women by black men was an ever-growing threat that needed to be addressed immediately" (228). It was this insidious ideology that allowed the anti-abolitionist and anti-miscegenation narrative of Poe's "The Murders in the Rue Morgue" to be adapted to a film that echoes the same racial paranoia from nearly a century earlier.

Murders in the Rue Morgue does not present Erik as the villain of the film; instead, it frames his aggressive sexual desire for Camille as innate, and therefore instinctual. He is portrayed as a victim of his own biological "rape instinct" (Stein 218). Instead, the film positions Dr. Mirakle as the true antagonist for insisting upon an evolutionary proximity between white people and the Black ape-man and for encouraging miscegenation. The

doctor's experimentation with injecting the Black ape-man's blood into the bodies of white women proves to be unnatural and deadly. When Erik kills Dr. Mirakle, the film reaffirms its prejudicial message that kinship with Black men inevitably results in danger for white people. After Dr. Mirakle has been punished for facilitating miscegenation through interracial rape, Dupin must kill Erik in a sequence which mirrors a lynching in order to defend Camille's honor and restore the appearance of a racial hierarchy. At its heart, the narrative of *Murders in the Rue Morgue* affirms its white audience's racial paranoia and endorses brutality against Black men under the guise of protecting white women.

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Notes

¹Elise Lemire uses the term “amalgamation” rather than “miscegenation” when discussing Poe’s story, as the term “miscegenation” was not used until 1864 (193). However, for the purpose of consistency, I will be using “miscegenation” because the film was made in the 1930s when so-called “anti-miscegenation” laws were in place. Furthermore, in the context of this project, I use the term “miscegenation” as defined by the Oxford English Dictionary to refer to the “[m]ixing of or reproduction between different racial or ethnic groups, or between individuals belonging to different racial or ethnic groups; *esp.* sexual relationships and reproduction between white and non-white people” rather than specifically “marriage or cohabitation by members of different ethnic groups” (“Miscegenation, n1.”). I use this term to reflect the racist and oppressive laws in place at the time the film was created.

²Scholars such as Stefanie Affeldt refer to this dehumanizing practice as “simianiz[ation]” (155).

³While the depth of her research falls outside of the scope of this paper, Stein’s chapter offers an illuminating overview of the disturbing debate among nineteenth- and twentieth-century scientists as to whether lynching or castration was a more effective solution to the supposedly rampant issue of interracial rape.

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“Everything was Forever”: Environmental Affect and Queer Temporal Play in Arundhati Roy’s *The God of Small Things*

Randy Reynaga

Arundhati Roy’s 1997 novel, *The God of Small Things*, follows a recognizably modernist tradition of non-linear storytelling: “Compared favorably to the works of Faulkner and Dickens” promises the back cover of the 2017 Random House paperback edition. Though Dickens’s serialized and linear writing style bears little likeness to the temporal progression of Roy’s novel, Faulkner’s flavor of high modernist writing does seem to prefigure Roy’s play with narrative time. Echoing Faulkner’s famous claim that “The past is never dead. It’s not even past” (73), *The God of Small Things* is a story told out of order as a means of highlighting the presence of the past in the present: the novel presents as a sequence of tragic events, centered on a single family, whose recounting frequently diverts from a linear start-to-finish temporal narrative in favor of a recursive retelling of events. With each retelling, the novel’s accounts of the past pull from and incorporate elements of the narrative present. As George Jibu Matthew has noted, “[t]he novel is structured by a retrospective hermeneutic,” meaning that the novel’s mechanics of meaning-making and understanding are rooted to the action of looking-back (98). In this retrospective sense, Roy’s novel begs to be reread: its ending serves in many ways as a kind of beginning, and subsequent readings of the text yield different affective experiences than the first read, moving from a sense of trauma and tragedy, to a more positive sense of hopefulness.

The novel’s affective progression from tragedy to hope hinges on the novel’s closing lines, which depict a farewell between Ammu and Velutha, one of the story’s two sets of transgressive lovers: “She kissed his closed eyes and stood up. . . . She turned to say it once again: ‘Naaley.’ Tomorrow” (Roy 321). The social laws of the traditional Hindu caste system mark Ammu and Velutha’s romance as forbidden, since he is an “untouchable” of the Paravan caste, and she, a woman of higher caste. True to its general lack of linear progression, the novel can be said to end *en media res*, immersed in the momentary ecstasy of Ammu and Velutha’s

forbidden sexual encounter, whose promise of continuity renders the scene as not so much an ending as a beginning originating from somewhere in the thick of a tragic love story. The novel ends on this repetition of two tomorrows: one in English, and one in Malayalam, the major language of the Indian state of Kerala, where the novel is set. This farewell is not terminal; rather, it is infused with futurity, with the certainty of recurrence captured in their valedictory promise of “Tomorrow.” It’s true that the novel features a notably traumatic chain of events, including the tragic drowning of Sophie Mol, Ammu’s niece and young cousin of her twin children, Estha and Rahel, as well as the eventual, brutal death of Velutha as the hands of local police, a murder consequential of his romantic transgressions. Yet, while the novel’s non-linear narration reiterates and develops the familial trauma onset by the dual deaths of Sophie Mol and Velutha, it also intertwines this trauma with the hopeful sense of continuity promised by the novel’s ending. For instance, although Velutha’s death is revealed early in the novel, the significance of his death accretes as the story progresses, climaxing in the novel’s final sexual encounter between him and Ammu, which, by changing the reader’s memory of Velutha from a figure of tragedy to a figure of pleasurable intimacy, retroactively infuses his death with a sense of hopeful futurity (since, as the novel is presented, his moment of corporeal pleasure with Ammu will always occur *after* his death). Rahel and Estha, the soul-bonded, if “dizygotic,” twins (4), echo Ammu and Velutha in a similar moment of sexual intimacy presented slightly earlier in the novel, retroactively infusing their encounter with positive affect drawn from Ammu and Velutha’s culminating carnality. This ending’s focus on pleasure over trauma suggests that through transgressive intimacy, the characters can rewrite their novel’s traumatic chronology with a sense of futurity, altering time by retroactively imbuing the preceding narrative with a sense of hope; it also brings attention to the potential for pleasurable acts to enact measurable changes on one’s social environment.

The novel’s ending is read somewhat divisively, since the novel’s sense of hope is subtle and indefinite. Elizabeth Outka, for instance, argues that, while this novel’s conclusion does instill in the reader a sense of hope, presenting “a circular return, leaving a final impression of an endlessly repeated scene, played out in a temporal feed-back loop at the close of the novel,” ultimately, this is only a narrative trick, affording hope to the reader but not suggesting any escape from trauma for the characters themselves (47). Margret Herrick, however, counters Outka’s view, noting that by embracing performance, by “participat[ing] in the divine *lila* (play) of creation,” the characters, especially the twins and Velutha, in their childlike playfulness, are able to create fantasies, or art that is “not mimetic of reality” but “productive of reality” (591). By participating in “play,” the novel’s characters are able to become active agents of change in the face of colonial systems of identity imposition. This mechanism of play, I argue, is captured in the novel’s transgressive intimacies, which, by moving the characters and their immediate environments into a state of indeterminate fluidity, disempower dominant modes of measuring time, such as historical time (which the novel identifies as “History,” a product of colonialism), but also what George Jibu Matthew calls “Mythical” time, or the time imposed by religious systems that predate British colonialism in India. In reshaping their perceptions of time, the characters are able to reinscribe the perpetually reproduced trauma of history with positive affect, facilitating the emergence of a sense of hope. The novel’s play, I argue, is carried out through a sublinguistic medium: an

environmental transmission of positive affect, where feelings are conveyed through the non-human environment.¹ I employ queer theorist Elizabeth Freeman's concept of "temporal drag," which views queer performativity as a "collective political fantasy" that constructs an alternative sense of temporality via performance (i.e., play) resonating with Herrick's *lila*, or play of creation (*Time Binds* 65). Though Outka supposes that the optimism suggested by the novel's final "tomorrow" is a narrative trick, I argue that, through play, or through temporal drag, time can be reworked and refigured; love, transmitted through the environment, and across time, is an anchor for resistance, a way for the novel's characters to recollect and manifest pleasurable moments against a backdrop of trauma and negative feelings, a tool for constructing hope, which can catalyze change in the present.

It is admittedly difficult to read the novel as overtly hopeful. During Rahel and Estha's moment of transgressive fraternal intimacy, for instance, enacted after over twenty years apart, the novel notes an experience, not of pleasure, but of overtly negative affect: "Only that they held each other close, long after it was over. Only that what they shared that night was not happiness, but hideous grief" (Roy 311). This depiction of shared grief implies that the novel's transgressive intimacy does not overwrite the novel's trauma, and if anything perpetuates it. However, when this scene is read alongside the following, final scene between Ammu and Velutha—their invocation of "tomorrow"—it gains a hopeful connotation. The two scenes of intimacy are connected through an environmental resonance of affect, a positive feeling manifested during Ammu and Velutha's encounter: aerosolized, de-temporalized, and carried through air and time to Estha and Rahel's encounter. Mirja Lobnik, in an ecocritical reading discussing the novel's aural elements, notes the potential of air to become "a composite of different gases, screams, and human emotions," given its ability to transmit sensory data such as sounds, via the vibration of air molecules, and smell, via the suspension of particulate matter of the object being smelled (122). In line with Lobnik, I argue that feelings themselves can become molecular, diffusing into the air whose sensory qualities are associated with particular affective sensations.

The novel's aerosolization of affect is most literally evidenced in the novel's repetition of the phrase "It was a little cold. A little wet. A little Quiet. The Air. But what was there to say?" (Roy 283). This line is first encountered, for the reader, earlier in the novel, when Estha gazes at his sister with an intimate, near-sexual fascination: "She was lovely to him. Her hair. Her cheeks. Her small, clever-looking hands. His sister" (283). The memory of this scenario carries into the line's next narrative occurrence: Estha and Rahel's transgressive sexual encounter, immediately following the assertion that their encounter is "not happiness, but hideous grief" (311). Notably, it again occurs during the final scene of intimacy between Ammu and Velutha (which occurs earlier later in the book, but earlier in the plot's timeline). This temporal playfulness pulls the unhappiness of Estha and Rahel's encounter into the later encounter between Ammu and Velutha, reinscribing the sexual act with positive affect: "She moved closer, wanting to be within him, to touch more of him. He gathered her into

¹ Throughout this paper, I use the term "affect" to represent a pre-linguistic feeling that hasn't quite been identified, whereas I use the term "emotion" to denote a feeling that has been identified and assigned a name.

the cave of his body. A breeze lifted off the river and cooled their warm bodies. It was a little cold. A little wet. A little quiet. The Air. But what was there to say?” (230). The phrase invokes physical sensations—“cold” and “wet”—combining them with internal sensations, “want,” the desire to “be within him” and to “touch more of him,” as well as the suggested sensation of “gather[ing] her into the cave of his body,” an action that is much a tactile sensation, a touching of bodies, as an internal sensation, a touching of feelings, a contact of souls. This enmeshment of tactile and affective sensations are both encapsulated in the briefly stated “Air,” capitalized, as if to draw significance to it. It is reasonable, then, to see these feelings as aerosolized, dispersed into the air and into the environment, where they can affect others as air does, either by inhalation (incorporation) or by tactile sensation. This metaphorizes the novel’s concluding sense of hope as permeating the novel, filling its blank spaces as air does, playing with temporality by reinscribing a past scene as still-yet-to-happen, since, by the time the phrase “The Air” reaches Ammu and Velutha, it’s become indicative of positive feelings, expected to carry forward into the chronological future (where Rahel and Estha will have their intimate moment).²

The God of Small Things posits colonial historiography as antithetical to the temporal play that facilitates the transmission of positive affect. The story invokes colonial historiography as a refrain in its frequent invocation of “The History House,” a small “house on the other side of the river,” where a British colonial man, Kari Saipu, known as “The Black Sahib,” used to reside with his young male lover (Roy 51). The novel describes him as “The Englishman who had ‘gone native.’ Who spoke Malayalam and wore mundus. Ayemenem’s own Kurtz” (51). For him, “Ayemenam,” the fictional town where the story takes place, became “his private Heart of Darkness” (51). The novel’s invocation of Joseph Conrad’s *Heart of Darkness* suggests a conscious linkage of history with coloniality. Kari Saipu’s ghost—the ghost of colonial history—haunts the novel, preying on young children, “captur[ing] dreams and re-dream[ing] them. . . the ones he craved most of all, the dreams he loved re-dreaming, were the tender dreams of the two-egg twins” (190). This antagonistic opposition between the twins, representative of childhood and its associated playfulness, and Kari Saipu, representative of lingering colonial historiography, suggests that, for history to function properly, childhood must be eradicated by history. Playfulness is uncontainable within colonial historiography, since it resists and does not abide by normative chronology. This resistance to temporality is seen in early descriptions of Estha and Rahel: “In those early amorphous years when memory had only just begun, when life was full of Beginnings and no Ends, and Everything was Forever, Esthappen and Rahel thought of themselves together as Me, and separately, individually, as We or Us. As though they were a rare breed of Siamese twins, physically separate, but with joint identities” (4-5). The twins’ identities are described as inseparable: they are collective individuals, not yet atomized or individualized by political structures of identity formation. Moreover, this sameness is atemporal, originating in the

² Given that the novel does not offer a chronological account of the story’s events, I will use the phrase “narrative future” to refer to events that occur later in the novel narratively, or as the reader encounters them, and I will use the phrase “chronological future” to refer to events that occur later in the story’s overall timeline.

“amorphous years when memory had just begun,” when there were no “Beginnings and no Ends,” or, no chronological measures of time, invoking a sense of indefinite, unmeasured time oppositional to history. The phrase “Everything was Forever” suggests not only an atemporal space before time, but also a cessation of time, one where their feelings for each other take precedence over the progression of history.

Becoming-Child, or Atmospheric Play

The God of Small Things, through its depictions of the twin’s playfulness, suggests that time and history can be subverted through the affective agency granted by embracing a state of play. “Play” implies an unfixed state: if an object has some “play” to it, it’s not fixed, it can move around and change position, it’s in a state of potential motion and changeability akin to what Giles Deleuze and Felix Guattari refer to as a state of “becoming.” Becoming is atemporal, it is a *haecceity*, which they describe as a collective of movement, or play, that isn’t quite a thing, or an object, or a measurable unit of time: “a season, a winter, a summer, an hour, a date have a perfect individuality lacking nothing, even though this individuality is different from that of a thing or a subject. They are haecceities in the sense that they consist entirely of relations of movement and rest between molecules or particles, capacities to affect and be affected” (261). Becomings, then, are parcels of “movement and rest,” they are things that are at play and cannot be made still and determinately defined, they are also “capacities to affect and be affected,” in that they both affect and are affected by their surroundings. When becoming-something, one does not literally transform into that thing; rather, they take on characteristics of that thing, they occupy the affective state of that thing, affecting others and being affected as if they were that thing. For Deleuze and Guattari, “all becomings are molecular: the animal, flower, or stone one becomes are molecular collectivities, haecceities, not molar subject, objects, or form that we know from the outside and recognize from experience, through science, or by habit” (275). A molecular object, for them, is the “becoming” version, the object in a state of play. Whereas, a molar object is that literal, tangible object. So, a molar child is a literal child, whereas a molecular child is something performing childness, something that affects others as a child would, momentarily occupying the affective position of a child. In this sense, while contrasting the “becoming-child” with “childhood memory,” Deleuze and Guattari note the difference between the molecular child, the child one becomes, and “the child we once were, whom we remember or fantasize, the molar child whose future is the adult” (294). Importantly, they also note that becomings are atemporal, since “unlike history, becoming cannot be conceptualized in terms of past and future” (292). Ronald Bogue notes that, in *The God of Small Things*, “the becoming-child” of the novel “is marked by. . . the atmospheric ambience of the twins’ world that seeps into the narrative voice” (95). Though Bogue does not pursue this “atmospheric ambience” in detail, nor does he note the general atmospheric tendencies of affect, I argue that, along these lines, Estha and Rahel, but also Ammu and Velutha, produce and reproduce the affective state of becoming-child, that this sense of childness becomes atmospheric, effusing into, and permeating the novel at large, creating a state of play where resistance to dominant social structures can take place.

The novel's sense of play is often metaphorized as performance, and can be read as resistive to the various modes of temporality that scholars have identified in the novel. Margaret Herrick, reading the novel against Outka's conclusion that the novel's sense of hope is only achievable for the reader, argues that the novel can be read through the lens of "South Asian *rasa* theory," in which "art is not mimetic of reality; on the contrary, artistic production has the capacity to participate in the divine *lila* (play) of creation. . . in other words; it is productive of reality" (591). Art, for her, in the novel, takes the form of performance—that is, a play, or drama—and argues that "participating in a play, then, enacting a drama, can also mean participating in a sort of world-creating performance" (592). Herrick suggests that this resistive play can alter the future by reproducing and revising the past, "not in helpless, terrified flashback, but in a group performance that is a social enactment of a different future, a communal world-making that resists the dominant Play of caste-based hierarchy" (596). It's important to note, however, that colonial history is not the only temporal force addressed by the novel: there is also what George Jibu Matthew calls "mythical" or "cyclical sacred time," which describes events transcoded into social law which "are supposed to have happened outside historical time" (103). He notably applies this to the novel's motif of the caste-oriented "Love Laws," which, "made in the mythological past, govern social interactions, prohibit intermarriage and intermingling, and influence occupational choices, notions of love and desire, of family honor and purity" (101). The novel's Love Laws are a principal perpetrator of oppression within the novel: they "lay down who should be loved. And how. And how much," and they are violated by Ammu/Velutha and by Rahel/Estha both (311). Per Matthew, the novel's Kathakali dancers, performers of Hindu religion mythology visited by Rahel and Estha, function as enforcers of mythical time, helping spiritual stories to become "ossified over time" as social laws (101).

The God of Small Things is as wary of mythical time as it is of historical time, and it resists mythologized laws much in the same manner as it resists colonial historiography, via an atmospheric transmission of molecular affect through and between the non-human environment; in this case, childness becomes a feeling employed as a direct counter to mythical time. The novel is overtly skeptical of mythologized laws, noting that the "[Kathakali Man] tells stories of the gods, but his yarn is spun from the ungodly, human heart" (219). The stories, though noted to be godly, or revered and made mythical, are noted to be products of the "human heart," allowing them to be read as social mechanisms of perpetual control, while the description of the stories as "ungodly," suggests amorality. Notably, immediately prior to watching the Kathakali dancers, Estha and Rahel encounter the elephant Kochu Thomban and Rahel places a "coconut on the ground next to him" (217). She reencounters Kochu Thomban after watching the dancers: "Kochu Thomban woke and delicately cracked open his morning coconut. The Kathakali Men took off their makeup and went home to beat their wives" (224). As their costumes are unadorned, the Kathakali men are revealed for who they are: flawed humans, perpetrators of abusive, patriarchal customs in their "beat[ing of] their wives." The elephant Kochu Thomban, meanwhile, becomes imbued with childness; he becomes-child in his sensitivities, gently accepting the coconut with "[a] leathery wrinkle parted to reveal a liquid glint of elephant eye" and proceeding to "delicately" open his child-given breakfast snack (218). The delicateness of the elephant, resonating

with the children, directly contrasts the children with the Kathakali dancers, placing them as oppositional to each other and suggesting childness as a counter for long-established customs of oppression. Estha and Rahel, meanwhile, are only liminally aware of the power of play. After Estha is sexually assaulted by the Orangedrink Lemondrink man, a concessions booth operator in a city movie theater, while the family is watching a screening of *The Sound of Music*, Rahel resonates with his suffering, panicking, and informing her grandmother, Mammachi, that “Estha vomited!” before being shushed. It’s notable that in this moment of empathized trauma, “Rahel looked around her and saw that she was in a Play. But she had only a small part. She was just the landscape. A flower perhaps. Or a tree. A face in the crowd. A Townspeople” (164). Rahel recognizes, here, a lack of agency, on her own part, but she does still recognize the resistive potential of performance, phrasing the surrounding events as “a Play,” and noting her own minimal role as “just the landscape.”

It is also in the context of play that Velutha becomes an object of Ammu’s erotic gaze; he becomes-child, emitting the affective state of being a child. Ammu does not see Velutha as a child, literally, but the affect that she senses from him is playful and childlike. When the twins are performing a “play” for Sophie Mol, and Velutha appears and participates in their play, Ammu gazes at him and sees “the ridges of muscle on [his] stomach grow taut and rise under his skin like the divisions on a slab of chocolate. . . a man’s body Contoured and hard. A swimmer’s body. A swimmer-carpenter’s body. Polished with a high-wax body polish” (167). Even in her eroticization of his body, she thinks of him as “a little boy” (167). So, Ammu’s attraction and feelings of intimacy towards Velutha are intricately tied with his becoming-child. He again becomes-child at the end of the novel, when they violate the Love Laws that prohibit inter-caste sociality and engage in sexual intimacy: “At the moment that she guided him into her, she caught a passing glimpse of his youth, his *youngness*, the wonder in his eyes at the secret he had unearthed and she smiled down at him as though he was her child” (318). Velutha, in Ammu’s eyes, becomes-child, the molecular child, affecting her as if he were a child and assuming a fluid state of identity; this state of childness, in becoming molecular, as all becomings are, becomes aerosolized, suspended in the air of the environment, suffusing through the novel with sensations of childness and play.

(Queer) Transgressive Temporal Erotics

While combating mythical time with counter-play, the novel also combats historical time, or “History,” with a sense of performance. This can be understood through what Elizabeth Freeman terms “temporal drag,” which can be understood as a performance of queerness that resists normative systems of time, or history, which Freeman refers to as “chrononormativity.” Though the novel’s characters are not queer in the conventional sense of subverting gender or heterosexual norms, they do, in their sexual intimacies, defy the hegemonic Love Laws, and in this transgressive loving, they enact a kind of temporal drag, resisting historical time in favor of feeling. Freeman notes that “temporal drag” is “thought less in the psychic time of the individual than in the movement time of *collective political fantasy*” (*Time Binds* 65; my emphasis). In this sense, with “political” suggesting transformative social action, and “fantasy” suggesting a state of play, or a performative identity, the novel enacts temporal drag as a means of resisting historical time. Freeman

argues that localizing pleasure and desire, rather than “failure, shame, negativity, grief, and other structures of feeling historical,” is a way to work against “colonial historical time” (*Erotohistoriography* 58). She argues that “we might imagine ourselves haunted by ecstasy and not just by loss” (66). Queer theorist José Esteban Muñoz also speaks to the temporally transformative potential of play, noting that “Queerness is also performative because it is not simply a being but a doing for and toward the future. Queerness is essentially about the rejection of a here and now and an insistence on potentiality or concrete possibility for another world” (1). The novel’s final lines, the double-promise of “tomorrow,” echo Muñoz’s promise of another world and his rejection of a “here and now,” while his declaration that “queerness is also performative” echoes the novel’s employment of “play”; this performative sense of tomorrow permeates the novel as a sense of childness.

Speaking also to the novel’s ability to rework time, George Jibu Matthew argues that, as resistance to historical and mythical time, the characters enact “subjective” time, or what I’ll call queer time. This subjective time, argues Matthew, is a “creative chronometry,” which the characters use to “purposively manipulate time, memory, and history, their own and that of those over whom they exercise control. They prolong, freeze, and obliterate time or connive with multiple temporalities” (105). This queer performative time is best evidenced in “Rahel’s toy wristwatch” that doesn’t tick, but which “had the time painted on it. Ten to two. One of her ambitions was to own a watch on which she could change the time whenever she wanted to (which according to her was what Time was meant for in the first place)” (37). Rahel sees time as malleable, presuming her own ability to alter time on a whim, and despite the fixed nature of her toy watch, the atemporality signified by the unmoving hands suggests a resistance to dominant measure of temporality: in freezing time, she also obliterates it, disempowering it. The novel, if not Rahel, notes the watch’s time six more times in the novel, by my count. In one instance, the phrase “[t]he time was ten to two” ends a chapter, shortly after the narrative focalization switches to Estha and Rahel, who “slept with their arms around each other. A hot twin and a cold one. He and She. We and Us. Somehow, not wholly unaware of the hint of doom and all that waited in the wings for them” (116). This stopped-watch motif invokes a sense of connection between Estha and Rahel, a time before time when the two were “We and Us”: one collective entity. Matthew further argues that Rahel’s eventual return to Ayemenem, and to Estha, after twenty years apart, “is not only to an old place, but also to an old time, when she and her twin brother had an undivided being” (105). Rahel’s return to Estha, then, re-invokes the notion of collectivity, serving as a reverse-atomization, a reintegration of individuals with each other, rather than a separation. The watch ultimately ends up at the History House, since it’s left behind by the raiding police: “The watch they all forgot. It stayed behind in the History House. In the back verandah. A faulty record of the time. Ten to two” (295). The lingering of the toy watch suggests a lingering of Estha and Rahel’s affective sense of togetherness, a timeless feeling that persists in a state of play, or childness, even after the brutality of Velutha’s police-beating and subsequent death. So, even while critic Leila Neta argues that “[w]hile the novel undoes the chronological progress of the narrative, and thus implicitly questions the narrative truth-claims of history, it remains fatalistically moored to a normative teleology” and that it “seems trapped in the melancholia of history,” I argue that the novel’s saturation of positive affect produces a counter-temporality: queer time, a resistive

haecceity (236). While it's true that the novel's teleology, or sense of purpose, is normative, and that to some degree it's "trapped" in negative affect, or trauma associated with history, the novel still manages to be suffused with a sense of love and hope, courtesy of Ammu and Velutha.

Affect Aerosolized

Various scholars have offered eco-critical readings of the novel, generally discussing the novel's deconstruction of a human/nature binary, and noting the novel's tendency to value an intersubjectivity between humans and their non-human environment. What's useful, for understanding the novel's permeation of childness as a construction of queer time, is noting affect's inclusion in this human/non-human environmental enmeshment. Aarthi Vadde, for instance, describes what she calls "the backwaters sphere," an alternative space of "subjectivity formation" where "human subjectivity [is formed] through cross-species solidarities" (524). Here, "the bonds among humans are enabled and offset by bonds forged across human, animal, and vegetable lines" (524). Mirja Lobnik, meanwhile, approaches the notion of bodily permeability to affect, noting that "Velutha presents a particularly compelling instance of the permeability of human bodies and their entanglement with matter," given his tendency to seemingly merge into his environment (129). She argues the novel "presents human corporeality as coextensive with nonhuman nature," which "helps raise awareness of the unbounded, rather than enclosed, nature of experience and imagination" (131). The twins, she notes, in terms of affective transference, display a "profoundly sensory awareness of each other's moods and emotions" (124). This "sensory awareness," I argue, is a receptiveness to the permeation of affect from the environment. This sense of corporeal permeability to the environment can be understood through ecocritical scholar Stacy Alaimo's notion of trans-corporeality, in which "the human body is never a rigidly enclosed, protected entity, but is vulnerable to the substances and flows of its environments, which may include industrial environments and their social/economic forces" (28). She notes that "trans-corporeality," which describes "the human" as "always intermeshed with the more-than-human world," showing "the extent to which the substance of the human is ultimately inseparable from 'the environment'" (Alaimo 2). The positive affect created and preserved by Estha/Rahel and Ammu/Velutha becomes aerosolized, or environmental, permeating bodies and enacting change by virilizing feeling.

The God of Small Things opens with a vivid portrait of environmental enmeshment with feelings, an affective composite of non-human objects and human emotions, suggesting that affect can become environmentalized:

May in Ayemenem is a hot, brooding month. The days are long and humid. The river shrinks and black crows gorge on bright mangoes in still, dustgreen trees. Red bananas ripen. Jackfruits burst. Dissolute bluebottles hum vacuously in the fruity air. Then they stun themselves against clear windowpanes and die, fatly baffled in the sun. The nights are clear, but suffused with sloth and sullen expectation. (3)

A sense of time becomes apparent in the "days" measured in length, while that measurement is compounded with the tactile sensation of "humidity." Calendar months are mentioned,

again, in association with the extrinsic sensation of heat, but also with the intrinsic feeling of “brooding,” so tactile feelings are enmeshed with affective feelings. The air itself, “fruity,” becomes suffused with the surrounding fruits: “red bananas” and “jackfruits.” The “nights,” figured as both a measure of time, and a state of the environment, is imbued with a sense of “sloth” and “sullen expectation.” Within the novel, a sense of childness becomes aerosolized, effusing into the environment and permeating human bodies, which, as Alaimo notes, are always “vulnerable to the substances and flows of [their] environments” (28). As the story becomes-child, it enters into a state of play where Velutha and Ammu’s promise of tomorrow can be felt in the present as feelings of love, togetherness, and hope.

The novel’s affective manipulation of time, through play, can be tracked through Ammu’s evolving regard for the future. An early passage, for instance, shows her distaste for time: “she was not the kind of woman who wanted her future told. She dreaded it too much. So if she were granted one small wish, perhaps it would only have been Not to Know. Not to know what each day held in store for her” (213). This fear of knowing the future could be said to originate from her perceived lack of control over her chronological future, a lack of agency against colonial teleology; however, this fear of seeing forwards in time is alleviated during the novel’s final scene of intimacy between Ammu and Velutha, when, post-coitus: “They had nothing. No future. So they stuck to the small things” (320). The most notable of these “small things” is “the minute spider who lived in a crack in the wall of the back verandah of the History House” who Velutha names “*Chappu Thamburan*” (320). Feeling now disjointed from the futurity of conventional chronography, Ammu and Velutha focus their hopes for the future on the small spider. Their happiness, their laughter, effuses into the environment, permeating into *Chappu Thamburan*: “Without admitting it to each other or themselves, they linked their fates, their futures (their Love, their Madness, their Hope, their Infninate Joy), to his” (321). Their intimacy and positive affect is poured into the spider who, it’s worth noting, “outlived Velutha. He fathered future generations. He died of natural causes” (321). The allusion to “Infninate Joy” recollects a sense of childness from earlier in the novel, where the twins’ uncle Chacko was reading aloud “the four things that were Possible in Human Nature” and “Rahel thought that Infninate Joy sounded the saddest. Perhaps because of the way Chacko said it” (113). Rahel, not knowing the words, not only misspells the word, but misperceives its meaning. The meaning of the word is at play, changing to the tune of Rahel’s affective understanding, which she has derived from Chacko, and “the way [he] said it.” With this scene’s collision of childlike playfulness and transgressive intimacy, the positive feelings of togetherness produced here and accumulated in the spider both become aerosolized through the novel, permeating the pages with the promise of “tomorrow.”

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Blasphemous Bodies: The Demonization of Female Sexuality and Autonomy in *The Exorcist* (1973)

Samantha Rentfro



(Source: Warner Bros., Inc., 1973)

At the crossroads of religion and gender politics, there is very little American-horror media that pushes the grotesque as transparently as William Peter Blatty's *The Exorcist*. Published in 1971, this faith-focused exploration of the consequences of evil emerges at a cultural moment marked by second-wave feminism, yet the novel, and Blatty's subsequent 1973 film adaptation, mobilized gendered horror to reinforce the patriarchal standards of religion, specifically the male-dominated Catholic ideology. Having grown up in a strongly religious home, I first encountered the film in secret as a young girl, fascinated by its taboo spectacle, yet unsettled by the violence endured by Regan's body. Even then, I sensed that the horror stemmed less from the demonic than the possibilities and dangers of the maturing female body. It is crucial to mention that Blatty wrote the screenplay, produced the film, and won an Academy Award for his adaptation, which was released just after Christmas in 1973, eleven months after *Roe v. Wade* was debated in the Supreme Court. The polarizing birth of this film occurred at a crucial moment in the national debate over human rights, reminding us just how intensely American discourse at the time was focused on women's bodily autonomy and the perceived threats posed by feminist progress. With both the novel and the film shaped by Blatty's hand, they naturally call to be read in conversation with one another. In this context, the film becomes not merely a visual translation of the novel, but a cultural intervention that brings Blatty's text to life in a way that amplifies its theological and ideological stakes by making Regan's body visibly and spectacularly available for public consumption. Crucially noted in Scott Simon's interview with the author, Blatty even rushed the end of the novel in order to begin on the screenplay for the film, which I argue would be a choice that highlights his eagerness to project the story's religious and gendered messaging into the vulnerable cultural mainstream (NPR). Nonetheless, despite the accelerated production timeline, the film and text are almost identical in substance, unified in their negative treatment of the female body.

Through a feminist theological lens, *The Exorcist* can be read as a story that demonizes the female body both literally and symbolically, projecting male anxieties about feminine sexuality and bodily autonomy onto the fetishized figure of an adolescent girl. Drawing on Barbara Creed's *The Monstrous-Feminine: Film, Feminism, Psychoanalysis* and Julia Kristeva's theory of abjection in her essay *The Powers of Horror*, Regan's body becomes a site where patriarchal institutions, particularly the Catholic Church, reassert control over any dominant or independent female subject. As Creed asserts, "The abject threatens life," a condition that Kristeva expands by insisting that abjection is "at the crossroads of phobia, obsession, and perversion," and that to be abject is to inhabit "what does not respect borders, positions, rules. The in-between, the ambiguous, the composite" (Creed 53). Within Blatty's universe, sanctioned by the Church, Regan becomes precisely this abject subject: her body an unstable threshold where the boundaries between innocence and sexuality, moral purity and pollution, human and monstrous collapse, requiring the violent restoration of order through male-dominated exorcism.

Crucially, as expounded by Eleanor Johnson's *Scream With Me: Horror Films and the Rise of American Feminism*, Regan becomes a possessed body whose sexual and violent transformation served as church propaganda that pushed society to turn to the Catholic Church and fear female liberation, positioning her body as a cautionary martyr through

which the film warns against the cultural destabilization brought on by feminist movements (Johnson 50). Ultimately, Blatty created his own monstrous feminine by framing the Church as the unchallengeable locus of goodness, while autonomous women were seen as agents of chaos and evil. Indeed, *The Exorcist* reads like Blatty's attempt to shepherd the public back to faith by demonizing women's bodies in response to the advances of second-wave feminism. Blatty was raised a devout Catholic who heard about demonic possessions and exorcisms while studying English at Georgetown—the very campus where notable scenes of the film would later be shot. During his time there, he encountered the widely circulated story of a real 14-year-old child in Missouri who underwent an exorcism, learning of it through a news article that captured national attention (Georgetown University). Although the real-life story is about a boy and is just as terrifying, the question naturally arises: why did Blatty change his main character into a girl? In this framework, the demonic possession that he creates functions as a symbolic assault not on Regan as an individual, but on womanhood itself. The demon targets Regan to use as a conduit for reaching the priest who is weak in his faith, reducing the girl and her body to collateral damage in a drama centered on male spiritual turmoil. Therefore, women become merely the means to a masculine end, demonized so that a man's crisis may be confronted and resolved. Reacting to the pressures of second-wave feminism, Blatty constructs a narrative that positions liberated women as a threat to American society, making *The Exorcist* explicitly anti-feminist in its warning against the dangers of single motherhood and the disruptive potential of women exercising autonomy in their own households.

The Cultural Terror of the Abject Body

In Blatty's favor, and perhaps unsurprising for a film that subjects a child's body to such graphic violence, the public responded with visceral shock, with most viewers leaving the theatres after fainting or vomiting. Pauline Kael's brutal 1974 review of the film in *The New York Times* highlighted her disgust with scenes depicting bodily secretion and public urination, calling for the film to be "X" rated (Kael). The outrage and shared discomfort directed at Regan's body throughout the film is precisely the point: the narrative forces audiences to simultaneously sexualize, demonize, and abject the female body. Kael's reaction exemplifies a cultural failure to recognize the story as a reinforcer of patriarchal anxiety; instead, it reinforces the very same impulse to label female bodies as unnatural and immoral, especially in the ways in which they produce. This is particularly significant because Regan experiences these violations right before her twelfth birthday, a time of puberty and bodily transformation, when the anxieties surrounding adolescent female sexuality are most acute.

This public panic around Regan's abject and uncontrollable body ultimately reinforces Blatty's ideological project, revealing how readily audiences absorbed and reacted to Regan's body, ascribing it as antithetical to societal norms. Blatty inserted the female body into the story as a warning designed to religiously cleanse society of secular or feminist alternatives, but audiences instead condemned the film as blasphemous, overwhelmed by its irreverent imagery and sexualized depiction of a young girl. This cultural discomfort aligns with Creed's analysis of the naming of Blatty's main character: Blatty names the young girl after "one of King Lear's monstrous daughters," associated with "the snake, Christian symbol of woman's

disobedience, unbridled sexual appetite and treachery,” which Blatty was assumably aware of given his religious background (Creed 136-7). Notably, we learn that Regan is possessed by the demon Pazuzu, “the devil and consort of the snake goddess” (Creed 137). This intentional cursing of her namesake sets her, along with all other women, up for failure, as Regan’s very identity is framed as inherently flawed. The possession by the demon Pazuzu intensifies this perception by rendering her simultaneously sexualized and grotesque, illustrating how her body is read as dangerous and corrupt simply by existing outside the bounds of patriarchal control.

Furthermore, Creed’s definition of the abject helps clarify why Regan’s body becomes the central site of horror in *The Exorcist*. As Creed explains:

In order to enter the symbolic order, the subject must reject or repress all forms of behaviour, speech and modes of being regarded as unacceptable, improper or unclean. A crucial area of the subject’s personal history which must be rejected relates to infantile bodily experiences and toilet training. All signs of bodily excretions—bile, urine, shit, mucus, spittle, blood—must be treated as abject, cleaned up and removed from sight. (155)

Regan’s possession is built around the spectacular return of precisely these expelled elements; her body erupts with the excretions that the male-dominated order demands be repressed. Blatty weaponizes this eruption by tying it to anxieties about feminine development and maternal authority. Regan’s profane, leaking, undisciplined body becomes a dramatization of what happens when a child grows up outside patriarchal structures, particularly under the guidance of a single, liberated mother. Johnson points out that “we have a liberated single mother with a child whose pubescent body doesn’t behave right,” making them a perfectly vulnerable vessel for evil (56). In this way, Regan’s abjection serves not only as a marker of demonic possession, but as a cultural warning about the supposed dangers of feminist independence and the breakdown of traditional family hierarchies.

Regan’s Body as a Sexualized Site of Body Horror

The plot’s terror unfolds within the MacNeil household, centering on Chris and Regan to dramatize the catastrophic outcomes of men’s religious ideology associating with women in isolation. Upon learning that her daughter has been playing with a Ouija board, Chris witnesses the gradual torment of Regan through what can only be described as a supernatural rape, a violation that unfolds psychologically and physically, originating from an disparate reality. Regan’s mind and body are consumed by an incubus-like presence: a male demon that infiltrates the psyche of a human female in order to seduce, dominate, and ultimately overtake her body—a dynamic that mirrors sexual assault within the supernatural realm. This violation aligns directly with Creed’s analysis of possession as a form of abjection: “The possessed or invaded being is a figure of abjection in that the boundary between self and other has been transgressed. When the subject is invaded by a personality of another sex, the transgression is even more abject because gender boundaries are violated” (133). In Regan’s case, the demon’s intrusion functions as both bodily invasion and gendered, sexual violence,

transforming her young, pubescent body into the physical embodiment of the Church's fear surrounding the female existence.

To understand how Regan embodies the abject, it is essential to recognize, as Creed argues, that the female reproductive body itself becomes a symbol of monstrous evil. Regan's body—in this framework—is imagined as fundamentally out of control: a body that must be dominated, contained, and reduced by the society that is threatened by its ambiguity and budding sexuality. Her abjection emerges not only through the repression imposed by the evil spirit; but also through the way she becomes consumed, controlled by it, and transformed into an unstable vessel that violates every boundary the symbolic order depends upon. In *The Powers of Horror*, Kristeva clarifies precisely why controversial figures like Regan provoke such horror:

“It is thus not lack of cleanliness or health that causes abjection but what disturbs identity, system, order. What does not respect borders, positions, rules. The in-between, the ambiguous, the composite. The traitor, the liar, the criminal with a good conscience, the shameless rapist, the killer who claims he is a savior. . . Any crime, because it draws attention to the fragility of the law. . .” (4)

Regan becomes precisely this kind of disturbance, being a living embodiment of the “in-between,” or a body that destabilizes identity and law alike, and therefore must be violently corrected. In this light, her possession is not merely a supernatural event, but a dramatization of how patriarchy responds when feminine bodies refuse to stay within the borders it sets for them.

After Chris realizes that Regan's condition is not simply psychologically influenced, she turns to the church and requests divine intervention, requesting that not only doctors, but Catholic priests make a home visit for Regan's sake. Making their way upstairs, the team of professionals find Regan violently lashing her body around her bed while her belongings fly aimlessly around in the air. Through this depiction, we see that Regan's possession is entirely sexual and perverse, alluding to nuances of sexual exploitation and the naked, adolescent, female body. At the climax of this scene, while Regan is convulsing, she pulls up her nightgown, revealing her genitals to the doctors and demonically shouting “Fuck me. Fuck me!” (*The Exorcist* 00:49:05-00:49:09). The significance of this moment lies in how violently it weaponizes Regan's prepubescent body as a sexualized object against the audience's will. Aside from the obvious blasphemy, the significance of this moment lies in Blatty collapsing the boundaries between innocence and obscenity. The doctors' horrified stares solidify how the film uses this moment to equate the maturing female body with danger, disorder, and moral collapse. In support of this, Johnson underscores that “the kind of sexuality that's invoked by the shaking bed is violent, nonvolitional, abnormal, and dangerous” (55). Consequently, Regan's lack of agency is crucial, for the words and gestures are not hers, yet the spectacle is forced onto her body, suggesting that even the mere possibility of female sexual emergence is something monstrous unless tightly regulated by patriarchal or religious authority. This assault becomes a symbolic warning about what happens when a girl's body is left outside the Church's control: it becomes grotesque, transgressive, and abject.

Regan's demonic possession in *The Exorcist* is explicitly sexually charged, a sustained depiction of the body as a site of abjection and spiritual transgression. The narrative repeatedly demonstrates this through crucial scenes such as the bed violently shaking, her public urination downstairs, and sexual violation of the psychiatrist's genitals. Most striking is the scene in Regan's bedroom, where she repetitively and violently stabs her own genitals with the crucifix while chanting, "Let Jesus fuck you!"; she then grabs her mother's face, forcing it into her bleeding body, and screams in a demonic tone "Lick me!" over and over (*The Exorcist* 01:13:36-01:13:50). Here, Regan is fully possessed by evil and engages in self-mutilation and lesbian incest, physically and sexually assaulting her own mother, committing the ultimate acts of profanity. This behavior exemplifies the incubi dynamic, in which a malevolent force invades a female body during moments of vulnerability, pursuing sexual violation and domination; early in the story, Regan even glimpses the face of a demon while drifting between consciousness, signaling the beginning of this invasion.

According to *Demonology and Witch-Hunting in Early Modern Europe*, the Latin term *incubi*, meaning "nightmare" or "to lay down on," describes precisely what occurs within Regan, as the demonic force manifests during her periods of sleep-related oppression, consuming her mind and body (Goodare et al. 88); entering the female body forcibly is the demon's ultimate proof of power. What begins as a sexualized invasion quickly mutates into a full-body takeover, where the demon's authority is expressed through non-consensual physical transformation. The violation of her sexual boundaries expands into a wholesale violation of her bodily integrity, signaling that the demon's power extends far beyond erotic domination. As Creed argues, Regan also becomes a figure of extreme abjection as "her body is transformed into a playground for bodily wastes. Her skin erupts in oozing sores, her hair hangs in a tangled filthy mat, she urinates on the carpet, spews green bile, and bleeds from her genitals . . . Regan's body is represented as a body in revolt," emphasizing how her possession renders her simultaneously grotesque and foul-mouthed, a creature of extreme perversion (159). Now fully possessed, Regan becomes the center of this disturbing, fetishized male fantasy that leaves her body completely without autonomy.

The Church vs. Female Autonomy

The Exorcist, in both its novel and film forms, serves as a stark warning that liberated mothers produce daughters whose autonomy and rebelliousness must be contained, often through violence or coercion, as symbolized by the demon's relentless domination of Regan. Chris MacNeil embodies the pushback of second-wave feminism: she is independent, financially stable, assertive, and unafraid to challenge societal norms. She has short hair, curses at others, and manages her domestic sphere with authority, asserting control over her household from the story's outset. As Johnson observes, Chris is "unfeminine . . . although a loving mother, Chris is about as far from the iconic or traditional American mother as possible" (52). Her very existence being strong, self-sufficient, and defiant marks her as a threat to patriarchal norms, while Regan's possession becomes the physical manifestation of male and religious anxieties surrounding feminine sexuality, autonomy, and even homosexuality. The novel and film further link urban and spiritual decay to the decline of traditional familial values within the MacNeil household. With the father absent and the

mother constantly challenging authority by uttering profanities, resisting male control, and asserting her independence, evil finds fertile ground to take root. Kristeva's theory of abjection illuminates this dynamic in Chris's character: "The other maternal image is tied to suffering, illness, sacrifice . . . This kind of motherhood, the masochistic mother who never stops working is repulsive and fascinating, abject" (Kristeva 158). Through Chris and Regan, Blatty presents a dual warning: the liberated mother, defying traditional expectations, produces children who disrupt social and religious order, while the possessed daughter embodies the extreme consequences of female autonomy being sexualized transgression and moral destabilization. Together, they exemplify a world in which women who step outside prescribed roles are both feared and punished, reinforcing the Church's authority as the only salvific power capable of restoring order.

Evidently, Regan's status as the abject is most explicit while she is wielding the crucifix, using it in a sexually perverse manner that mimics self-pleasuring behavior; an act of blasphemy that violates what is sacred. Creed describes this as a transgression of the maternal function, noting that men seek to control the perversity expressed through the rebellious female body; women's bodies, in turn, are mutilated and cursed (71). *The Exorcist* also reinforces masculine, gendered abuse tropes: the demon invades the domestic space, tormenting both Regan and her mother through physical, sexual, and emotional abuse, and Chris's responses are coded in ways reminiscent of domestic violence, as she covers her appearance, acts in extreme paranoia, and bears bruises inflicted by the entity possessing her daughter. This illustrates the broader patriarchal logic at play: men, or male-coded forces, suck the life out of women, dominate them, and manipulate them even within the sanctity of their own homes. As Johnson observes, "Because the reality is that Chris, too, is possessed by proxy: There is no way for Chris to escape because there is no way she will ever abandon her child" (67). Through this lens, the film asserts that the only path to cleansing is through submission to the Church and the men who control it, further solidifying a worldview in which female bodies, and even children, exist as property possessed and disciplined by patriarchal authority. Blatty's patriarchal plan thus becomes unmistakable: to reassert male religious authority by depicting the female body as a gateway to chaos, sexual deviance, and overall spiritual collapse.

When Patriarchy Possesses

Blatty channels his own religious anxieties and sexual inferiority into a text that functions less as a theological meditation than as a torture-fetish narrative, one that transforms the female body into a site of punishment, spectacle, and patriarchal warning. *The Exorcist* becomes, in effect, a visual curse placed upon women: Regan is rendered hypersexual, sexually aggressive, grotesque, mutilated, and violated, all at the hands of a masculine-presenting demon. In this way, she becomes the exact figure that traditional, masculine America feared liberated women would become: unruly, uncontrollable, and monstrosly disobedient. Creed captures this structure of patriarchal fantasy with unsettling precision, arguing that "the horror film offers an abundant display of fetishistic effects whose function is to attest to the perversity of the patriarchal order founded, as it is,

on a misconception—the erroneous belief that woman is castrated” (42–43). In *The Exorcist*, this perversity takes the form of a body staged for male terror and male mastery.

Yet the narrative insists that only the Catholic Church, only the patriarchal order itself, can save us. Blatty constructs a world in which female autonomy is not merely discouraged, but punished, where a girl’s developing body becomes synonymous with danger and contamination unless violently possessed by male authority. While female bodies are routinely stripped of autonomy and demonized across mainstream horror, Blatty’s *The Exorcist* stands as the genre’s most distilled and influential articulation of this logic: a work that elevates the policing of the female body into a sacred mandate and casts patriarchal domination as not only justified, but divinely ordained. Maybe that is why, even after all these years, I still find myself returning to Regan’s body with equal parts dread and defiance, hoping that we can rewrite the gendered stereotypes that this story, along with others throughout horror media, perpetuate against women. Perhaps that is why consuming *The Exorcist* now feels less like revisiting a horror film and more like confronting a cultural wound, one that reminds us that the female body has been long exploited as a domesticated canvas for media and institutions like the Church. In the end, we must insist on letting women haunt their own stories without being punished simply for taking up space.

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Surviving, Cautiously: A Cripistemological Analysis of Blood Cancer Survivorship

Maggie Hart

“The grief of what I have lost is consuming. I am consumed. I am alone here in grief’s belly—surviving, cautiously.”

–Personal journal entry, October 5, 2023

Introduction: Cancer Survivorship as a Rhetorical Undertaking

In mid-April of 2023, a doctor in Mumbai, India, recommended I go home, immediately, following the results of the blood test he’d collected after I came to his clinic complaining of fatigue, swollen lymph nodes, and a relentless gut feeling of something being wrong. My blood was, in his words, “dangerously abnormal.” Shortly after, I rushed home to Colorado, received a diagnosis of a rare and aggressive blood cancer called acute myeloid leukemia (AML), and began my first round of chemotherapy. Long story short, I got cancer; I survived it. Many people do: approximately two-thirds of Americans face some sort of cancer in their lifetime, and of those, two-thirds will survive five or more years after their diagnosis (Coscarelli et al. 125). Cancer survivorship, which I define as the ongoing, ceaseless task of living beyond cancer in a decidedly vulnerable body and in a mind that is acutely aware of that vulnerability, is not an uncommon undertaking, though it is a complicated one. I am still grappling with what it means to be a cancer survivor. In this, too, I am not alone. Meaning-making is a common theme in illness narratives, perhaps as a way of sorting through the rubble of a wrecked trust in life’s comprehensibility, perhaps as a justification of pain and suffering, perhaps to contend with living in a body after being so intimately and fundamentally betrayed by it. Whatever the reason, there seems to be a persuasive cultural assumption that illness “has meaning,” and can tell us something about the human condition (Kleinman xiv).

So, while I am not alone in searching for the meaning of my illness and surviving it, I do find that it is often a lonely endeavor. It is also an inherently rhetorical one. Meaning-making is an “iterative process that begins with rhetorical encounters,” and is developed

through “reading, writing, discussing, deliberating, risk-weighting, and decision-making—all implicitly rhetorical activities” (Finer et al. 4, 18). Meaning-making is rhetorical, and because humans have a proclivity to make illness mean something, surviving illness, and existing within that survival, is rhetorical.

In this paper, I complicate cancer survivorship through a criptestemological analysis of the material for survivors provided on the Blood Cancer United (BCU) website with an autoethnographic framework. Cripistemology refers to a way of knowing that is informed and shaped by disabled embodiment and experience (Johnson and McRuer 134). Autoethnography is a research method that involves self-reflection and personal recounting to connect experience with research (Lunceford 14). By combining these methods, I can first honor my cancer experience as embodied knowledge, and then enter that knowledge into a conversation with survivorship materials on the BCU website through my own storytelling about that experience. Based on this analysis and conversation with these knowledges—my knowledge through experience and the knowledge contained on the website—I call for health and medicine rhetoricians and rhetors of illness advocacy groups to direct intentional and meaningful attention to the embodied, dynamic, and complex experience of survivorship, and to recognize survivorship not as a finality to an illness, but as a mutation of it, and as a unique health identity (Segal 20).

Embodied, and Embodying, Scholarship

My having cancer was, and is, an all-encompassing, deeply embodied experience. The hands I am using to type this paper were touched by my cancer, as were the eyes that read the scholarship I engage with, as was the mind that developed the ideas throughout. In other words, I cannot study the rhetorical depiction of cancer survivorship without embodying it fully, and without my embodiment being central to the work. The knowledge I have exists within and simultaneously is my cancer, and therefore my disablement. Embodied knowledge is apt for this discussion because it is the only knowledge I can offer on the topic, and it is also a “potent generative force” (Cedillo 1). Cancer is a bodily health condition that exists within the bodyminds of individuals; and, further, we are all, healthy or not, situated in bodies and in language (Knoblauch 58). We cannot separate the body and the mind when treating an ailment, and we cannot separate the body and mind when reckoning with it. It is with this in my bodymind, that I employ two major embodied methodologies as throughlines in this piece: cripistemology and autoethnography. Bodymind, a materialist disability studies term from Margaret Price (270), highlights “how processes within our being impact one another in such a way that the notion of a physical versus mental process is difficult, if not impossible to clearly discern” (Schalk 5).

Cripistemology, an intersection of disability, crip, and queer theories, is a way of knowing shaped by the “critical, social, and personal position of disability” (Johnson and McRuer 134). The framework provides an embodied lens through which disabled subjects can use sensations, such as feelings and emotions, to provide insight, challenge ableist conceptions of normalcy, and acknowledge these experiences as valid knowledge (Johnson and McRuer 130). My aim is to trace how the website’s discourses of normalcy and personal responsibility resonate and conflict with my own lived experience as a young adult leukemia survivor.

To do this, I read the Blood Cancer United website, focusing “not on the text itself, but rather on how that text [is] received, internalized, and responded to” (Lunceford 15). If autoethnography involves “toggling between our experiences and larger relational and social contexts and then creating. . . analyses and critiques,” the latter part of my autoethnographic practice emerged as I began closer analysis of the materials on the Blood Cancer United site, noting my embodied response to them, and imagining how my experience might be situated within larger “relationships and systems” (Lunceford 5, 3).

Methodologically, this hybrid approach situates the survivor’s body as both the site and instrument of inquiry. The juxtaposition of textual analysis and lived experience performs criptistemology in practice: it exposes how knowledge about illness and survivorship is always co-constituted by affect, embodiment, and institutional rhetoric. Reading Blood Cancer United through my own survivor body, I seek not to invalidate the organization’s resources but to illuminate some of the tensions between represented and lived survivorship. However, the illness experience is a complex and multifaceted one, and it varies by gender identity, race, age at diagnosis, types of treatment received, caretaker access, financial security, insurance status, and many other conditions. My criptistemology is shaped by my experience as a white, female, cisgender, insured person, who was twenty-five years old at the time of diagnosis.

Illness as Rhetorical Community

The search for the meaning of illness and survivorship leads me, and other survivors, to engage in rhetorical encounters within a particular rhetorical community, which Finer et al. define as “groups of people inducted into a realm of discourse which they may or may not participate as rhetors themselves,” in which members are “both the expressed consumers of and profoundly in need of the discourse” (5). The diagnosis of a serious illness, such as cancer, plunges one into the rhetorical community alongside others seeking to understand living with, managing, and recovering from the condition (Appleton and Flynn 382). Encounters within these rhetorical communities have significant personal and societal consequences, including the construction and shaping of epistemological frameworks, whether or not this meaning-making is intentional or helpful (Finer et al. 3). These frameworks, then, can “inspire, limit, help, and hurt” due to the discourse’s ability to “shape the reality of the health concern and sense of self” (Finer et al. 23). Rhetorical communities are omnipresent, they exist wherever members exist. However, there are certain spaces, such as the Internet, where members of these rhetorical communities may gather and engage more intentionally, establishing these spaces as rhetorically significant and rich sites of study, especially when considering their personal and societal epistemological influence.

Bodies in the Medical Gaze: Cancer as Disability

Cancer is legally considered a disability due to the “changes caused by cancer and cancer treatment” (“ADA,” American Cancer Society). These changes largely depend on the type of cancer and treatment, and the condition of the body at the time of diagnosis, but they can involve impacts on the immune, brain, nervous, respiratory, and reproductive systems. Further, as noted by Jay Dolmage and Cynthia Lewiecki-Wilson, the rise of cultural logics allowed for disability to extend “beyond actual impaired bodies” (29). They further suggested

that any body “subjected to the medical gaze becomes disabled to some extent” (29). Of course, bodies with cancer are subjected to an extreme medical gaze—for example, my own body was yanked into clinical objecthood during my AML treatment. My pelvic bone was drilled into five separate times to retrieve marrow, a large chunk of flesh was scooped out of my stomach to remove an abscess, my veins were stabbed with needles until my arms and hands were entirely purpled with bruises, and I wasn’t permitted to move my body freely; I had to request permission and wait for a nurse to disable the alarm on my bed before I could get out of it, and only after I had been, essentially, leashed. My nurses measured and reported every shower, every pain, every meal, every urination, every shit. Subjected to the medical gaze, to me, is a generous way to think of it.

Cancer disabled my body first by disrupting its function with mutating cells, then by mutating the body itself into a medical *thing* rather than *me*. “How is it possible that they are doing this to me?” I thought during my first bone marrow biopsy, through the haze of anesthesia, as I felt the vibration of the drill shake my naked body. *It is as if I am a piece of wood*. But, through the medical gaze, the doctor wasn’t drilling into *me*, he was drilling into a bone to retrieve cancer-riddled marrow. But that bone was—is—mine. My self is my body, and even though my body can (and did) keep secrets from me, I and it are the same, intertwined; I have, and am, a bodymind (Charon 76; Price 270). Medical objectification, then, is as disabling as it is devastating, as it attempts to pry apart the body and the mind when the two are inextricably enmeshed.

Bodies (Still) in the Medical Gaze: Cancer Survivorship as Disability/Disabling

Cancer as a disabling force does not die when the cancer cells do. Even when there is no evidence of disease (NED), patients may continue to suffer because of the debilitating treatments they received, though current cancer survivorship rhetorics “overshadow the realities of cancer treatments and their capacity to permanently alter the bodies and minds of patients” (Finer 163). Chemotherapy, in particular, may impact patients long after the treatment has ended. Finer calls for a reframing of post-chemotherapy as a chronic condition due to the “embodied undertaking” that is receiving such a harsh medical treatment, as well as the possible long-term cognitive, psychological, and physical effects it may have (161). These side effects include depression, difficulty focusing, memory loss, brain fog, heart failure, lung scarring and inflammation, infertility, osteoporosis, thyroid issues, impaired immune system function, and secondary cancers (“Long-Term and Late Effects”). Post-chemotherapy as a chronic condition involves vigilant surveillance of bodily processes and more acute attention to “potential sources of worsening” (Kleinman 47). Suddenly every “off” feeling, every bruise, every jolt of pain, every minor abnormality could, in a body with a chronic condition, indicate something more sinister and cause panic, anxiety, or worse. As Audre Lorde wrote in her *Cancer Journals*, “Sometimes fear stalks me like another malignancy, sapping energy and power and attention away from my work” (8). Chronicity implies a kind of engulfment that is, truly, life-altering. With a chronic condition, Sue E. Estroff notes, the self shifts from “a person who has an illness to a person who is an illness or diagnosis” (Estroff 251). To become an illness is a profound disablement.

Even cancer patients that do not receive chemotherapy may find survivorship disabling. Achieving remission may feel like relief or triumph, but it also may not. According to the National Cancer Institute, remission is a “decrease in or disappearance of signs and symptoms of cancer,” and for some survivors, existing within this remission space does not effectively reckon with all of cancer’s mental, emotional, and physical scars (“Remission”). *Remission, I wrote in one of my cancer journals, is like a life raft in the middle of the ocean. Hope, a prolonging, but it is not land. There is still the possibility of drowning.* Moving from active treatment to longer-term survival often induces feelings of anxiety and isolation (Appleton and Flynn; Deimling), increased prevalence of psychological distress (Coscarelli et al.), elevated rates of suicide (Coscarelli et al.), and symptoms of posttraumatic stress disorder (Deimling).

These data points indicate that many cancer patients experience medical trauma, a set of “psychological and physiological responses to pain, injury, serious illness, medical procedures, and frightening treatment experiences,” (McBain). Cancer is a traumatic event; it is a major threat to health, life, and peace, and experiencing it may shatter fundamental assumptions about control, vulnerability, identity, and possibilities for the future. Living with this kind of traumatic event may involve “reliving certain traumatizing treatments, nightmares, fearfulness, insomnia, and difficulties resuming normal relationships” (Rancour 936). Further, trauma itself may be disabling. Carter calls for a reconceptualization of trauma as an embodied, affective structure that disrupts time, space, subjectivity, and knowledge. We can see these disruptions in the bodily effects of trauma, which include hypervigilance, sleep disturbances, sexual dysfunction, difficulty concentrating, loss of appetite, and severe distress (Rothschild; Salick and Auerbach). If we consider disability as Garland-Thompson does, as a “system for interpreting and disciplining bodily variations,” and a “relationship between bodies and their environments,” then the disruptive nature of trauma, and its interference in one’s ability to perform basic tasks and meet certain needs, is, itself, disabling, and it disables the body it influences and disturbs (“Integrating Disability” 5).

Case Study: Blood Cancer United

The search for the meaning of illness leads many survivors to engage in rhetorical encounters within specific rhetorical communities, groups organized around shared discursive practices and forms of meaning-making (Finer et al. 5). Encounters within these communities have significant personal and societal consequences, including the construction and shaping of epistemological frameworks (Finer et al. 3). Blood Cancer United is “the leading source of free education and support for blood cancer patients and families” (“Welcome to Blood Cancer United”). In this way, the BCU website advertises itself and exists as a gathering place for members of the rhetorical community of people affected by blood cancer.

Cripistemology exists in tension with the “neoliberal compulsion to get better and to be better/sensational/exceptional—quickly, individually. . .” and in this paper, I place myself, a member of the relevant rhetorical community, in tension with Blood Cancer United (Johnson and McRuer 138). Importantly, the BCU website may shape general understanding of health and medicine at large (Bellwoar 328). Routine literate activity influences broader cultural perspectives, and for many people, BCU may be their only interaction with blood cancer

texts. The information they receive at this site, then, creates the dominant discourse of the condition, which “have their ways of permeating the culture and hence shaping beliefs and understandings” (Finer et al. 3). If BCU aims to be the “leading source of support” for blood cancer patients and families, as they claim, they might wish to consider the very questions this paper does: What view of survivorship does the website offer? How might an expansion of the portrayal of survivorship in a common gathering space for the blood cancer rhetorical community be valuable for those community members? In the sections that follow, I illustrate how BCU shapes a limiting, and potentially harmful, understanding of cancer survivorship based on normalcy and personal responsibility. In this analysis, I illustrate the role these community resources have in meeting survivor needs and highlight the areas where the site presently fails to responsibly and completely fulfill this role.

The “New Normal”: Survivorship as Return to Normalcy

“I don’t know if I’ll ever be ‘me’ again. I miss her. I wish I’d loved her better. I just cannot imagine going back to how I was.”

–Personal journal entry, February 13, 2023

Often, the goal of survivorship is presented to cancer patients as establishing a “new normal,” which may include regaining physical ability, being able to work and earn money, and/or having a family. Yet many cancer survivors face significant obstacles to achieving this “new normal,” including persistent symptoms, fear of relapse, unrealistic recovery expectations, psychological stress, and survivor’s guilt (Lee et al. 487).

BCU upholds this idea of a “new normal” as a worthwhile and desirable pursuit. The following text is part of the “Navigating Life During and After a Blood Cancer Diagnosis” workbook available for download on the site:

Being diagnosed with cancer is like being sent on a journey that you did not want to take. You are forced to go places you did not want to go to, learn a language you never planned on learning, and do things you never wanted to do. You will have questions and concerns along the way. Navigating this foreign landscape and coping with the unpredictable demands of day-to-day life that come with the territory can be overwhelming. Remember you are not alone. The support of loved ones and organizations, such as Blood Cancer United, can help you navigate new pathways and help you find your “new normal.”

In this excerpt, BCU does acknowledge that the survivorship experience varies, but they still ultimately conclude that a “new normal” is the endpoint, which may in some ways contribute to the larger ableist, normate culture that valorizes the “normal” body and reinforces the “centrality, naturality, and neutrality” of the able, or not ill, position (Dolmage 22). Rosemarie Garland-Thomson identified the “normate” as an assumed standard (*Extraordinary Bodies* 8), and since then, the term has developed to “connote the ways normalcy is used to control bodies” through ableism (Dolmage and Lewiecki-Wilson 24). Ableism is a system of discrimination that “rhetorically invents and employs the idea of a ‘normal body’ and treats physical deviance from that norm as lacking something that all other nondisabled people

share” (Cherney 8). In this excerpt, the site encourages cancer survivors to push forward with life and align with “culture’s desire for homogeneity,” so that illness does not inconvenience and discomfort the able and the well (Dolmage 21).

After my chemotherapy regimen caused all my hair to fall out, my grandmother gave me eyebrow pencils, false eyelashes, and wigs instead of accepting my bald, sick body. *I want you to look normal again*, these gifts seemed to say. She meant well. But when I drew hair-like arches over my eyes and donned a wig, I still looked like the abnormal person I was, a person living with the “abnormal condition” of cancer (Agnew 8). I imagine a reality that isn’t swathed in ableism, one in which I and others do not seek to disguise ill bodies. I imagine a website that does not promote a return to the “realm of the normal” (Agnew 14). The decision to accept being abnormal, and disabled, “opens up a world of possibility” (Johnson and McRuer 137). The BCU might adjust their materials to reflect this world of possibility.

BCU is a juggernaut in conversations about blood cancer, so locating this advocacy for a “return to normal” on a website with such presence may place pressure on survivors to seek something that may not be achievable. Some survivors may never feel “normal” within their non-conforming bodies, and existing within a non-normative body is, as Christina V. Cedillo points out, already an “unrelenting process; it is indeed exhausting” (9). There is an opportunity here for BCU to “move over” and “make room” for non-normativity (Cedillo 9), or to reject the concept of normalcy altogether, and help survivors recognize their complex feelings as an “expected part” of their experience (Coscarelli et al. 132). In the widely-accepted, ableist view, sickness, even cancer, need not interfere with the proper functioning of society, which requires that people return to normal. To suggest otherwise, to create a space that works against this normative view and to propose that perhaps something as life-altering as cancer can disrupt normativity forever, is to resist a cultural script that is so engrained it seems impossible to reimagine—but it is not.

The Labor of Wellness: Survivorship as Responsibility

“What if I never have another martini and I get enough sleep and I weigh what I should and I manage my stress and I keep track of all my appointments and I get my blood drawn diligently every three months and I still relapse?”

—Personal journal entry, March 17, 2024

Cancer is an unsettling reminder of the unpredictability and vulnerability of the human condition. It highlights how little control we have over our bodies, and our failure to “explain and master much in our world” (Kleinman 20). Survivorship and maintaining remission is similarly unpredictable, though the BCU website, at times, does not uphold this view. A list of health suggestions to keep survivors “healthy and happy” is included under the heading “Follow-Up Care and Survivorship” on the site. This list includes items such as “Keep all doctors’ appointments,” “Keep a healthcare file with copies of lab reports and treatment records,” and “Get enough rest.” Figure 1 shows the list of health suggestions in its entirety, though I quote the suggestions I include in this discussion.

Take good care of yourself

Review the following tips to keep yourself healthy and happy:

- Keep all doctors' appointments
- Talk about how you feel with the doctor at each visit
- Ask any questions you may have about side effects
- Follow the doctor's advice for preventing infection, as you may be at a higher risk
- Eat healthy foods each day: it is okay to eat four or five smaller meals instead of three bigger ones
- Contact the doctor about tiredness, fever, or any other symptoms
- Do not smoke. Patients who smoke should get help to quit.
- Get enough rest
- Exercise, but talk with your doctor before starting an exercise program
- Keep a healthcare file with copies of lab reports and treatment records
- Have regular cancer screenings
- See your primary care doctor to keep up with other healthcare needs
- Talk with family and friends about how you feel.
- Seek medical advice if you feel sad or depressed every day for a two-week period. Depression is an illness. Treatment for depression has benefits for people living with cancer.
- Putting your thoughts and feelings into writing can be a way to reduce stress. You may use the following sample journal page, Feelings and Thoughts, on page 36 of our booklet, *Each New Day: Ideas for Coping with Blood Cancer*, and you can print as many copies as you need:

Figure 1

Figure 1 is a screenshot from the BCU website of a bulleted list of suggestions for “taking care” of yourself post-blood cancer.

This message is not inherently problematic. Exercising some control over one's health may be empowering for some, and establishing healthy habits is good practice. However, the tragedy of illness is that one might be the healthiest, happiest person in the world and their cells may still mutate. The BCU website does not prepare survivors for this possibility, nor does it challenge the “societal expectation of individual responsibility to overcome” that many cancer messages construct (Hitt 11). There is no mention of the unpredictability and uncertainty of remission amongst their suggestions for healthy living.

The impact of this writing could be harmful for survivors who do ultimately relapse or develop another condition—did they not make the right decisions? Did they not take “good care” of themselves? It may also increase feelings of guilt and abandonment in those who are unable, for myriad possible reasons, to follow the site's recommendations. It further contributes to inaccurate cultural fantasies about bodies, including that they are “compliant instrument[s]” (Garland-Thomson, “Integrating Disability” 5). You can take “good care” of yourself and still be unable to shape bodily functioning.

Discussion: Illness, the BCU Site, and Meaning-Making

This analysis reveals that, in some ways, the BCU website fails to present a nuanced and inclusive portrayal of survivorship and provide support and informational material accordingly. It reveals themes of upholding normalcy and individual control that are part of larger cultural perspectives which influence all of us, not only cancer survivors.

The site exhibits a largely normate view of surviving cancer, contributing to a picture of this complex experience as a “minor hiccup to a healthy life,” one that does not “unnecessarily disrupt the realm of the normal” (Ryan 375; Agnew 14). The site's message is that returning to as “normal” a body as possible is the optimal cancer survival experience, upholding ableist ideas of the ‘abnormal’ body as “inferior” and the “oppressed Other” (Cherney 8). Cancer is, objectively, abnormal. It is caused by abnormalities in the body, and surviving it does not mean that the

abnormality of the experience vanishes, nor does it have to. The rhetors for the BCU website have an opportunity to create a space that does not advocate for normality or the concept of a normate at all and instead acknowledges and empowers the human experience of not feeling any sort of “normal,” new or otherwise. What possibility exists in the world’s largest blood cancer nonprofit asserting that cancer does, and indeed should, disrupt the realm of the normal? What possibility exists in the world’s largest blood cancer nonprofit rejecting the realm of the normal entirely?

Implications and Recommendations

In many ways, Blood Cancer United is wonderful, informative, and helpful. However, as rhetors within a vulnerable rhetorical community, the technical communicators for the website have an “ethical obligation to consider the impact” they have on users, “intended or not” (Moeller 75). I am confident that the rhetors for BCU have the best intentions. In fact, the recent rebranding from the Leukemia and Lymphoma Society to Blood Cancer United demonstrates attention to their impact, and that shift also came with changes to the site that are inclusive and thoughtful (“LLS Unveils Name Change to Reach All Blood Cancer Patients”). It is because of this that I call upon them to continue to reflect on and improve their work. In *The Cancer Journals*, Audre Lorde writes, “without community there is certainly no liberation, no future, only the most vulnerable and temporary armistice between me and my oppression” (Lorde 5). To develop a more effective community, the kind of community Lorde writes of, in online medical spaces, I call on rhetoricians to avoid passively consuming the texts on these sites, and to seek an understanding of “their myriad implications” and the “many possible results of our acceptance of their authority” (Hefferson and Brown 2).

Conclusion

There are plenty of opportunities in this realm for further study, including an analysis of Blood Cancer United’s other materials. This work is also limited to one medical advocacy site for those impacted by blood cancer, so further study might include analysis of other medical advocacy websites and survivorships by other scholar-survivors with different illnesses. More study is needed to explore the intersectionality of survivorship through a criptistemological lens, as my own perspective is limited by my race, gender identity, age, socioeconomic status, and more identifiers. Disability life writing “continues to privilege White bodies,” and my work here does nothing to address this privilege (Ferri 2275). It is my hope that further exploration and analysis of this nature can lead to online rhetorical communities that are truly places of visibility and refuge for those who need it and contribute to a positive reconceptualization of what it means to be sick and to survive.

“And I am not who I was and that is never not a gut punch, a heartbreak and I do not think I’ll ever have enough time, even if I live to one hundred and I probably won’t live to one hundred and I find some peace with that and I find some peace in general and I keep living and living and living and. . .”

-Personal essay

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The Madwoman Reimagined: Uncanny Doubling and Visibility in Julia Armfield's "The Great Awake"

Stephanie Rowitz

In the chapter "Infection in the Sentence: The Woman Writer and the Anxiety of Authorship" from *The Madwoman in the Attic: The Woman Writer and the Nineteenth-Century Literary Imagination*, Sandra M. Gilbert and Susan Gubar argue that female writers experience an "anxiety of authorship" that is inherently different from the male writers' experience of the "anxiety of influence" (Gilbert and Gubar 47). In short, the "anxiety of influence" is the idea that men suffer from an Oedipal-like struggle of imposter syndrome due to the overabundance of male forefathers. In contrast, the "anxiety of authorship" (49) reflects the unique struggle women writers face due to the absence of literary foremothers. This "anxiety of authorship" manifests itself in how femininity is perceived through the angel versus monster binary. Women are either the angelic ideal of femininity or they are its monstrous shadow, most vividly embodied in the figure of the madwoman in *Jane Eyre*. For Gilbert and Gubar, these doubles emerge unconsciously, reflecting the repressed terrors and desires of women who had no literary authority. However, as Veronica Schanoes suggests, contemporary women writers often deploy the doubling phenomenon more consciously, multiplying selves in ways that expose rather than conceal the mechanics of repression. Julia Armfield's short story "The Great Awake" is an example of this shift. Her uncanny "sleeps" are doubles that echo what Sarah A. Brown describes as the unsettling tension of the familiar made strange. However, unlike the attic-bound madwoman, these doubles move around visibly in the public space. Additionally, as Jeanett Shumaker notes of Anne Enright's fiction, contemporary uncanny doubles often reveal gendered anxieties tied to identity and embodiment, a tradition that Armfield inherits while reimagining it in terms of surveillance and productivity. By making the double external rather than internal, thereby subjecting it to social regulation, Armfield transforms the trope of the madwoman from a hidden, unconscious manifestation of authorship anxiety into a conscious and visible figure that dramatizes twenty-first century anxieties about selfhood, surveillance, and control.

In “Infection in the Sentence,” Gilbert and Gubar examine the ways eighteenth- and nineteenth-century women writers grappled with the “anxiety of authorship,” a condition that constricted women’s creativity and was both socially constrained and internally conflicted. Many women writers of the time employed the use of a symbolic double to represent the forbidden aspects of the feminine experience and explore their transgressive thoughts. One of the most famous examples of the madwoman figure to date is Bertha Mason from Charlotte Brontë’s *Jane Eyre*. As Gilbert and Gubar note, the construction of the double to discuss women writers’ internal struggles was not necessarily something that they were aware they were doing. The unconscious manifestation of the double illustrates how women authors internalized the social constraints that limited their daily and literary lives. The use of the madwoman was a way for the author to express her inner rage, desire, and creativity, which she could not fully express in the real world. By “projecting their rebellious impulses not into their heroines but into mad or monstrous women (who are suitably punished. . .), female authors dramatize their own self-division, their desire to both accept the strictures of patriarchal society and to reject them” (Gilbert and Gubar 78). In this way, the madwoman is more than just an interesting oppositional character to the “angel;” she is also the mediator between the author’s inner life and the rigid expectations she is supposed to adhere to in the patriarchal literary world. The madwoman’s confinement—in the case of Bertha Mason, in the attic—reflects the degree to which women’s internal conflicts had to remain hidden to maintain social order.

It is important to note that the madwoman double is both a threat and a companion to the socially sanctioned female writer. As Gilbert and Gubar note, the double haunts the woman writer and the act of writing is an attempt to negotiate with the forbidden aspects of herself, a way to release her frustrations and desires in a socially acceptable way. It is precisely the woman writer’s marginalization that makes the use and concealment of the double necessary. However, the double is more than just a psychological or literary construct; it is a reflection of the historical and social realities of women.

The idea that women authors used the madwoman double unconsciously provides a fitting backdrop for understanding the work of contemporary author, Julia Armfield. Unlike the madwoman who must be confined or obscured, Armfield’s “sleeps” are purposefully visible. Whereas Gilbert and Gubar’s doubles must function secretly in the attics and margins of the eighteenth- and nineteenth-century women writers’ work, Armfield’s doubles perform and interact with social expectations in real time. This difference highlights an important shift in contemporary literary practice in that doubling no longer needs to be a private or repressed mechanism; it can now be used openly to explore concerns about visibility, productivity, and surveillance. Through Gilbert and Gubar’s examination, we can see how Armfield transforms the historical madwoman framework from something that must remain hidden in the attic to something that boldly walks the street with us.

In “Uncanny Doubles: Part Two,” Sarah A. Brown provides an important extension of this discussion by emphasizing the uncanny nature of the double, noting both its familiarity and its strangeness. Drawing on Sigmund Freud’s theory of the uncanny, Brown argues that the double destabilizes boundaries between the self and the other, the interior and the exterior, and the conscious and the unconscious. She explains that doubles provoke

such unease because they are both recognizably “us” and yet disturbingly autonomous, making one question which is real and which is the doppelgänger, “who is doing what to whom? Is the uncanny resemblance real?” (Brown 73). In Armfield’s “The Great Awake,” this uncanniness takes a distinct social form when the “sleep” mirrors its original self so perfectly that the difference between who is the real person and who is the doppelgänger is almost impossible to distinguish. This blurring is most striking when the unnamed narrator sits across her brother at the table and comments: “Reflected in the window, it was hard to tell which of them was paler, which would be more recognizable if I came up to the diner from the parking lot and saw them through the glass” (Armfield 38). The “sleeps” bring to life Brown’s definition of the uncanny. They replicate the gestures, routines, and habits of their counterparts to the point that the characters themselves feel both recognized and redundant. However, Armfield complicates this by removing the uncanny from the private, psychological space of the Gothic attic to the bodily space of everyday life, where social performance is required. In this way, the uncanny is no longer confined to the home but has become a feature of the everyday social being.

While Gilbert and Gubar illustrate how the double works as an unconscious projection of the repressed, and Brown comments on the uncanny nature of doubles, later feminist and postmodern theorists believe that the use of the double is often an intentional and self-aware literary strategy. In “Doubling and Multiplying the Self/Story in Catherynne M. Valente’s *The Ice Puzzle*,” Veronica Schanoes argues that modern women writers consciously use the storytelling device of a double to exert narrative control and explore their identities. Instead of the double representing an eruption of the repressed, it is a deliberate act used to multiply the self. Schanoes uses the analogy of a shattered mirror to illustrate her point that the scattered pieces of the narrative “reflect the self into different shapes. . . It uses different myths as mirrors of one another and of one female character. If myth is a way to make meaning out of our lives. . . then here it becomes a way of creating ourselves as multiplied selves” (196–97). In this way, the use of the double is an act of agency and a way for women writers to inhabit multiple positions at the same time. This perspective highlights that doubles are not merely symptoms of anxiety, but can be creative acts of self-representation.

Schanoes’s emphasis on conscious doubling helps us understand how Armfield’s “sleeps” function as thinking and sentient counterparts who can exert control over their humans. The “sleeps” are sometimes havoc-raisers, but they also have a protective nature, preventing their human counterparts from doing something ill-advised. While on a phone call with her mother, the narrator considers telling her about a budding romantic relationship with her neighbor, to which the “sleep” chooses “that moment to take the receiver away from me and hang up the call” (Armfield 36). The “sleep,” functioning as an extension of the narrator, knew that sharing this detail with the narrator’s mother was not a good idea. The “sleep” thereby exerts control in a way that the narrator cannot, thus illustrating how the double can represent one version of the self that thinks and acts differently from another version. One version of the narrator wanted to share an important life detail with her mother, while her double knew that it would only cause more pain to tell her; thus, the double represents the part of the self who acts in the narrator’s best interest and allows the author to inhabit conflicting positions simultaneously.

Armfield's doubles also participate in a broader cultural conversation about surveillance and productivity. A teenager writes to her local newspaper about how she is "too shy to masturbate with her Sleep watching" (29), which underscores how the existence of the "sleeps" compels people to act in a certain way even when they are alone. Despite being extensions of the characters, the "sleeps" are still otherized presences that make people feel like they are being watched and judged for their behavior. Since they are not confined to either the public or the private space, "sleeps" can monitor and control behavior everywhere. In addition to their ability to uphold chaste behavior, the "sleeps" also allow London residents to be more productive since they no longer have to designate time for sleep. The narrator explains that her brother is on his way to an acting audition at two o'clock in the morning, which is "an early example of what would become the fairly common practice of 'repurposing the night'" (28). The repurposing of nights to work more provides a crucial contemporary commentary on how, as technology advances and automates specific tasks, our capitalist society inevitably finds other ways to fill the time with more work. Unlike Gilbert and Gubar's madwoman, who rebels by retreating into madness, Armfield's double conforms so completely that rebellion is replaced by survival. No one pushes back against the "repurposing" of nighttime; instead, it becomes fully integrated into daily life as the people become more exhausted and too weak from a lack of sleep to fight it.

Aside from being cognizant entities that control their human doubles to act in ways that align with the chaste capitalist demands of society, Armfield's doubles also comment on the distinctly feminine forms of haunting. The narrator describes her "sleep" as a burden and a companion. It is something to talk to in the sleepless hours, yet it provides "little indication that what I said was appreciated" (23) and essentially ignores her attempts at engagement. The "sleep" haunts her, yet she cannot engage with it or rid herself of it. The conflicted way she feels about her "sleep" reflects how modern women grapple with the social expectations placed on them. Women strive to fulfill societal expectations to the best of their ability, but inevitably fall short because the standard is unattainable. This creates a sense of ambivalence for women who are not allowed to engage in the conversation about the expectations placed on them, yet are still expected to perform them perfectly. The double then becomes a figure of social exhaustion; it enables women to perform the feminine ideal—i.e., being the perfect caregiver without complaint—but to the point of depletion. The narrator is more productive than she has ever been, but at a severe physical and emotional cost. As Jeanett Shumaker notes, the double then "dramatize[s] the impossibility of stabilizing identity" (107). The modern woman will always be at odds with the unrealistic expectations placed on her and therefore her identity remains unstable. The uncanny, then, is not what is hidden but what is overexposed. The "sleep" walks through a world where the self has become a ghost, split between the competing drives for authenticity and social performance.

Julia Armfield's "sleeps" in "The Great Awake" reimagine the feminist double for the surveilled postmodern age. While Gilbert and Gubar's madwoman was confined to the attic, Armfield's double is free-roaming and infiltrates every aspect of modern life. The narrator is functioning in the way society expects, but she is still haunted by the expectations that society imposes through the emergence of the "sleeps." Gilbert and Gubar's analysis of eighteenth- and nineteenth-century women writers whose doubles had to remain hidden,

Brown's belief that doubles are familiar yet eerie examples of the uncanny, and Schanoes's understanding that doubles are now a conscious literary choice provide a crucial backdrop to understanding Armfield's literary moves. Furthermore, Shumaker's ideas about doubles representing gendered anxiety about identity allow us to see how Armfield's work embodies evolving ideas about the madwoman double, showing how women's identity has become a public negotiation. The result is a new feminist uncanny in which the self is no longer fractured privately but is instead very publicly exposed and scrutinized.

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Selling the Body of Christ: How Sadomasochism Was Used to Advance Sententious Christian Ideology in the Medieval Text *The Life and Passion of Saint Margaret*

Trever Ballaine

Although it may seem counterintuitive, sex can be a useful tool in promoting conservative ideas regarding the sanctity of virgin female bodies. Skilled practitioners of ideological manipulation exploit the inherent human desire for intimacy, utilizing illicit subject matter to attract and entice their audiences while subtly indoctrinating them with reactionary ideology. In contemporary times, this dynamic can be observed in the phenomena of the slasher film. These films notoriously combine graphic nudity with depictions of extreme violence, all the while perpetuating the trope of promiscuity equating to death, as those characters seen engaging in premarital sex are often the first victims of a conservative ethos manifested into murderous rage. But while the slasher film is a relatively modern example of this dynamic, utilizing illicit sexual and violent imagery to sell conservative Christian dogma is a tactic intertwined with New Testament theology. This tactic of combining sadomasochism with sexually conservative ideology flourished during the medieval period (Dresvina 223).

As Julia Dresvina points out, “medieval Christianity can be viewed as a masochistic religion, with a specific focus on sacrifice, penance, and mortification of flesh, as well as anticipation of the bodily resurrection; a whole industry of scholarly work has arisen to examine the interplay between pain and pleasure in medieval Western religious culture” (223). But while Dresvina is correct that there are many scholastic inquiries into the relationship between pain and pleasure in medieval cultures, not much research has been conducted into how the sadomasochistic elements of medieval literature were used to attract and indoctrinate readers into the more sententious aspects of Christian thought. The following study examines *The Life and Passion of Saint Margaret*, a medieval virgin martyr narrative, positing that the sex and violence featured within the text served to entice and indoctrinate a readership so sexually repressed, they turned to glorifications of bodily torture in pursuit of erotic gratification. As demonstrated by the popularity of regressive tropes in modern film, apparatuses encouraging unattainable ideals of corporeal

female purity continue to persist and infiltrate culture. In an effort to identify and combat reactionary tendencies in contemporary society, it is essential that we analyze texts like *The Life and Passion of Saint Margaret* to examine the foundations of these cultural dynamics.

In detailing how states establish and maintain power, influential French philosopher Louis Althusser postulated that in addition to the Repressive State Apparatuses that are employed to maintain power (such as the police, military, courts, and prisons), power is also maintained through Ideological State Apparatuses that advance ruling class supremacy through the formation and manipulations of individual ideologies. As Althusser puts it, “the Repressive State Apparatus functions ‘by violence,’ whereas the Ideological State Apparatuses (ISAs) function ‘by ideology’” (16). When describing the different kinds of ISAs and their function in society, Althusser points out that while the Educational State Apparatus is the most influential in contemporary society, previously, that distinction was held by the Religious State Apparatus (21). In detailing how dominant this apparatus was at the time, Althusser explains: “in the pre-capitalist historical period which I have examined extremely broadly, it is absolutely clear that there was dominant Ideological State Apparatus, the Church, which concentrated within it not only religious functions, but also educational ones, and a large proportion of the functions of communications and ‘culture’” (21). Althusser also describes the Cultural State Apparatus as a contemporaneous and influential one, responsible for literature and films like the slashers mentioned above, which perpetuate ruling class supremacy by maintaining a patriarchal order that seeks to control the bodies of women (23). But as Althusser stated, in the period that *The Life and Passion of Saint Margaret* was written, the church was the singular, dominant ISA, responsible for indoctrinating the masses with an ideology that would advance ruling class interests. The church’s ideological dominance during this time is important to keep in mind while we examine the elements in the narrative that were added to entice and excite the readership as they were seduced into adopting a sexually conservative ideology.

It becomes clear when researching *The Life and Passion of Saint Margaret* that the text was motivated by specific religious ideologies and concerns. In her exploration of the cult of Saint Margaret that thrived in the North Dorset region during the medieval period, Jenny Bledsoe argues that Margaret’s physical endurance throughout the narrative provided instructions for how medieval Christians, particularly women, should behave and engage with their bodies (173). According to Bledsoe, the text was directly informed by the Fourth Lateran Council of 1215, which affected and altered the way in which the legend of Margaret was relayed in *The Life and Passion of Saint Margaret* (174). The Fourth Lateran Council was concerned with codifying practices that have now become synonymous with Catholic rituals, including the act of confession (174). Adding to the historical connections between the Council and the text, Bledsoe identifies the self denial of desire and the personal reflection on one’s sins, along with confession, as some of the concerns of the council that are reflected in the narrative (195). The importance of the swift identification and confession of one’s sins is reflected in the narrative when the demon, speaking candidly to Margaret about what individuals can do to avoid his influence, reveals that “as soon as they sin in any way, they ought to go straightaway at once to reveal it in confession so that they do not delay it at all, be it never so little or so light a sin” (Huber and Robertson 105–06). In this section, the author

ingeniously presents the values of the Council through an adversarial lens to better present the benefits of the practice of confession to the reader, an effective technique in advancing recently codified Christian theology.

Jessalyn Bird's historical study into the techniques used by crusaders and missionaries before and after the Fourth Lateran Council reveal that this particular ecumenical council was made up of diverse interests from throughout the Christian world, which allowed for the formation of "trading reform schemes, recruitment propaganda, and proselytization and debate techniques" (25). Bird's study also reveals that the council was motivated by the prophetic belief that armageddon was near, obligating Latin Christianity to undergo a reconquest of the holy land and a conversion of the people occupying these lands in order to dutifully usher in the apocalypse (24). The belief that conversion of subjects was a Christian obligation, combined with parallels between Council concerns and the text, suggests that *The Life and Passion of Saint Margaret* would have been an important tool in relaying and maintaining the updated value systems and ideologies of the ruling class. The widespread belief that adherence to such ideologies was imperative to God's will as the end-times approached would have motivated the author of *The Life and Passion of Saint Margaret* to use every narrative tool at their disposal to entice and indoctrinate, as a sense of urgency would have been inevitable given the belief that the apocalypse was impending.

In their efforts to spread the doctrines and decrees of The Fourth Lateran Council, those adhering to its practices may have inadvertently informed how the modern educational apparatus functions. In her study of virgin martyr narratives from this period, Katherine Winstead found that as a result of the directives of The Fourth Lateran Council, a multitude of religious literature was produced for the masses (64). She goes on to state that "In the wake of Lateran IV, the clergy had the formidable task of educating laypeople while preserving its own authority over them" (Winstead 64). This delicate balance of indoctrination without encouraging a dangerous level of independent thought is an indelible feature of the modern educational apparatus. And while Bledsoe suggests that this version of the Margaret legend may have been written with a small group of devout nuns in mind, I contend that this would be consistent with a strategy of indoctrinating from the top down, as instructors of religious dogma have the greatest influence over laypeople (173-74). While acknowledging that these virgin martyr narratives were intended to uphold authority by presenting these martyrs as "Brides of Christ," Winstead also makes the case that these legends could have also been interpreted as tales of empowerment for the female readership as it provided an outlet and rationale for resisting traditional marriage (65-66). Though I sympathize with attempts to reclaim or draw individual empowerment from the popular narratives promoted by ideological apparatuses, I also think it is important to realize the deliberate dichotomy built into such narratives. The rebellious protagonists of these tales would have provided inspiration to those women suffering under the brutal circumstances of medieval marriage, but the alternative these texts present also requires strict adherence to patriarchal standards of corporeal submission to ruling class ideology.

In tandem with Winstead's argument that these narratives may have had effects unintended by their authors, K.A. Laity argues that the massive amount of torture and sadism on display may have dissuaded women from joining the holy order (64). In her position

that fear of bodily harm may have been an unintended consequence of sympathizing with the protagonists of these narratives, she asserts that “The lessons become negative when they appeal not to the female reader’s intellectual apprehension, but to her apprehensiveness of physical harm. Such bodily terror may have led more women away from the intended path of sanctity rather than toward it” (Laity 64). While this argument is compelling, it does not take into account the societal dynamics that can render submission to physical pain alluring, exciting, and ultimately, pleasurable. In examining marriage during the medieval period, Sarah Salih argues that because sex in medieval marriages was often unpleasurable, societal sexual repression encouraged finding pleasures in submission, going on to state that: “The pleasure or unpleasure of sex is not necessarily located in the bodily act itself, but in the narrative framework of what it means” (132). And while *The Life and Passion of Saint Margaret* does not directly address the displeasures of marital sex, it does bestow a more specialized and brutal form of torture on the Brides of Christ, or as Salih identifies, virgins who formed the most elite status of chastity (followed by widows, then wives), who often eroticized their relationship to Christ (128). The sexual appeal of submitting to bodily torture in service of Christ is exemplified in the narrative when Margaret is initially captured by the heathen ruler Olibrius who seeks ownership of her body, prompting her to address Christ directly for guidance and assistance:

Have, Lord, compassion and mercy on your woman. Never let my soul perish with the lost, nor my life with the wicked men, who are stained bloody with sin. Jesus Christ, God’s son, may You be ever my joy and my gladness, who I may evermore honor and praise. Hold, lofty Lord, my heart, I beseech You, in true belief, and protect my body—which is completely given over to You—from fleshy filth, so that my soul may never be sullied in sin through that fleshy desire that pleases for a little while. Lord, listen to me. I have a precious gemstone, and I have given it to you—my virginity I mean, the brightest blossom in the body that holds and protects it well (Huber and Robertson 89–90).

Displayed here is the eroticized “narrative framework” that Salih identifies, used skillfully by the author of the text to establish a submissive yet pleasurable relationship between Margaret and Christ. This pleasurable relationship enticed the intended readership as it is assumed that women could have the same eroticized relationship if they also submit their bodies to Christ, or, to put it in material terms, to the church. In calling herself “your woman,” Margaret positions herself as a possession of the Lord and in a typical sadomasochistic fashion, she submits her body without knowing the types of torture that lie ahead. The readership, however, primed by other passion narratives, may have been eagerly awaiting the sensational violence that traditionally accompanies this act of absolute submission.

Another indication that the intended readership would have found these aspects of the material alluring can be found in Dresvina’s conclusions from her investigation into sadomasochism in medieval cultures. In her study, Dresvina finds that the theology of Christianity is conducive to sadomasochistic tendencies in the first place, which, combined with a willful lack of knowledge of female anatomy or orgasms, would have fostered an environment where women seek pleasure within the act of submission (223). She goes on

to state that “Sure enough, in a society where sex was technically seen as the activity during which a man ejaculates, female sexual pleasure was less of a consideration than male pleasure, especially in fiction” (Dresvina 213). Given this cultural dynamic and the widespread belief among scholars that the intended readership *The Life and Passion of Saint Margaret* was initially comprised of devout nuns, it would have been logical for the author to accentuate and fetishize the submission and masochism already present in the legend in order to appeal to the most practical outlet of relieving sexual tension for virgin women at the time: their sadomasochistic devotion to Christ. The decision to fetishize the violence Margaret endures can be observed in the narrative with the repeated sexualization of her torture, like when Olibrius, frustrated by Margaret’s refusal to submit to his demands, instructs his men to “strip her stark-naked and lift her up on high, so that she hangs as a reward for her mockeries, and burn her body with tapers” (Huber and Robertson 110). Here, the emphasis on stripping her naked before elevating her for display clearly eroticizes the violence in a manner that incorporates the sadomasochistic tradition of humiliation. It is significant that while Olibrius is the one directly responsible for the torture, it is her submission to Christ and Christian values that gives her the strength to endure and resist capitulating to her heathen husband.

It should also be noted that along with the sadistic elements of the narrative that are intended to allure and entice, the text took on a metaphysical quality that further encouraged sensual engagement with the material. Sara Ritchey argues that these virgin saint narratives are actually “efficacious texts,” going on to explain that “the process of reading these Lives promised to precipitate physiological and spiritual transformation” (1104). The metaphysical quality of the text is demonstrated in the text when Margaret proclaims, “I bid and beseech You, who are my joys and bliss, that whoever writes a book about my life, or obtains it written, or holds it and has it often in hand, or whoever reads it or listens eagerly to a reader, Savior of Heaven, may all their sins be forgiven immediately” (Huber and Robertson 66). Given the physiological engagement encouraged by the text, it would be safe to assume that the salacious elements would have had more of a sensational impact on readers of the time. Ritchey goes on to argue that readers during this period would not have interacted with the saintly narratives the same way we do today, instead believing them to have transmutational effects on their bodies (1102). From a theological standpoint, it would have been essential for the author of *The Life and Passion of Saint Margaret* to display an ideal example of how women should treat their bodies, because, as Elizabeth Robertson argues, the legend of Saint Margaret ultimately promotes the prevailing medieval view that women, in contrast to men, achieve their spiritual redemption through the body. In Robertson’s words, “Because a woman can never escape her body, her achievement of sanctity has to be through the body” (268). But while these medieval authors may have had Fourth Lateran Council concerns of confession and self denial of desire as their formal justifications, it is no coincidence that affirming these theological concerns also serves to cement the influence of patriarchal power structures by controlling female bodies.

The torture and abuse of the female body throughout the narrative also provides opportunity for some readers to find aspects of female empowerment in the legend. Nicole Nyffenegger argues that by reading the violent marks that appear on Margaret’s skin as

figurative tattoos, the text can be interpreted as one promoting female empowerment (267). Nyffenegger goes on to explain that “While the gruesome torture scenes suggest that Olibrius wins the upper hand in this contest, the outcome of the narrative instead proves that Margaret triumphs. She dies a virgin after defiantly appropriating, in her tattoo narrative, the torture marks as her own, divine tattoo” (267). While I do agree that the text does present Margaret as the victor by the end, I question just how empowering the text can be if her victory was used by ideological state apparatuses to maintain and promote a patriarchal structure that sought to normalize the oppression of women by presenting Margaret’s sacrifice as the most noble of her options, while never interrogating the power structures that forced her into this dilemma in the first place. Skilled ideological manipulators know how to disguise state/church-sponsored ideology as subversive, manufacturing inspiring protagonists that rebel against the system on the surface of the narrative, while reinforcing repressive societal patterns within the subtextual realm. In her examination of the text’s relationship to the female body, AnneMarie Fox posits that *Margaret* actually reinforced patriarchal boundaries on the body by creating a text that “overtly and covertly encloses the female reader within those boundaries, and restricts and regulates her spirituality” (133). Fox suggests that the text is written by men for women with the express purpose of containing female spirituality and controlling their bodies (133). By reinforcing patriarchal boundaries on the body, *Margaret* demonstrates cultural reverberations of The Fourth Lateran Council’s directives, which resulted in an atmosphere of sexual suffocation for women at the time. The frustration caused by this suffocation resulted in a conversion of overt sexual desire into the eroticization of submission, humiliation, and physical pain, a dynamic which was exploited and manipulated by the dominant ideological state apparatus of the era.

While it certainly was not my intention with this essay to besmirch those that find inspiration in female protagonists like virgin saints, Disney princesses, or the only surviving character in a slasher film, I do think it is important to analyze the ideological imperatives behind products that are promoted by ruling classes. These narratives are intentionally intertwined into the cultural atmosphere, and as such, they are almost impossible to escape. Thus, we might as well make the most of them by finding character motivations that resonate with us and by seeking subversive interpretations that suit our worldview, as long as we make the effort to step back, observe, and criticize the ideological frameworks in which these products are attempting to trap us.

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To Travelogue *The Blazing World*: Feminine Counsel and Dis/Re/Placement in Margaret Cavendish's Postbellum Imperialist Reform Fiction

Drea Wineman

Barbara Korte asserts that “the majority” of women’s travel writing is “private or semi-private” as expressed through the medium of “diaries, journals, or letters” (113). This has marked the travelogue, particularly prior to the twentieth century, as a largely male genre form. For example, Claire Jowitt confirms that early modern travel narrative “does the domestic work” not to conjure images of Englishwomen, but to call attention to male dramatists’ “use of exotic tropes”—often involving the positioning of people of color, women, or both—“in an opportunistic way, as they comment upon problems and inequities at home” (5). Marion Wynne-Davies ponders these gendered barriers to travel within fiction. “The first Elizabethan prose fictions,” she notes, “were often set in distant or imaginary lands” invented by men, such as John Lyly’s *Euphues* (1578 and 1580) and Philip Sidney’s 1590 work, *Arcadia* (223). Wynne-Davies’s analysis of *The Blazing World* is centered on the “feminised utopia” in which Englishwomen reclaim (or “re-enchant,” in Rachel Trubowitz’s sense) travel. This novel is crucially contrary to Cavendish’s other representations of female travel, such as in Sociable Letter “XCIX.” Here, Cavendish depicts “Wives of Banished men . . . forced to Travel to and from their Husbands to seek for Means and Subsistence” as they “want . . . Meat . . . and Cloaths to cover them” (Bb2v). This Cavendishian duality of feminine travel is apt, for she also identifies a masculine counterpart in “An Oration concerning the Foreign Travels of Young Gentlemen.” These men “get nothing by their Travels, but Vanity and Vice . . . go[ing] forth of their Own Country Civil Men, but return[ing] . . . as Apes, Goats, and Swine . . . so that their Travels Metamorphose them from Men to Beasts” (L2r-v). In Cavendish’s view, aristocratic men are cautioned against less of an immediate danger than a selfish vice, while women are frightened into stasis; she contributes, in fact, to the maleness of the travel narrative, especially during the wars and the Interregnum. However, it is in Cavendish’s ambitious political science fiction, *The Blazing World*—what I deem her feminine “travelogue”—that she radically modifies and even reverses her former writings on female agency and travel.

Beastly young men ruined by their journeys do not simply create contrast between the outcomes of men's travel and women's to open, for Wynne-Davies, an avenue through which to re-enchant women's travel following the English civil wars. These early representations of beast-men evolve into those who satirize the Royal Society in Cavendish's *Blazing World*. Cavendish's world does not merely explore women's placement within spaces scarred by war and defined by man's society and government. *The Blazing World*, I posit beyond Wynne-Davies, illustrates a hopeful yet practical future for her politicized and political placement within a Restored England. Cavendish presents the possibility of realistic female governmental power through the novel's critique of fixed male authorities of English society—all via an exilic, Royalist, and unmistakably feminine ethos generated by inter-worldly travel and experience. Furthermore, I illustrate the complexity of sovereignty within *The Blazing World's* female characters through a lens not yet critically explored: the genre of travel writing.

Cavendish's novel embodies the travelogue, doing Jowitt's ironically masculine "domestic work" to implicitly steer England, like an enlightened voyager, toward new excellency—and away from the old inadequacies which her exploration of the foreign reveals. Cavendish's political manipulation of the science-fictionalized travelogue solidifies with a simple chronological consideration: the same year her novel was published, the Royal Society published a "Catalogue of Directions" encouraging male travel on the basis of the science (Korte 36) she so markedly disparages in her works. Although Sociable Letter "CXV" narrator claims that "being of the Female Sex," she "want[s] those Observations that Travelling and Commercing Persons have" to "Judg of Nations [and] People" (*Paper Bodies* 75), the dis-placed and re-placed Duchess and Empress of the novel, and the non-fictional Margaret Cavendish, are not left wanting. Following their experiences of both unconsented and consented travel, these female Royalist personas comparatively wield their observations via their own English travelogue. *The Blazing World* is itself a public, viable, and ultimately female-empowering "Judg of Nations [and] People" in direct conversation with royal government and policy neglectful of the feminine. Later in this essay, however, I elaborate on the complications which arise from the privileging of the real Duchess's textual persona over that of her wholly fictional—and wholly powerful—Empress of the "blazing" world.

This paper's focus on life away from home as formative and largely empowering prompts a necessary overview of the Cavendishes' own literal time in exile.¹ Husband and wife travel from England to France to the "Low Countries" and to England again,² gaining from this international experience considerable connections and creations, as well as undeniable bouts of desolation. In Paris, salon culture refined "the Cavendish Circle" of which men such as Thomas Hobbes, Pierre Gassendi, and Rene Descartes were a part. In Antwerp, the couple took up residence in the Rubenshuis, where William Cavendish established his well-regarded riding school, and, following his wife's many works, published *Méthode et invention nouvelle de*

¹ Biographical information has been sourced from Anne Thell's "Brief Chronology" prefacing her edition of Cavendish's *Grounds of Natural Philosophy* (2020).

² For Margaret Cavendish, this journey is less straightforward or linear. In 1651, her denied petition for Newcastle's estates resulted in her continued two-year stay in England, where she published *Poems* and *Philosophicall Fancies* before her return to Antwerp in 1653.

dresser les chevaux (1658). Newcastle continued to host prominent Royalists in exile while his wife fostered close female connections with the wealthy and artistically renowned Duarte sisters. However, it was during her time in Paris that Cavendish's sister, niece, and mother all died in England in 1647, and her youngest brother was executed after the siege of Colchester the following year. While the Cavendishes made an effort to make the best of Paris, their financial and personal grief compounded guttingly with, for Royalists such as they, their divine king's execution in 1649. For Cavendish, Charles I's murder fell between two other deaths in her Royalist family—all of which occurred countless miles away, out of her sight and out of her control.

It must be noted that these tumultuous decades in Margaret Cavendish's life were dictated not by herself or her husband, but by her honor and obligations to queen and country in a time of war. This enduring absence of both self and agency within the politics and place of her home in England appears as no small influence on Cavendish's writing. From Parliament branding Newcastle as more traitor than citizen and Cavendish, according to the speaker of Sociable Letter "XVI," as no citizen at all given her sex (*PB* 65); the claustrophobia of foreign courtly life; the moorlessness of frequent travel and temporary lodgings; to loyalty's delayed reward in the form of a dukedom for her husband, it is no surprise that female-fronted monarchical reform and counsel frame Cavendish's novel of physical and governmental dis/re/placement.

Published in 1666 alongside *Observations Upon Experimental Philosophy*, *The Blazing World* is rightly interpreted as an indictment of the Royal Society by scholars like Holly Faith Nelson, Sharon Alker, and, in her recent work on critiques of Robert Hooke, Line Cottagnies. Cavendish mocks the fledgling academic organization via representations of its members as human-animal hybrids of questionable scientific authority. Esteemed Cavendish scholars such as Deborah Boyle and Rachel Trubowitz have extensively studied Cavendish's engagement with science and philosophy in the context of "being one of [her] own sex" (*PB* 208), as well as her considerations of governmental powers and her views on what makes an adequate monarch. Fewer scholars have considered the influence of geographical movement and exile on the politics of the novel, with even fewer exploring the textual travel and narrative relation of such that Cavendish and her characters undertake on the page. The most apparent gap in scholarship, though, is made by a lack of comparative analysis of *The Blazing World* and early modern travel narratives as similar documents of insider/outsider sociopolitical observation, critique, and influence.

The conversation on the duchess's movement in space and on the page is not dominant in studies of Cavendish, but has produced valuable scholarship. *The Blazing World's* tension between external and internal movement and literal and representational displacement is a relevant concern for these arguments. Emma Rees emphasizes extensive peritextual material and the "slippage" of Cavendish's voice into *The Blazing World's* (and other works') narrative as evidence of a "conflation of text with self" (30). Sylvia Bowerbank and Sara Mendelson evoke a similar line of thought through the title of their *Cavendish Reader*, aptly emphasizing Cavendish's notion of *Paper Bodies*. However, this "self" is not strictly Cavendish, but rather the female figure literally or figuratively exiled from England in her powerlessness and obscurity—or, lack of "fame." Though banished, Rees writes, Newcastle's "voice and, equally

defiantly and at greater length, that of his wife, is still forcibly articulated and put into public circulation” through the heavily prefaced and personalized works of “Margaret the First”³ (31).

Anne Thell and Wynne-Davies analyze the consistent returns to “real life” in their challenge of the purported utopia in which the novel largely takes place. Thell builds on Oddvar Holmesland’s idea that exile in Cavendish introduces rather than excludes opportunities for empowerment (459), and on Mendelson’s show of such through Jewish allusions claimed to stem from Cavendish’s intimacy with fellow exiles, the Duartes. Thell argues that travel for the Cavendishian character is “the factor that enables and maintains her usurpation of all other types of power” (441). She claims this is especially so within a world that is not escapist but “reciprocal or symbiotic” as it elides “worlds and personas, text and life,” to transfer power between the ruling Empress and advising Duchess (442). Like Thell’s, Wynne-Davies’s emphasis on travel and the interrupted utopia figures *The Blazing World* into a map—one which is necessary to navigate personal English female trajectory in the midst or wake of war and conflict. Because the “traditional method of mapping” was “analogous” to seventeenth-century prose (222)—as in early atlases’ anecdotal asides of pilgrimage, and of destination as “heavenly” conclusion or narrative denouement (224)—Wynne-Davies marks the change in tone of wartime geographical arts speaking to poverty, theft, and rape as critical (229). As I earlier stated, Wynne-Davies claims this vulnerability in pre-Restoration travel is both expressed and subverted in *The Blazing World* (229): indeed, the Empress is threatened by male assault and the Duchess stolen away from England once again, but each woman wrests personal power from their circumstances of relocation.

Most critics tangibly map the novel’s trope of the travelling self. Many cite Cavendish’s literal publishing and book donation, her disruptive real-world allusions and settings, or general wartime travel practices and map-making. Marina Leslie and Tessie Prakas, however, move further inward in their arguments. Prakas places emphasis on *The Blazing World*’s unbeholden, anti-authoritarian “fancy,” functionally differentiated by Cavendish from the technical “philosophy” of *Observations* (PB 152). Prakas considers her “fancy” in opposition to Hobbes’s (whom Newcastle was a patron of) constrained imagination described in *Leviathan*, stating that fancy is a “realm” to which Cavendish immateriality travels to reconcile “fundamentally incompatible political and philosophical systems” (129). Prakas locates this reconciliation in the duchess’s textual persona, noting the simultaneity of like-mindedness and divergent methodology in her impact on the Empress. The Empress, Prakas argues, is unconventional in her greater authority beside the Emperor, yet aligned with what Cavendish deems the detrimental conventions of her day: not absolutist monarchy, but the masculinely factious and thereby exclusionary influence of the Royal Society upon it (131). While Prakas stresses a mental excursion where the destination is situated in the self—with an ability to create worlds specifically under a “discipleship with Cavendish at its forefront” (140)—Leslie evokes a journey through genre. Tracing Cavendish’s engagements with multiple

³ Cavendish so christens herself in her address “To the Reader” prefacing *The Blazing World* (PB 153). Claire Jowitt explores the Cavendishes’ nostalgic Royalist allusions to Elizabeth I in “Imperial Dreams” (1997), articulating the unique space for desired female empowerment within failing paternalist monarchy.

incongruous genres both in this novel and in her wider oeuvre, she argues that “arriving in a new place is achieved not only by discerning the distance between here and there,” but by a “reframing of then and now” in terms of creative conventions and rules (89). In other words, the novel tests imaginative boundaries within textual time and space by challenging the certainty of established conventions in early modern English writing. This is a bold move also carried out in Cavendish’s numerous, unconventionally lengthy, and structurally spontaneous plays.

Though in alignment with these critics’ respective philosophical and political explorations of the travelling inner and outer selves, I move toward a deeper, female-oriented exploration of the novel’s relation to the English travel narrative. Such an analytical strategy unveils *The Blazing World* as a response to the expulsion of the feminine in the structures of both pre- and post-Restoration English society. In considering the novel a type of travelogue and building on the work of scholars like Thell, Wynne-Davies, and Prakas, key interpretations emerge. Cavendish rectifies and rearticulates Royalist women’s gendered placement in—and recent displacement from—English society. This is achieved through cultural discourse within another, juxtapositioned world in which women are empowered and publicly represented. Additionally, through her characters’ physical, immaterial, and political journeys, Cavendish generates a rallying call for imperialist reform inclusive of public female presence and advisement post-war. In response to physical and political displacement and disregard in her native country, Cavendish’s novel deploys a moderate re-placement of the feminine in government. This is established not via the forceful edicts of the Empress, but that of the Duchess’s transformation into the innovative Counselor-Scribe; female favor and influence are not permitted because of status or misinterpreted divinity, but the reputation or “fame” the Duchess’s exile awards her in the form of her worldly knowledge.

Beginning with *The Travels of Sir John Mandeville*, a popular fourteenth century narrative,⁴ the English travelogue emerges as a document of comparative observation, religious and cultural enlightenment, and most importantly, adventure. Referencing the narrator’s claims of fountains of restoration (as in Cavendishian gum or restoring beds⁵) and species of dog-headed men called cynocephali (as in Cavendishian beast-men), A.W. Pollard deems the text “a source of literary pleasure” rather than a useful “medieval contribution to geography” (p. xi). The travelogue, like *John Mandeville*’s narrator, arrives by choice to—rather than gain an adequate knowledge of the foreign—derive pleasure in his destination from that of his living surroundings. This is, of course, a pleasure necessitated by comparison with that of his place of origin. The author of exilic literature, on the other hand, does not share the story of travel for mutual adventure or enlightenment with readers; she shares her story of dis- and re-placement because it, and she, has been refused by her place of origin. However, Edward Said, Palestinian exile and author of modern travel narratives (such as “Andalusia’s Journey”), presents in “The Potentate and the Traveller” a categorical

⁴ One of the very first printed texts, it remained in English print centuries after its initial London printing in 1499 by Wynkyn de Worde, and centuries more following a reprint and new translation in the eighteenth century (Pollard p. vi).

⁵ Two methods which the Duchess of Newcastle creatively proposed across her works, fictional and philosophical, for the increase of life or even the outcome of immortality.

destabilization. The exile and the traveller may become one whole rather than two opposites, consolidating into the intellectual change-maker who “depends not on power, but on motion, on a willingness to go into different worlds” in order to, unlike the actual potentate, “live in new rhythms and rituals” and “abando[n] fixed positions” (17). The fictionalized Duchess and the fictional Empress—notably expelled from her world’s public space as a result of men’s attempted assault—become travelling exiles via their determined willingness to move within and without the new “blazing” world to exact change. In so doing, they harness what Thell calls the “power of transport” (441), for “the traveller controls her own tale” through the malleable “window that the traveler herself gives” (446). The travelling-exile turned monarch would then, in her experience of both representational power and powerlessness, logically align with both the subject and the subjector in a peaceful, balanced method of Royalism. The fictional Empress, rather pointedly, does no such thing.

The early autobiographical *A True Relation* (1656), written in exile, informs Cavendish’s reader that displacement from England is an event—a sensation of “misfortune” (PB 41)—she knew at a young age. “Father[’s] exile” for killing one Mr. Brooks in a duel, she writes, lasted from the duel “to Queen Elizabeth’s death” (41); Thomas Lucas’s absence from his children’s lives, and his own livelihood, lasted six years. Cavendish concludes her autobiography with the clarification that “I write it for my own sake . . . not to please the fancy, but to tell the truth . . . I was daughter to one Master Lucas of St. Johns neer Colchester in Essex, second Wife to the Lord Marquis of Newcastle” (63). In reasserting her physical placement in England both genealogically and provincially, as well as expressing her equal importance amongst its men, Cavendish’s autobiographical voice rebels against the terms not just of her own political placement and exile, but of her father’s and husband’s. Unlike this assertive personal voice, the speaker of Sociable Letter “XVI” attempts to praise her status as “no Subject” (PB 66), claiming “there hath been n[o war] amongst the Women” (67). Yet, the latter Royalist speaker finds herself not just locationally displaced as a result of the wars, but suddenly both hyperaware and in denial of her “exclu[sion]” (66) from the fundamental shaping (politics) of her distant home. Cavendish in *A True Relation* respectfully empowers and re-places herself within patriarchal monarchy, while the speaker of the letter merely hints at the need to do so amidst complete and detrimental deference. The Empress of the “blazing” world subverts the conventions of her native world and country much differently. In the difference and movement between Empress and Cavendishian Duchess, two associated yet divergent and thereby binarized methods of feminine changemaking destabilize patriarchal rule.

The Empress acknowledges that “fear, though it makes people obey . . . [does] not last so long, nor is it so sure a means to keep them to their duties” (PB 193). Yet, she also requires the Duchess—a fictionalization of the only party who can confirm she has not “made such disturbances, and caused so many dissolutions of particulars, otherwise named deaths” as other conquerors have (250–01)—to “abate [the Empress’s] passion” (236). The Duchess notably remains silent when, like Parliamentarians did unto St. John’s Abbey, the Empress resolves to “reduce [Towns and Cities] by force” for her vision of government (240). Contrasted against the mediating Duchess whose agency lies, as per her guidance of the Empress within her own origin-world (218), in experiential insight, the Empress’s power appears disingenuously fantastical. The Empress secularly manipulates the church—the very institution which, per

conservative views, should evince the goodness of the monarchy—to “trouble [her people] with their own wickedness” (193) and to sacrilegiously simulate walking on water like Christ (237). The re-placement within government that the Empress of much less worldly (exilically observational) experience enacts for herself is overtly akin to Cavendish’s description of tyranny in other works.

In *The World’s Olio*, Cavendish defines tyranny as “that power [which] never lasts, which falsehood got” (H4v). The novel by no means obscures the Empress’s exertion of power over her people and husband-emperor “who could hardly be persuaded⁶ to believe her mortal” (PB 162). Her governing method, largely executed via the manipulation of religious conceptualizations, is falsehood. On the other hand, the Duchess/Cavendish wields power as a practical and logical “Scribe” of the epistemological Caballa (208) and, come the novel’s conclusion in the form of anecdotal retellings to Newcastle (248–50), of this very tale. The Duchess, rather than the all-powerful Empress, does the important “reconciling” of which Prakas writes. Reconciliation between the obliteration of conservative female deference and that of Cavendish’s philosophy of *consent* in the motions of all life and matter in the universe (Grounds 73) occurs here: the Empress’s intense, absolute matriarchal power offsets the Duchess’s consistent yearning for home, husband, and king. Her consent to return to male authority coexists with the political agency and experiential competence which the Duchess puts to use for a—and potentially her own—monarchy. The alignment of an Empress who expresses no desire to return home nor assert her worthiness of “fame” under male rule with the previous remarks on tyranny is in no way incidental—nor is the Duchess’s concluding Biblical description of that world’s “most tempting sorts of Fruit” (PB 250). These are fruits she has ostensibly seen enjoyed by the transgressive fictional Empress, but has not imbibed in herself. She, the traveloguer, strategically tells of “difference” between the Empress’s unrealistic world and indulgences and that of her own reality. As this “difference cannot well be exprest,” (250), she alone has the power to comparatively define this difference to man—as well as to elucidate the viability of (her) female power in moderation, and her own authoritative position as a travelling exile.

Unlike Cavendish’s reality, the fictionalized Duchess consents to her trans-worldly and trans-national movement in the novel. As a result of her agency, she derives valuable knowledge of foreign affairs which she puts to use for her king—whom she has the power to introduce formally in court to the Empress (PB 219)—husband, and temporary matriarch. Like the exiled traveloguer or travelling exile, the displaced Duchess and Cavendish rule over representation of the other-world, claiming from this comparative position literal authority over the definition of their origin-world. This definitional power is amplified, in the words of Korte’s best-text edition of *Mandeville*, by representations of “the land . . . that *varies* and is *discordant* in faith and writing from us and our faith,” detailed so the traveller’s reader “may know the *differences* between our belief and theirs . . . [f]or many men desire to hear of *unfamiliar* things and take pleasure in them” (*English Travel Writing* 27, her emphasis). The

⁶ The unnamed woman attempts this “persuasion” once, it must be noted. Though, following her coronation as Empress, she predictably never again attempts to dissuade the world’s inhabitants of the notion of her divinity.

“pleasure” the Duchess’s husband feels “with [the] Foreign Relations” she describes (*PB* 248) is derived from the relief of her familiarity and the evidence, such as her homesickness, of her loyalty to ideal ways of female Royalism—even while playing a masculine role in court as official scribe and counselor.

The role the Duchess and Cavendish play, like Mandeville and his narrator, is to stretch the threshold of what is acceptable within English society. This is undertaken via the pleasurable exploration of extreme, forbidden differences (such as Greek polytheism in *Mandeville*, or the Empress’s sacrilegious superiority over her husband), which in turn permits readmission of small differences (acknowledged complex reasoning of the dehumanized, the cynocephali, or the public installment of an exceptional female advisor, the Duchess). This compliance method, though hardly modern, is now defined in social psychology as Robert Cialdini’s “door-in-the-face” strategy (“Inducing Compliance”). The starkly inadmissible foreign (i.e., a female authority’s usurpation of the disregarded royal male’s) therefore makes the controversial, domestic moderate (a lesser female authority’s *commingling* with a centerpiece male’s) appear rather admissible. Cavendish re-places herself within another world to play the advisor to a transgressive female monarch, yet still expresses enduring deferent sentiments toward the country, husband, and king whom she alone may tell of it. It is through this travelogue-esque novel that Cavendish advocates for moderate female presence in the structures of government: a feminine presence which, via worldly encounters with subject and subjector, may identify and repair persisting imperial fractures post-war. After all, there is “[n]o doubt” that “the greatest happiness in all Worlds consists in Moderation” (*PB* 217)—not factioning nor complete segregation of the sexes in politics.

It is indeed in the narrative “entertain[ment]” of William Cavendish who “was never displeased to hear” of this “blazing” world (*PB* 248) that the Duchess exerts her power to influence and transform her own world and reader. The result of such is a noble readership which is not only “pleased” by female empowerment, but specifically hers (and, by extension, Margaret Cavendish’s). Through the additional and abrasive feminine presence of the Empress, Cavendish achieves two things. She divests herself of the weight of English patriarchy via her persona’s alliance with the Empress; conversely through their juxtaposition, she asserts not just her Royalist deference to her king, but the viability of her intellectual position as once-exiled traveller. Once again, Prakas’s notion of the novel as a site of reconciliation between Cavendish’s politics and philosophy seems relevant. The Duchess has the power to embody “new rhythms” (Said 17) of government along fictional and literal maps where she may wish to be a “princess” (*PB* 211) among an empress. But, most importantly, she defines herself by her respect for old rituals of unconditional loyalty to potentate, husband, and country.⁷ Given her high positions within and adaptability to two separate realms, she becomes a counselor on the ways of the world(s). The Duchess guides her royal companion toward “new rhythms and rituals” like the “Poetical or Romanical Caballa” (*PB* 210) and the “abandon[ment of] fixed positions” (Said 17) like factionism.

⁷ The Duchess expresses longing to return to her husband and/or male social authority approximately eight times across the novel (*PB* 210, twice on *PB* 219, *PB* 222, *PB* 228, *PB* 244, *PB* 246, *PB* 248).

Her counsel on knowing the world (i.e., her debate with the Empress over the role of the “Jew’s Caballa”) is reflective of the nonfictional Duchess’s potential as a moderate and worldly advisor. Mendelson notes that the Cavendishes befriended Jews in Antwerp long before formal considerations of English re-admission went underway (174), evincing forward-thinking in terms of English subjectivity. Additionally, Robin Cohen’s suggestion of “a feminine version” of his wider definition of diaspora⁸ may be applied to Cavendish’s relations with the Duarte sisters. “Despite or because of their Jewish origins,” Mendelson writes, “they were in some sense kindred spirits under the skin” (184). The same can be said for the Duchess’s bond with the Empress, her “Platonick Lover” (PB 210). Because of her exilic, or diasporic, experience, the Duchess/Cavendish locates both areas of “sympathy” and “antipathy”—that which Cavendish identifies as the balancing motions of the universe (*Philosophical and Physical Opinions* G4v)—between herself and the foreigner (the Jew, the Empress). This is based upon a unique and progressive female Royalism; it prompts the Duchess to “pra[y] the Empress,” whom she “platonickally” adores and extols to men in her native world (the fictionalized Newcastle, universities receiving this novel), to “pardon her that she was of another,” more practical “mind” regarding female governmentation (PB 218). Her introduction of the Caballa to this other-world indicates the part both the Duchess and Cavendish play as the intellectual and experienced advisor. These women rearticulate experiences of (dis)placements into a site of realistic, reformative—rather than absolutist and thereby utopian⁹—female authority within the monarchical government.

Korte writes that the English travelogue, and travel writing at large, allows for participation in “inter-cultural perception and cultural construction, in processes of understanding and misunderstanding” (5). In the fashion of an English travelogue “influencing” and “transforming” their accompanying reader (7), Cavendish reconstructs her culture to determine the appropriate extent to which a Royalist government may be altered and restored by and for women. After all, the Duchess’s push to “alter” or revert the Empress’s changed policy (factioning) rather than “maintain [it] against all sense and reason” (PB 230) echoes, as Jowitt posits, a nostalgia for the past Elizabethan age expressed by both Cavendishes (“Imperial Dreams” 383). The only active agent of comparison other than the implicated narrator is, in fact, the fictionalized Duchess. The Empress is dismissive of her place of origin up until the novel’s international and interworldly naval battle. As opposed to the Empress, the Duchess expresses consistent nostalgia for a return. This return is considered not only in relation to the Duchess’s home country familiar to the reader, but to

⁸ “(1) dispersal or expansion from an original homeland, often traumatically,” as occurs to the real Duartes and Cavendish and the fictional Empress; “(2) a collective memory or myth about the homeland,” which both real and fictional Duchess express in their narratives, as well as “(3) an idealization of [such];” “(4) a return movement [and] (5) a strong . . . group consciousness,” as expressed through enduring Royalism amidst these female characters; “(6) a troubled relationship with host societies [and] (7) a sense of solidarity with . . . members in other countries (8),” which occurs simultaneously between the real groups of women, and the fictional Duchess and Empress whose worldviews oftentimes clash (Cohen 180).

⁹ Elizabeth I’s former rule is not configured utopian, given the value prescribed to the marriage between fictionalized Cavendishes in this novel. The Empress claims superior absolutist female rule *while married* to the Emperor, which does seem a utopian impossibility.

her “Noble Lord and dear Husband” whom she fosters an “extreme desire to converse with the soul of” (PB 219). Like Madame Mediator in *The Convent of Pleasure*, she takes on the role of the moderator: she consistently redirects the Empress and wider narrative toward moderate imperial values (i.e., the advocacy of female empowerment, but with its center in loyalty to male power and relation)¹⁰ not just implicitly via genre, but overtly in the text.

Grounds of Natural Philosophy, published two years after the novel, offers some clarity to Cavendish’s position. The text states that only “this World we are of,” which is “partly Irregular, partly Regular” and therefore of a “Purgatory” nature (201), is fathomable to the “authoress,” Margaret Cavendish. The travelogue’s familiarizing account of the foreign then evolves into that of the paradoxical account of the already familiar foreign. Enacting transformative absolutism within a world once horrified simply by a woman’s presence in worship (PB 164), the Empress simultaneously embodies and dismisses familiar, conventional male authority—to the effect of concurrent extremes. This dismissal occurs firstly in a shocking disregard of the father’s will; he is so brief a character, both introduced and abandoned in the exposition (PB 154), that one almost forgets his enduring importance as an authority within early modern society.¹¹ The Empress’s radicalism is further illustrated in the shift from private social transgression to public. As the fictional stand-in of Cavendish—also a staunch Royalist—observes, the Empress is no longer one of E S F I’s¹² inhabitants or subjects, but is rather divested of native claim and imbued with female power to subject. She is now in possession of “your people,” as the Duchess addresses the female body made body politic (209). The once-unnamed woman has renounced fealty to her king and become “the Empress.” Yet, this play at power is tempered by an unusual replication of the divisive structures of male monarchy that Cavendish attributes no real authority to. As Prakas attests, the fractionated and exclusionary Royal Society which Cavendish so often mocks is satirically reproduced among hybrid men under the Empress’s orders, effectively revealing its deficit effects on government (134). This, of course, is not revealed to be detrimental until the Empress who establishes it is re-educated by the Duchess.

The Empress’s “contentio[us] and divisi[ve]” confrontation (PB 229) with English conventions and transgressions foil the views of the loyal but critical Duchess. Though their souls share a platonic, “immaterial kiss” (230), the women indeed exemplify two

¹⁰ In her book, Claire Jowitt describes gendered tension within ideas of Elizabeth I as a monarch of expansion: “she is the ruler who controls and licenses the actions of her subjects, yet as a woman her status is subservient to the maleness of her explorers” (8).

¹¹ Alexandra Shepard explains the social importance of fatherhood in *Remaking English Society: Social Relations and Social Change in Early Modern England* (2013): “fatherhood was idealised as a source of authority and positive male identity” (43). Elizabeth Foyster and Maria Cannon have more recently argued in “Rethinking Mothering and Fathering in Medieval and Early Modern Europe” (2025) that “fathering did not stop with the end of childhood: this was a lifetime’s commitment” (126).

¹² The “blazing” world is formally deemed such, an acronym for England, Scotland, France, Ireland. This title implies Cavendish’s imperial desires for consolidation, while also reducing each nation to a mere letter in a tempting yet offputting utopia for the female loyalist. This succinctly points to the represented tensions between the Empress’s nominal absolute power, and the actual aggressive exertion of monarchical power absolutely.

respective worlds and ways of life: one not quite English, and one made all the more English in juxtaposition. Unlike the yearning wife Cavendish represents herself as, the Empress is “very glad” (217) in her deception toward and relative usurpation of her male monarch. His gifts of “worship” and the “absolute power to rule and govern all that World as she pleased” (162) evoke discomfort over an unnaturalized imbalance in power. As incorrect as the female tyranny may seem, however, this reversed gender dynamic also implicitly illuminates the imbalanced parameters of a traditional monarchy sans female political agency.

The fictionalized Duchess who disseminates this narrative in “discourse with some of her acquaintance” (249), and the largely defictionalized Duchess Cavendish who does so for her readership in “The Epilogue to the Reader” (251), replicate the inter-cultural learning and representations of the travelogue. It is in this English travelogue, writes Korte, that “all concepts of the *other*” self and world function as “projections of the [observer’s] self” and world (20, her emphasis). Cavendish’s replication of the travel narrative restores a sense of English identity following fictional and literal exile. The description of the “blazing” world becomes an account of the extrication from and return to England by choice, and appropriately suggests imperial reform. The suggestion is “appropriate” because the text privileges Cavendish’s fictional self’s input and manifestation within imperialism—that of the role of moderate advisor¹³—foiled by the presence of the iconoclastic Empress, a thrice-titled “goddess” of war (*PB* 163; 238; 242). This new world is by no means a utopia. Rather, it is Cavendish’s imaginative deliberation over past monarchical failures and potential reform via re-placements of the female as both ruler (creator of worlds of political change) and actualized royal subject (advisor to a respected authority).

Cavendish’s persona within *The Blazing World*—one whose soul cohabitates both with her high-ranking husband and a supreme female leader in a “Platonick Seraglio” (*PB* 222)—adopts a feminized, intimate political position reflective of William Cavendish’s own: “[Charles II’s] Earthly Governour” (219) and advisor. Fears of dying without “fame” and the resulting creation of “paper bodies” (*PB* 11) have awarded Cavendish increasing prestige in this century. Conversely, in yet another gendered reversal, her husband’s lengthy letter to Charles II was long misattributed to Edward Hyde. Newcastle’s counsel was obscured up until 1903 when Arthur Strong, utilizing Cavendish’s own *Life of the Thrice Noble, High and Puissant Prince, William Cavendish* (1667), corrected the error (Slaughter xi). Though not nearly as troubled by his representation in government, society, and the English consciousness at large, Thomas Slaughter’s transcription shows Newcastle to be just as concerned as his wife regarding the validation and use of his experiences by social authority. In one section of Newcastle’s letter, he aligns with *The Blazing World*’s criticism of divisive structures such as the Royal Society of beast-men: “the Error was making so many Lordes, which made the upper House more factious then the Lower House” (Slaughter 50). The Duke of Newcastle even evokes the value of feminine perspective: “your Majesties Embassador Should Sitt in all their Counsellis, as they Did in Queen Elizabeths time” (73). He goes on, as Cavendish does in her

¹³ The Duchess is described as crucially “advising” her monarch four times (*PB* 210; 216; 229; 230), with overt requests for and considerations of such “advice” occurring triple this within the Empress’s narrated thoughts and actions.

novel, to emphasize an alternative and intimate counsel based on foreign affairs and worldly knowledge.

Thomas Slaughter deems this letter Newcastle's "last political act" prior to Restoration and following his retirement from politics in 1660 (xxxiv). However, he neglects to mention that Cavendish's reference to this advice is not merely one of her many eulogizing lines of prose about her husband. *The Blazing World* emerges from this distinctly masculine document. In its adherence to the form of travelogue, it becomes its own text of referential political advisement. It celebrates not just the experiential input of an exiled Royalist male, but the opportunity for balanced governance contingent upon one necessity: the moderate re-placement of the noble female mind and body within the empire.

The Blazing World may read as the power fantasy of a woman denied (re)entry not only into sciences and authority reserved for men, but physically and legislatively into the country to which she always remained loyal. When carried out by the Empress, this fantasy, and at times iconoclasm, is understood to be a comparative political device, namely of the genre of travelogue. Generically, then, *The Description of a New World, Called the Blazing World* reflexively holds up a mirror to the structures and values of a world in flux: the very world from which the "authoress" writes. It is for this reason that analyses of the novel based in cultural studies of the traveller illuminate the political dimensions of Cavendish's oeuvre. Exile and governmental implosion therefore serve as the impetus for *The Blazing World's* thought experiment on the Royalist woman's placement, displacement, and re-placement within a "restored" system of monarchy. The structures and values of our familiar place of origin, England, are muddled by the usurping Empress's extremes in the "new" world. However, these extremes are cleverly tempered by the guidance of the loyal Duchess: her singular "description" of this world awards her not only definitional authority over both "other" and "origin," but the authority of exilic experience from which to politically counsel. Margaret Cavendish's fictional persona advocates not only for Royalist conviction in her loyalty to a temporary sovereign, but ultimately for a proto-feminist logic in the practical, public application of a moderate female advisor to a paternalist monarch.

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What a (Wo)Man Most Desires?: Operating Under Chivalry in *The Wedding of Sir Gawain to Dame Ragnelle*

Rebekah Hahn

According to Susan Carter, the Middle English literary motif of the *loathly lady* makes its earliest appearance in Irish folklore: “the Irish Sovranty Hag, an imbroglio of cultural ideas about political power contestation, in which gender roles are loosened, dissolved, and resolved” (330). The loathly lady has often been contended with as a feminist motif; one that represents female agency and power in Middle English narratives, as her monstrosity gives her the ability to invert feminine gender roles, thereby giving her control over the masculine spaces she occupies. She invokes fear, which is meant to represent her control, and she “enjoys” it. However, what cannot be ignored is that at every corner of the loathly lady tale, there is a dominating masculine institution that undermines her apparent agency, leaving her either ridiculed or used to caution against her monstrous femininity. Her ending shows a celebrated assimilation to traditional and expected gender roles and leaves the knight with something he’s always desired—a beautiful, young wife—under the guise of having gifted the loathly lady her sovereignty over him because he gives her the choice of her transformation. The loathly lady, however, has no choice at all, in that she is no shapeshifter, but one cursed to be loathly until a knight can transform her back into her a true form of assimilated womanhood. Any enjoyment she possessed in being loathly comes through her attempts at agency in a society she knows does not respect her cursed appearance, or in ways that ensure her safety as a courtly wife, so that she may be able to shed what makes her “othered.” She does not desire to remain loathly, just the same as the characters around her do, and she serves as a vessel for chivalric masculinity to remain triumphant in the traditional tales she occupies. A generalized summary of the trope is as follows:

- A knight finds himself in trouble (e.g. Arthur is indebted to Sir Gromer Romer Joure, Florent gets in a brawl with a knight, the Wife describes a sexual assault against a woman in the woods).
- The knight, to atone for his sins, is given the task to find the answer to “what women desire most.” He journeys until he encounters the loathly lady (hag), who gives the answer of

“sovereignty.” This being the correct answer, the loathly lady has a price for her knowledge in which the knight must marry her.

- With variations in tales, the knight and lady are married, and before they consummate their marriage, the lady transforms into a beautiful young woman. The lady offers the knight a choice, in which he can have her beautiful at night or beautiful by day, and he gives her the power to choose. Her curse of loathliness is lifted, and the narrative is resolved.

There are variations of Middle English loathly lady tales, with the most reviewed being Gower’s “The Tale of Florent,” Chaucer’s “The Wife of Bath’s Tale,” and the anonymous “The Wedding of Sir Gawain to Dame Ragnelle.” In conversations regarding these three tales, “The Wedding of Sir Gawain to Dame Ragnelle” is often cited as Chaucer’s inspiration for the Wife’s tale, while also being the longest of the three, with both Gower’s and Chaucer’s poems between 408 to 468 lines, and Dame Ragnelle being 855. According to Thomas Hahn’s introduction to the poem in the 1995 TEAMS edition of *Sir Gawain: Eleven Romances and Tales*, “the episode that makes up the plot of *The Wedding of Sir Gawain and Dame Ragnelle* is one of the most popular stories of late medieval England” (41), making it a prime example for the examination of the loathly lady, and just how much feminine power she truly holds as a motif. Furthermore, Hahn states that “at the heart of *Ragnelle* lies the question of how the unknown, the marvelous, or the threatening is brought into line with legitimate, normative, idealized chivalric society” (41). While, yes, the loathly lady represents political power, it is not hers that is triumphant. While gender roles are resolved in the poem, it is through masculine chivalry at the expense of the lady—loathly or not—in which we see resolution. Ultimately, the loathly lady does not exist without the misogynistic institutions in place that makes her appearance, voice, control, sexual promiscuity, and even her “wisdom,” intentional inversions of proper medieval femininity—inversions that the medieval audience are meant to fear and critique.

A brief overview of the medieval attitude towards elderly women and the concept of “sovereignty” can contextualize “The Wedding of Sir Gawain and Dame Ragnelle” in dissecting the actual anti-feminism and masculine anxieties at root in the loathly lady trope. Medieval people held anxieties regarding elderly women much like the contemporary audience does, in that with old age comes the loss of sexual appeal—the fear of a naked old woman or a “hag” in contemporary horror film also being played upon in Middle English tales. However, some specifics to medieval culture also heavily informs why a lady such as the “loathly” one works so well as a type of Middle English monstrosity to dissect. According to Roberta Gilchrist in her chapter “Experiencing Age: The Medieval Body,” medieval humoral theory describes the medical theories that informed much of medieval life and played a large influence in the understanding and, thus, anxieties regarding ageing. To the medieval individual, the body is made up of four elements (that also made up the universe), which are earth, water, fire, and air. Gilchrist writes that “Fire, hot and dry, produces yellow bile in the body, and a choleric complexion; water, cold and wet, produces phlegm, and the phlegmatic disposition; earth, cold and dry, is also black bile in the body, and leads to the melancholy complexion; air, hot and wet, makes blood, and the sanguine temperament. A balance of humours was required for good health in each individual, but it was believed that these substances fluctuated in the body according to age and sex” (32). Elderly women were not unscathed from the imbalances of the humors, as it was the medical way to approach and

think about what happened to the body in the Middle Ages; therefore, to experience age was to experience the humors becoming imbalanced over time. Alongside misogynist attitudes towards women, an elderly woman finds herself under a microscope, as her role in society drastically changes through what age does to her body. In terms of the elderly woman versus males, “The complexion changed over the life course, with males becoming colder and wetter in old age, and females gradually becoming drier. The essential masculine heat allegedly caused male embryos to grow faster in the womb, and enabled adult males to transfer nutrition into the growth of beards and body hair” (Gilchrist 32). The female body lacked the heat of a male, and this contributed to a judgment towards her “cold demeanor,” her inability to produce semen, a weak and fickle disposition, and inferior intellect (32-33). The young woman is seen as too “watery” in humors, and as her aging body dries, she is predisposed to decay and putrefaction (33). The humoral imbalance of water in the female body—a medical assumption rooted in misogyny—then affects the elderly woman’s body, making it worse to medieval society than it was in her younger years. Ultimately, the elderly female body no longer possesses the sexual appeal of a younger woman on top of her “putrid” decay. The loathly lady, thus, finds herself at the center of a medieval conversation rooted in a fear of the elderly woman, and a desire for her age to be magically rewound.

“The Wedding of Sir Gawain to Dame Ragnelle” precedes Chaucer’s famed “The Wife of Bath’s Tale,” and its use of dramatic description and detailed ending lay the groundwork for a poet working with the notion of a woman as controlling as she is giant, as gluttonous as she is hideous, and all around a woman doing exactly what the medieval audience does not want most. It can be argued that “The Wife of Bath’s Tale” would be heavily influenced by the poet who wrote it, and we know who that is and much about his life. We also know the author of “The Tale of Florent” as being a contemporary of the time, John Gower. These influences can reflect the misogyny of the time, and Chaucer’s own life; however, how can this same type of argument be made for Dame Ragnelle’s tale? It can be assumed that the Gawain tales were written, or heavily influenced, by masculinity given how pervasive misogyny was even in medieval medicine, and that Dame Ragnelle takes place within the Gawain chivalric tradition. Norris Ralph works through evidence claiming that “The Wedding of Sir Gawain to Dame Ragnelle” may have been written by the author of *Le Morte d’Arthur*, Thomas Mallory. This, then, would mean all three widely popular loathly lady tales were 15th century male writers—giving credence to the pervasive masculinity of the tale. *Le Morte d’Arthur* is the first full English compilation of the legends of King Arthur, and P.J.C. Fields originated this theory of Mallory being the author also of Dame Ragnelle based on both including the character of Gromer Somer Joure, and the ending each having similar appeals to be released from prison (Ralph 82-83). According to Ralph, this theory has been highly referenced in scholarship but not seriously considered. However, “Study of both the *Morte Darthur* and the Wedding in the years since Field’s article first appeared has brought to light additional points that the two works have in common that further decrease the likelihood that each was written by a separate author” (84). While there can be no concrete proof that Mallory wrote Dame Ragnelle, what can be concluded is that there are similarities to a tale we know was written by a prolific male author of the 15th century. Furthermore, the tale of Dame Ragnelle is included among the Gawain romances, which deal heavily with the social concerns of

proper masculinity and chivalry, with the characters Gawain encounters—monstrous or not—as testaments to his courtesy. According to Glenn A. Steinberg, “I take as a given that romances, despite their fantastical elements, relate directly to the emergent social realities and ideologies of their time, serving their producers and consumers as a way to exorcise social anxieties while molding social attitudes and behaviors” (7). If one can be confirmed to be influenced by the masculinity of his time—the importance of chivalry, brotherhood, courtly love, etc.—then, Dame Ragnelle cannot escape this influence to the point that it has been asked if a male poet wrote the tale. The question being asked points to a tradition of masculinity pervasive enough in Dame Ragnelle that one of the most famous chivalric medieval works, “The Wife of Bath’s Tale,” is seen as a point of comparison. The text, itself, is rich enough with pervasive masculinity, then, to indicate a tale about a woman not nearly in control of the narrative as critics wish the loathly lady was.

While “The Wedding of Sir Gawain to Dame Ragnelle” is over 800 lines, some key moments represent the masculinity Ragnelle cannot escape in the tale. Her excessive, “monstrous” features (hers being the most extensive of the loathly lady tales), her appetite, the bedroom scene, and her disappearance from the tale once everything is “as it should be” for King Arthur and Gawain, all are glaring indications of her lack of any true agency. While most of the tale can be dissected as an intentional persuasion towards fear of this type of femininity, these instances specifically highlight just how egregiously the poet is willing to argue against specific types of women, under the guise of a trope that has been misunderstood as feminine power.

Some claims that give the loathly lady her “agency” in “The Wedding of Sir Gawain to Dame Ragnelle” is her apparent enjoyment in being loathly. However, if this work is operating under masculine traditions of misogyny, any enjoyment she is experiencing in not having to operate under “expected” femininity is being written to instill fear in its audience against this kind of woman. It would seem that Dame Ragnelle controls the room when King Arthur and Queen Guinevere are trying to hide her from court, in shame of her, and Dame Ragnelle demands “I wol be weddyd alle openly” (575). She states this twice, to Arthur and then Guinevere. It appears that by her making these demands, she has actual power in the room. However, the characters that surround her and the circumstances strip her of any real agency she has. Firstly, there are multiple attempts to take away what has been promised her by King Arthur, but it is not his honor we are questioning in these tales but a critique of a woman such as Ragnelle who would make such demands. She was promised a marriage to Gawain, in exchange for her answer to what women want most. She reminds Arthur “Syn I have sayyd your lyf, and non other / Gawan must me wed, Sir Arthoure” (500-1). Arthur, however, states, “No, Lady; that I you hyght I shalle nott faylle / So ye wol be rulyd by my councele / Your will then shalle ye have” (503-05). Arthur is demanding that she get married to Gawain under his conditions. Only on his terms will he fulfill his promise to Dame Ragnelle. Yes, Ragnelle states also to Arthur “Openly I wol be weddyd” (507), and it is not because he respects her that he allows her to ride with him to Carlisle; it is the fear of this type of woman that allows her any forms of control. And, if her control is dictated by being so hideous, old, and outside the boundaries of proper femininity enough to instill fear in men, is this control still not dictated by masculine institutions at play? Specifically, when Dame Ragnelle demands this

of Queen Guenivere, does it become apparent that there are clear distinctions being made of what kind of femininity is meant to be respected and which is to be critiqued. Guinevere asks Dame Ragnelle to be married “as pryvaly as ye may” (571), meaning in private. “Nay!” (572) exclaims Dame Ragnelle, aghast. After Dame Ragnelle makes her demands, again, for a public wedding—emphasizing that she was promised this by the King—Guinevere, ever the lady she is meant to represent, states, “I am greed,” says Dame Gaynour / Butt me wold thynk more honour / And your worshypp most.” (581–83). The intentional contrast of Dame Ragnelle’s outburst and aggressive responses versus Guinevere’s calm and collected ones (even as she is ashamed of Ragnelle, she words it as if it is for Ragnelle’s benefit), emphasize two versions of femininity against each other. One, however, is clearly meant to be mocked, while the other is meant to be praised. Ragnelle gets her way through a public wedding, yes, but it is not without emphasis on hastening Gawain and Ragnelle home to be out of the public eye of the church as soon as possible, and it is not without public ridicule of Ragnelle. The feast that follows is where Dame Ragnelle is being compared to and surpassing that of men, which seems to give her a form of agency beyond femininity in that she “doesn’t care” what others think of her as a woman. Yet, this scene is meant to be a blatant and even humorous mockery of any woman who dares to engage in such behavior.

Sue Niebrzydowski, in her essay, “Monstrous Appetite and Belly Laughs: A Reconsideration of the Humour in The Wedding of Syr Gawen and Dame Ragnell,” argues that the poem itself follows the traditions of medieval audiences and their enjoyment of parody, even in the forms of the grotesque. Chaucer’s *Canterbury Tales* are riddled with such content (89). Her essay states that, “the hideousness of Dame Ragnelle was enhanced by an author fascinated by the comic potential of female appetite.” Thus, her feasting habits are not only meant to represent her loathliness, but are meant to be a deliberate parody of Arthurian feasting traditions that allow her to be mocked and ridiculed (97). Rebecca A. Davis further solidifies Ragnelle’s descriptions as parody when she writes, “repeating his blazon of loathliness and amplifying the grotesque details, the narrator appears to be carried away with silliness, so thoroughly enjoying his outrageous and extended description of the ugly hag that he forgets what he had said before” (433). The description of how Dame Ragnelle feasts is meant to be horrifying, but not in the way that she is in control of the room. Yes, “she ete as moche as six that there wore / That mervayld many a man” (605–06), but this marvel is not that of giving her control, nor is she written as experiencing joy in her loathliness. In the attempt to create a laugh, the poet is writing a scene that emphasizes all details of a grotesque woman that he knows will entertain his reader. This is the third detailed description of her hideousness in the poem, and paired with her mannerless eating habits, she is the ultimate contrast of any courtly lady—not to her enjoyment, but to ours. According to Jeffery Jerome Cohen’s “Monster Culture (Seven Theses),” thesis VI is “The Fear of the Monster is Really and Kind of Desire” (16). He writes that the monster represents the forbidden, yet it also attracts (17). Therefore, the desire for a type of woman we can laugh at—the one that is so opposite to the woman we are supposed to want—can also only exist as a monster through the power of desire we give it. For Dame Ragnelle, to give her long fingernails to eat with and get food caught under, to give her a belly so large it could burst as she feasts, to make the teeth she eats with haggard and yellow; all are intentional inversions of the mannered feminine that

we desire. Yet, she is written as a form of desire to see a woman who is so outside the scope of desired femininity—because we fear her, despite asking for her. While the masculine institutions that created the loathly lady are not attracted to her loathliness (and aren't supposed to be), it is these institutions that asked for a woman to mock; and thus, her monstrosity is born, because of the type of woman a man desires and the type a man desires to be afraid of.

Nowhere is this desire and lack of actual control for the loathly lady more apparent than in the bedroom scene. In summary, once the loathly lady and her new husband are in the bedroom, they must consummate the marriage. Then, the loathly lady transforms into someone beautiful. The lady poses a question to the knight, asking him to choose: would he rather she be beautiful only at night, so that he may enjoy her privately; or would he rather she be beautiful during the day, so he can show her off, but he risks becoming a cuckold? The knight gives the lady her sought-after “sovereignty” that the tale circulates around, and because the knight has given this to her, the curse is broken and she becomes her true self: a beautiful woman at all hours. Usually in these tales, the loathly lady's body is not her real body, but she is trapped in loathliness until a knight (often of Gawain's descent) frees her through marriage. “The Wedding of Sir Gawain to Dame Ragnelle” specifically represents just how misogynistic this conclusion to a loathly lady tale is—especially with the extended ending of Sir Gawain and Dame Ragnelle's marriage continued. Some contention of Dame Ragnelle's control of the bedroom comes from Gawain's willingness to sleep with Dame Ragnelle, and her continuing demeanor of being demanding. However, part of what makes Gawain the character that he is in the Arthurian tradition is his courtesy and, often, excessive willingness. And, in tandem with Dame Ragnelle's other demands, we know that these are not fulfilled the way she intends, nor are they meant to be respected. However, this demand seems, also, the mildest of Dame Ragnelle's, and that is because we are meant to read into Gawain's courtesy as a knight and his loyalty to Arthur in this tale—not into the control Dame Ragnelle has over him. In the bedroom, Dame Ragnelle states, “A Sir Gawen, syn I have you wed / Shewe me your courtesy in bed” (629-30), and he does just that. She also states, “Yett, for Arthour's sake kysse me att the leste / I pray you do this att my request” (635-36). Gawain then responds with, “I wolle do more / Then for to kysse, and God before!” The Gawain tradition is essentially what is at play here.

Outside of a loathly lady tale, this is a tale about Sir Gawain, and a “test” to prove his loyalty and willingness to chivalry and, especially, Arthur. One of the most famous Gawain tales, *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*, is all about testing Gawain's courtesy and loyalty to King Arthur, as Lady Bertilak is sent to tempt his virtue for three nights. The virtue of Gawain is the center of this poem. In another of these tales, “The Carle of Carlisle,” Gawain is represented as the kindest of the knights, who is also tempted by the wife and daughters of the Carle. The Carle is also under a spell of his own doing, and in Gawain's extreme willingness, he chops off the Carle's head, revealing him to be a Knight—a masculine parallel to “The Wedding of Sir Gawain and Dame Ragnelle.” And, finally, in the Dame Ragnelle poem, it is Arthur who is challenged to find what women most desire by Sir Gromer Romer Joure, and Gawain is the one who hears Arthur's dilemma and exclaims, “I shalle also ryde another waye / and enquire of every man and woman and gett what I may” (188-89). Sir Gawain, just

as is tradition, jumps at the opportunity to help King Arthur before any other knight. Upon hearing he must wed Dame Ragnelle to spare Arthur's life, as Arthur bemoans her loathliness and apologizes to Gawain, Gawain responds with, "I wolde wed her att whate tyme ye wolde sett / I pray you, make no care" (367-68). According to Manuel Aguirre's article "The Riddle of Sovereignty," in Ragnell, "the role of Arthur has encroached upon that of Gawain, who is the real hero of the tale" (277). Therefore, it is not surprising that—not only does Gawain agree to kiss Dame Ragnelle "for Arthours sake," but he will do more. Thus, it is not for Ragnelle that Gawain consummates the marriage despite her loathliness; it is not because Ragnelle is controlling the space. It is because of a masculine tradition of chivalric loyalty of Sir Gawain to King Arthur that appears in some of the most famous tales about him.

Furthermore, it is not that Ragnelle is rewarding Gawain for "giving" her sovereignty in her choice. Dame Ragnelle does not actually have the power to shapeshift or give Gawain the beautiful wife he has "earned," because her loathly body was not her real body at all. Therefore, any argument for her control of the space as her loathly self, is undermined by the fact that her body was forced to endure a femininity no one would desire, other than as a vessel to ridicule the "incorrect" version of womanhood. It is no wonder she acts as she does, in attempts to gain agency through rejecting femininity. However, her appearance has already sealed her fate, and her only control is to be out of control, because a woman who no longer represents procreative or sexual desire for masculinity is automatically rejected. No amount of assimilation would have saved her, so to regain her true body—the one she knows fits the mold of medieval femininity—was to use her loathliness to her advantage, in using the fear of her body and actions to make her way to the most courteous of knights to become herself again. If she truly enjoyed her loathliness and found any agency in it, she would not have worked her way back to court and to Gawain for her transformation. This, then, makes "The Wedding of Sir Gawain and Dame Ragnelle" a story about what masculine chivalry and courtly institutions can do for medieval society and medieval womanhood. As the poem comes to an end, the masculine focus of this loathly lady tale is most apparent, as Dame Ragnelle is now the woman worthy of a knight, so her operations in court shift dramatically, with her loathliness—and ultimately, herself—being erased.

Sheryl L. Forest Grupp writes an article that positions Dame Ragnelle as no monster, but a woman operating under medieval inheritance laws and institutions. On the ending of the poem, regarding Dame Ragnelle's new "Lady of the Court" status, she states "the poet reduces Ragnell both intratextually and extratextually. Within the narrative of the poem itself, Ragnell returns to Gawain his husbandly prerogatives." The following day, Gawain introduces Dame Ragnelle's beautiful self to King Arthur, Queen Guinevere and the court. Everyone is rejoicing in her lack of loathliness, and immediately the poet writes, "Syr Gawain gatt on her Gyngolyn / That was a good knyght of the strengthe and kynne / and of the Table Round" (799-801). This means that Sir Gawain got Dame Ragnelle pregnant, and Gyngolyn is their son—who in tradition becomes a knight of the Round table. In the same stanza, the poet writes of Gawain: "As a coward he lay by her bothe day and nyghte," as he loved his lady so much to the point of submission. Almost instantaneously upon becoming a lovely lady of the court, Dame Ragnelle is pushed into expected femininity now that she is operating *within* the periphery of medieval womanhood. At this part in the poem, she has now fulfilled her

procreative duties, and now the poet is inserting his misogyny by suggesting that Gawain has knightly brotherhood he should be attending to, rather than submitting to his lady. But, in medieval masculine fashion, the poet writes, “nowe for the make you a short conclusyon / I cast me for to make an end full sone / Of this gentylle Lady / She lyvyd with Sir Gawain butt yerys five” (817-20). The poet is assuring us that, now that this lady has performed her duties to the Round Table of producing an heir, she will no longer be taking all of Gawain’s time and her “end” will come soon. After she transforms back to her young self, she is written to die after five years, and it is after this death that the poet writes, “She was the fayrest Lady of alle Englund” (826). Her praise as a lady of the court is celebrated before she has given Gawain an heir, as she still has the potential to fulfill her duties, and after, she has died. Gawain is so in love with her that she only serves to distract Gawain from Arthur and his fellow knights once she’s produced Gyngolyn—therefore, she must disappear from the narrative so as to continue the poem’s emphasis on Gawain’s courtesy to King Arthur. Grupp writes that, “Her assimilation ends with her producing her own phallus, a son for Gawain, Gyngolen. After having the requisite heir, Ragnell becomes dynastically unnecessary and dies five years subsequent to her marriage to Gawain” (121). The poem ends to tell its audience that, “thus endythe the adventure of Kyng Arthoure” (829), ensuring that we don’t leave thinking this is a story about Dame Ragnelle, but of court, chivalry, and knightly loyalty. All is as it should be, with a loathly lady back to her “correct form,” so that she may perform under the expectations of courtly femininity and then disappear so that the masculine chivalry of Arthurian traditions can conclude its tale placing emphasis where it should have been the entire time.

“The Wedding of Sir Gawain to Dame Ragnelle” is one of the main loathly lady tales, inspiring Chaucer’s “The Wife of Bath’s Tale,” which are often read in tandem with each other. A deep dissection of Dame Ragnelle’s loathly lady provides us with a context of pervasive masculinity in a chivalric tradition that places women at the center, but only in what they can do for the knights the tales are really about. The ladies of Gawain traditions are vessels to test his loyalty and courtesy to King Arthur, and Dame Ragnelle is no different. Despite Dame Ragnelle using her loathliness for a sense of control, she only operates under the fear and ridicule she is given as an elderly, hideous woman who is actually working towards no longer being loathly through the institution of courtly marriage, so she may fulfill the duties of a medieval lady and then die. It is never without some other control against her that Dame Ragnelle is actually given any of her demands; it is not without clear critique, fear, and mockery that the promise made to her is fulfilled, despite possessing the wisdom to save the King. It is not enough to be wise in her old age if she is too “loathly” of a woman to respect. The treatment of elderly women, loud women, and ill-mannered women who serve no procreative or sexual fulfillment is how the loathly lady herself holds no real agency, and the expectations of her once she becomes a young, beautiful lady again show that she never had any real power to begin with. Despite the making of the monstrous feminine, she herself desires her role as a lady, because the poet is telling his audience that we, too, should desire that of women. Therefore, loathly or not, she is a lady and, therefore, must move the masculine plot, get some laughs, become beautiful, produce an heir, then disappear.

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The Impact of Shame on Racialized Gendered Identity: How Shame Informs Black Masculinity

Stephanie Metz

Racialized gendered identity is not a cultural phenomenon; rather, it is a sociological concept built on the cultivation of ideologies shaped by familial and peer-group expectations enforced by the social conventions of their community. Despite how often the term “shame” appears in African American literature, the self-reflective emotion has received limited attention in literary studies, particularly in understanding how it functions as a literary device across the genre. A keyword search on ‘shame’ in Heinemann’s African Writers Series of about 250 texts yields the following results: novels, 170 entries; poetry, 57 entries; and drama, 15 entries” (Diabate 340). What Diabate finds is the frequency of the word; however, I argue that Black authors demonstrate how shame shapes masculine formation through more nuanced experiences, presenting how it functions in literature without naming it. Through examining literature by authors such as John A. Williams, Richard Wright, and Chester Himes, we find depictions of Black men battling against circumstance, environments, and social conformity, evoking vulnerability and shame as inevitable characteristics of Black men who choose to examine their psychological makeup and confront their emotional responses. In America, Black men’s masculinity is built on the notion of shame because American society has denied Black men authentic equal rights, perpetually reinforcing an ideology that Blackness and inferiority are synonymous. Through the literature, we will find that shame affects Black men by regulating their sense of self and social position, which produces self-conscious emotional responses that reinforce or challenge racialized constructions of Black masculinity and gendered behavioral expectations. In analyzing communal expectations and values depicted by Black American male writers, we will identify shame as a significant contributor to Black masculine identity formation, highlighting that when White hegemonic expectations are not met, shame as a self-conscious emotive response subscribes to behavioral traits.

To understand how shame informs behavioral traits of Black masculinity, it is first necessary to identify what shame is. Shame is a self-conscious emotion stimulated by internal

thoughts and judgments of oneself stemming from events that highlight shortcomings, disrepute, or humiliating disgrace. Gilbert and Andrews state, “shame is best understood as an intense negative emotion having to do with the self about standards, responsibility, and such attributions as self-failure” (126–27). This paper will examine embarrassment, inadequacy, and ridicule as variants of shame as each illuminate a unique dimension of how shame operates within social constructions of Black masculinity. In a General Social Survey conducted by the National Opinion Resource Center, it was found that, “sixty-two percent thought Blacks less likely to be hard-working; fifty-six percent thought blacks more violence-prone; fifty-three percent thought Blacks less intelligent; fifty-one percent thought them less patriotic” (Poll Finds Whites Use Stereotypes). Historically, Blackness has been burdened by negative stereotypes that shape both social perceptions and individual experience of identity. These deep-rooted stigmas are ingrained into American social consciousness, making them inextricable from the traits Black men develop, born into America’s white heteronormative structure. Shame as an emotion is not often discussed as being tied to gender-specific identity traits; however, the ability to “produce shame in others reflects the widespread accounts of masculinity and the expectation that men have a deeper sense of shame” (Diabate 349). Brene Brown explains, “For women, shame is these unattainable conflicting competing expectations of what we are supposed to be. For men, shame is not a bunch of conflicting, competing expectations. Shame is one. Do not be perceived as weak.” The framing of shame as de facto. The fabric of America’s white supremacist composition is designed to perpetuate weakness and vulnerability in Black men.

Deviation from culturally ascribed racialized gender identity is shaped by shame, which manifests as a critical element in forming Black male identity. In America, “many men not only have been regularly shamed, but they live in the incessant anxiety that they’ll be further shamed. When they are shamed, they act out in their bullying, abuse, and violence to deal with it or avoid it” (Donaldson). In the coming-of-age novel *The Long Dream*, Richard Wright provides an authentic account of shame taking root within young Black boys, demonstrating how experiences of humiliation and social marginalization can contribute to behavioral expressions of Black masculinity characterized by aggression, bullying, and violence. In the novel, four young boys find themselves witnessing a carnival game, “HIT THE NIGGER HEAD,” where “a black man’s head protrud[es] from a hole in a thick canvas” as white men pay to throw baseballs at the Black man’s head (55). As these young boys witness the spectacle, they find themselves feeling individual emotions that they are unable to comprehend. Each of the boys leaves the carnival game with a shared experience that uniquely informs their racialized gendered identity.

Fishbelly felt that he had either to turn away from the grinning black face, or, like the white men, throw something at it. That obscene black face was his own face and, to quell the war in his heart, he had either to reject it in hate or accept it in love. It was easier to hate that degraded black face than to love it.

“I’m going to try to hit ‘im,” Fishbelly said, suddenly finding release from his rising tension.

“Yeah, let’s try,” Tony dared to join him.

"I want to try too," Zeke said in a scared voice.

"Goddammit, I ain't in this," Sam said, turning away." (57-58)

In this scene, their shame collapses around them. There is an overwhelming feeling of anger from each of them that manifests in different ways; however, the way they process and act out the emotion is unique to each child. Fishbelly recognizes the face, metaphorically, as his own, to which Wright identifies that young Black men have a choice to accept or reject, and the easiest option is to reject Blackness. In their collection of essays, bell hooks states, "most black males cannot confront the collapse, so they focus on performing, on doing rather than being, hiding their deep-seated feelings of hopelessness. . . the backdrop for much of the childhood shaming that black male children are forced to endure" (85). From the limited perspective of adolescent boys, the options are to hit the head or be the head. Fishbelly's internal battle between honor and shame becomes muddled by white social pressure. The act he ultimately decided to perform embarrassed him. Shame, sadness, and anger are commonly felt and are the least regulated emotions in boys' lives (Kindlon & Thompson 83). Before he began, Fishbelly "wanted to surrender his balls and leave, but that would have made him even more ashamed" (Wright 58). Wright's usage of "balls" in this quote carries the weight of a physical and symbolic measure of masculinity. Relinquishing the physical balls to throw at the head would demonstrate weakness, thus becoming a moment of symbolic emasculation. Neither Zeke nor Fishbelly successfully hit their target. It is unclear if their failure stems from their desire not to punish or inflict pain on a person who could be themselves or their lack of athletic ability. Playing the game, conflated with "sadistic anticipation," forms how they survey their race in the future and the significance of influential white pressure as they grow into men.

Meanwhile, Tony's success in hitting his target only fuels his rage against the head. When his peer group pleads with him to step away, and he views the larger scene around him, Tony is "suddenly abashed" (Wright 59). Tony tensely reminds his peer group that he "hit that sonofabitch" (Wright 59). The carnival scene demonstrates how "White supremacy shames us out of our humanity and programs us to shame one another at its service" (Robinson 127). The silence in the group emphasizes their shame after enacting violence and abuse on the head in an effort to secure a dominant position; in essence, this action demonstrates to the white community that they are not weak.

While *The Long Dream* emphasizes shame as a crucial emotional process for Black boys from an early age, Chester Himes creates a portrait of a Black man who finds that persistent shame emerges from negotiating Black male identity within a social order defined by white cultural and masculine ideals. Many Black men "associate their masculine identity with an aversion to the experience of shame," as we see Himes demonstrate in his novel, *If He Hollers Let Him Go*. Himes develops a dynamic character, Bob Jones, who has intense emotions and an inability to escape the shame of being a Black man living within the confines of white expectations. Wright's characters explore their shame through internal monologue to confront their emotional responses to situations. Jones's shame manifests itself emotionally and physically as his rising shame is accompanied by "burning" and is most often revealed when others make him feel "small or inconsequential" (Himes 79, 124).

Although shame originates as an emotional response, Jones's experience demonstrates how profoundly it can be inscribed upon the body, prompting questions about the mechanisms through which shame becomes a visceral physical experience. Dr. Annette Kämmerer supports Himes's depiction of the physical reaction to shame, suggesting "it is common to experience a physical reaction to feeling shame. Most people feel flush in their face and necks" (42). Experiencing shame can be "painful and debilitating, affecting one's core sense of self, and may invoke a self-defeating cycle of negative affect" (Kämmerer). Bob Jones internalized a hatred for himself and his race, reflecting, "That's all I ever wanted—just to be accepted as a man" but was instead "sullen, resentful—ashamed too. Just ashamed of being Black" (Himes 153, 71). The development of Bob Jones' core sense of self derives from the understanding that it is his Blackness that makes him feel "scared and powerless and unprotected. . . every goddamn morning [he] woke up" (Himes 35). Himes builds upon this understanding to create situations where Jones's internalized shame often informs his aggressive behavior and violent ponderings.

Himes opens his novel with the implication of a young Black man's involuntary subconscious identification of his position in the world to explicitly emphasize to his readers that, through the lens of white supremacy, Blackness is shame. In *If He Hollers Let Him Go*, Bob Jones demonstrates how when Black men are ideologically conditioned to understand how to perform masculinity yet fail to hit the performative markers in real life, shame forms. The novel's opening scene introduces Jones in a fugue dream state. His physical body and subconscious conflate to demonstrate his inability to escape his internalized shame. Jones positions himself on his back, an inherently vulnerable position. After moving to his back, the dream transitions to a job search in which Jones is "asking two white men for a job" (Himes 2). When Jones explains he is not equipped to meet their expectations of a worker, the two white men make fun of him for his inability to perform the task and laugh at him. In his dream, Jones reflects, "I didn't mind their not giving me the job, but their laughing at me hurt. I felt small and humiliated and desperate, looking at two big white men laughing at me" (Himes 2). Through this scene, Himes suggests the inherent and subconscious impact of social shame. Founder and executive director of the Black Emotional and Mental Health Collective, Yolo Akili Robinson writes, "I realize that I have never known who I am without shame. I have never had the privilege of experiencing shame as a just feeling. I, like so many Black men, was introduced to shame from birth as an intrapsychic reality" (xi). Robinson suggests shame as an inextricable trait of Black masculinity, supporting how Jones channels his shame via psyche, physical, and mental.

The social position and authority people possess over their lives directly impact how they view themselves. Jones appears to understand his position as a Black man in a white world, yet, his internal reflections highlight his continuous surprise by white people's actions in his orbit, causing him to be increasingly reflective on his own actions and movement in the world. His dream would suggest his unease in pursuing a job; however, Jones is gainfully employed somewhere that he enjoys. Jones reflects on his career at the Atlas Shipyard and finds that "something about my working clothes made me feel rugged, bigger than the average citizen, stronger than a white-collar worker—stronger even than an executive. Important too" (Himes 9). It is Jones's employment that grants him an air of self-importance.

His employment status was one aspect of Bob Jones' life that initially helped him suppress the oppressive shame he was under, as he was a leaderman, which was an opportunity rarely afforded to Black workers. In this position, Bob Jones "felt a certain responsibility about setting an example" (Himes 18). Himes demonstrates that Bob Jones' sense of pride is a trickle-down effect of a responsibility bestowed on him by white people, a malleable gift that can and is revoked at a moment's notice.

Jones's career forms the foundation for his confidence and place in the world, a confidence that is quickly jarred when his sense of strength, power, and importance is revoked. Enduring racial degradation from a white female subordinate, he responds with immediate and impulsive action, suggesting that feelings of shame have overwhelmed his capacity for measured judgment. The incident leads to losing his coveted position as a leaderman. His boss, Mr. Kelly, reprimands him, stating, "I'm surprised at you, Bob. I figured you were too intelligent to lose your head about something like that. I figured you had better manners, more respect. . . Monday you start as a mechanic. . . Danny's going to work with you this week and beginning Monday he takes your place" (Himes 29-30). The demotion from leadsman to a mechanic and swift replacement by a "white boy" leaves Jones "feeling cheated, and trapped" unable to decipher if he had "been a coward or a fool" for allowing himself to be shamed into an iniquitous corner (Himes 30). There is unfounded historicity of shame and not "keeping it together" for white perceptions [which] also manifests in the way Black men are trained to 'be respectable or die.' 'Put that face up and smile when that white man spits in your face'" (Robinson 54). The ingrained perception of how Jones *should* act while his superior informs him of his demotion unearths confusion and shame within Jones.

In a Westernized heteronormative culture, men are valued by their employment status and ability to provide for themselves and others. Gainful employment is increasingly challenged as America continues to deny equal rights for employment and social recognition to the Black community. The dominant capitalist ideology strengthens the shame-producing machine of neoliberal practices. White American culture assumes "the Negro was so far below the nation in social position that he could not be recognized until he developed further" (Du Bois 352). As found within Jones, shame develops as an emotional response when his social status and self-worth are threatened.

Likewise, American author John A. Williams creates two Black male characters who rely on their status as writers to exemplify their masculine presence in the world. When these positions are challenged or met with crisis, their experience and coping mechanisms for their inability to meet the constructed social expectations of their environment, and their consequential shame, inform how they develop as men through the rest of the novel. Upon falling in love, Max Reddick is faced with an impossible choice to follow his pursuit of authorial autonomy or follow the American dream. When Max proposes to Lillian Patch, she urges him to "write at nights and work. . . teach or do casework" to find a steady source of income and provide for a family, following traditional expectations for masculinity (Williams 102-03). When Lillian becomes pregnant, she "wanted an abortion because she said, she did not want to push Max into anything he was not ready for" (Williams 108). Lillian's dilemma rested on the idea that Max could not financially support a family; she did not want to force Max to conform to the gender expectations that American culture

upholds. Thus, Max's self-worth is threatened. He expresses that Lillian's comment made him think he "was not worth anything" and, as a man, did not "have what it takes to make it" (Williams 113). Lillian's death post-abortion envelops Max in shame as he comprehends his failure to provide the "old American security" deemed necessary as a socially constructed responsibility (Williams 117).

Misdirected shame is commonly expressed in the emotions of anger and hostility. Psychotherapist and domestic violence expert, Carol Lambert, suggests that "feeling shame can ignite a person's defense to externalize the horrible unworthy feeling of 'I'm bad' that arises. By blaming outwardly, they assign responsibility for their misstep to the other." Max misdirects his shame on everyone but himself, internalizing, "I'll never forgive them. Never. . . he felt a rage growing within him, small at first, like a cyclone on the horizon, and then it came spinning up, blacker and redder, faster and faster. He could break the mirror, the glass he held in his hand" (Williams 116). It is understood that Max is experiencing intense shame in this moment; however, he is unable to fully recognize or bear its weight, forcing him to project his internalized shame onto others as a coping mechanism. Furthermore, for men burdened with unresolved shame, emotional vulnerability becomes difficult to access, thereby restricting their capacity for love and intimacy. Williams exemplifies this concept through Max's relationship with Lillian. Max attempts to push his shame onto the social order instead of taking accountability for his role; his inability to shake his shame foundationally alters his behavior toward women and intimacy throughout his life.

By juxtaposing the characters of Harry Ames and Max Reddick, Williams allows for these complex masculine individuals to demonstrate varied performative gendered functions, while examining how shame related to self-worth impacts Black men and their methods of processing shame. Initially granted a fellowship in creative writing, an alternate candidate replaces Harry; he internalizes, "he had been *the best*. Now he was nothing. What a fool he had been!" (Williams 129). According to Gilbert and Andrews, shame emerges from the fear of being exposed and judged negatively by others (7). Harry's exclusion from a life-changing opportunity for his family activates these anxieties, transforming professional disappointment into a profound experience of shame. As with Bob Jones, whose emotional turmoil becomes physically expressed, Henry Ames's response reveals the extent to which shame transcends the psychological and manifests corporeally. All the characters previously introduced are in three categories: self-employed, unemployed, or oppressed by a figure of authority while employed. Writer Abdur Rahman Malik expresses, "No man wants to willfully endure oppression. Furthermore, no man wants to have his wife or significant other witness him submit to oppression. And no Black man would dare allow his child to witness him be oppressed, weak or submissive." In this scenario, Ames physically demonstrates his shame when discussing his rejection with his wife, as "he did not want to look her in the face" (Williams 129). While Gilbert and Andrews define shame as a fear of exposure, scrutiny, and negative judgment by others, Malik's observation that Black men resist having their wives and children witness their oppression further illuminates the gendered dimensions of this fear (7). For Ames, the pain of rejection extends beyond the lost opportunity itself; it lies in the possibility that his failure will be visible to those who depend upon him. Consequently, his

refusal to look his wife in the face signals more than disappointment. It reflects an embodied response to shame, revealing his anxiety that the rejection has compromised his ability to perform the roles of provider, protector, and patriarch that structure dominant expectations of Black masculinity. A study conducted by psychiatrist Dr. Michel found physical signs of shame to appear as “reactions of face-lowering, gaze aversion, submissiveness, and shrinking away.” Rejection from the Lyceum fellowship, combined with financial disappointment and the apparent fall from literary greatness, diminishes Ames’s self-worth and feeds into his internalized shame.

In the novel, Ames’s shame propels him to be competitive toward other writers who follow in his footsteps to engage in an extramarital affair for the duration of his life and to be intermittently estranged from his best friend, Max Reddick. These are not uncommon events aligned with shame. Psychologist Annette K  mmerer explains, “feelings of shame can be painful and debilitating, affecting one’s core sense of self, and may invoke a self-defeating cycle of negative affect” (41). To reposition and assert his masculine identity in the world, he perpetuates self-defeating cycles that inevitably keep him grounded in an essence of shame. Ames’s affair with Michelle is marked not by shame but by self-aggrandizement. Because shame is characterized by concealment, avoidance, and fear of judgment, Ames’s boastful demeanor suggests that the affair serves as a source of masculine validation rather than emotional distress. In other words, “shame, in its nature, induces secretiveness and concealment of one’s shameful deeds, thoughts, or of felt inappropriateness from the gaze of others” (Riley 25). Yet, there are moments in the lives of Black men that transcend the ability to pretend—moments where their skin is their token of inescapable shame.

The color of one’s skin is an aspect that is typically unchangeable and most harshly distinguished as a marker of value and worth. Beginning in the 1920s, light skin increasingly served as social capital, granting access to opportunities unavailable to darker-skinned individuals (Gaines). Himes eloquently highlights these issues through Jones’s frustration with his fianc  e, Alice’s, ability and desire to pass, quickly turns to shame when he realizes she spends time with men who take her to places where “known ‘Negros’ like [him] couldn’t go...she’d be gay and unrestrained...not tight and frustrated like she had been with [him] the other night” (Himes 142). Robinson explores an ideology where the repercussion of shame transcends individuality, with shame serving as a marker for racial identity. He also discusses an inherent shame of Blackness, explaining:

I was branded with shame by virtue of my Black skin, wide nose, and limp wrist. I was indoctrinated with shame from history books to the media to my communities’ unanswered demands for justice. . .And how we struggle to love ourselves and move through that shame is synonymous with how we battle white supremacy. (Robinson 203)

Robinson’s use of the words “branded” and “indoctrinated” is particularly significant because both suggest that shame is imposed rather than naturally occurring. Shame originates not from personal shortcomings but from a society that repeatedly associates Blackness with deficiency and deviance. Consequently, shame becomes a social mechanism through which racial hierarchies are maintained, shaping how Black individuals perceive themselves and

how they are perceived by others. It proves difficult for Black men to construct a masculine identity free from shame when dominant cultural narratives continually position Blackness as inferior.

In W.E.B. Du Bois's essay "On Being Ashamed of Oneself: An Essay on Racial Pride," he explores interracial racism and racial shame, not through degrees of color but from the perspective of class. In *The Long Dream*, Tyree initially presents as a pillar of his community. He is a successful self-made businessman and property owner who performs as a leader and role model for a sector of the Black community that the white community would otherwise overlook. Tyree and his wife teach their son, Fishbelly, to understand their class position in the Black community, cautioning him against becoming the racially stereotyped working-class person. Fishbelly's parents instill in him that, "they your color, but they ain't your kind," his mother had told him. "I touch 'em only when they dead, Fish, and I wouldn't do that 'less I was paid," his father had drawn the line" (Wright 20). Du Bois contends that while Black Americans have historically sought to define themselves within the nation, American society imposes a contradictory expectation: Black individuals are encouraged to assimilate while simultaneously being segregated, marginalized, and degraded (Du Bois 351). As seen with Tyree's family, class distinction is formed through affiliation, income, social status, and physical presentation. Within the confines of the Black community in Wright's novel, color is not the marker of value; instead, one is judged on mimicry of whiteness. Accordingly, upper-class Black men were desperate not to be minimized by lower-class Black people and continually strove to establish distinctions between the two to avoid being treated loathingly. After reconstruction, the Black community was characterized by small groups of aristocrats at the top and a larger group of social outcasts at the bottom. The group between the two extremes accounted for eighty-percent of the black population (Gaines). As Robinson previously theorized on the inherent shame based on the color of one's skin, Du Bois argues that intra-racial racism and shame are formed from an intellectual and class perspective. Discussing color with his white-passing girlfriend, Gladys, Fishbelly realizes "in a flash that, though black of skin, he was really much whiter mentally than she was or ever could be" (Wright 282). Gladys's external hierarchical position is based on her skin color; however, Fishbelly dismisses the color spectrum, imagining that intellect equates to whiteness and whiteness leads to superiority. Fishbelly dismisses the visual color spectrum, imagining that his intellect equates to whiteness and whiteness leads to superiority. While Fishbelly explicitly rejects white supremacy, his belief systems are at the core of his racialized identity, supporting an ideology that suppresses and shames his race and, by extension, himself.

By witnessing role models who frame certain expressions of Blackness as shameful, young Black men learn to regulate their behavior according to prevailing expectations of masculinity, absorbing these lessons through example rather than instruction. The relationship between Tyree and Fishbelly proves to be complicated as Fishbelly becomes disillusioned and "ashamed of his father's fear," when he witnesses how Tyree presents himself to the white community (Wright 86). As Fishbelly's father, Tyree is his only viable image of what mature masculinity is and, therefore, a representation of what it means to be a Black man in America. Tyree shows his son that Black men "were not their own masters" (Wright 325) by donning a childlike and effeminate persona, while speaking to a white man

in the same manner as “a woman with ten children telling her husband that he could *never* leave her” (Wright 341). By observing Tyree’s interactions with authoritative white men, Fishbelly learns that shame extends beyond emotion, functioning as a force that deprives Black men of power and symbolically feminizes them within dominant constructions of masculinity.

Shame is an inescapable component of Black male gendered identity often generated from internalized humiliation as a response to authority. Gilbert and Andrews argue that “episodes of shame have an almost paniclike quality to them. One can feel our minds going blank, feel rooted to the spot, wish the ground would open, and we could slip out of sight or flee. Defensive reactions evolved for rapid defense in potentially dangerous situations” (6). Fishbelly exemplifies this defensive, panicked response to authority and shame, when he is arrested. As the white cops taunt him with castration, “an enormous curtain of black appeared and dashed itself against Fishbelly’s eyes. He had fainted, had passed out cold” (Wright 149). Fishbelly’s physical representation of shame is his body’s response to “potentially dangerous situations,” however, as a Black man, his recurring fainting spells during this event do not diminish his shame. Instead, expounding upon it as Fishbelly reflects, “When confronted with white people, he had been weaker than he thought, and he hated himself for it. He was irrationally convinced he had to undergo some pain or shame” (Wright 154). It is important to note that when Fishbelly initiates thoughts of this shameful situation, he is not pointing to police authority but to white supremacy as a system, implying the social authority of whiteness.

It is unnecessary to possess a badge, a higher-ranking position, or high intelligence to hold a gendered, shame-inducing authority over Black men. Through Jones’s attempt to address his white subordinate after a mutual verbal attack, he is overwhelmed with shame.

I cursed myself for a coward. I called myself a fool. . . I didn’t even have the nerve to speak to her. That was what really got it, when I really knew. I had gotten up that morning and gotten myself ready to die. And I could have gone and done it. I could have kept walking into .45 slugs until the weight of ‘em pulled me down, so help me God. But I just couldn’t walk into this woman with so much white inside of her. . . I’ve never felt so cheap, so small and inconsequential, so absolutely subhuman. I couldn’t stand myself; couldn’t stand thinking about myself. It was physical torture (Wright 124-25).

In both Jones’s and Fishbelly’s individually unique situations with white authority the inability to make space for their personal authority is clear. Authoritative shame is the most blatant and culturally identifiable of all forms of humiliation. Shame is inextricable from the advent of modernity as, “it creates an acute awareness of the germinal defeat of being colonized by foreign powers, and of being subsequently abused and cheated by postcolonial leaders” (Diabate 342). Specifically, this statement reflects the long lingering shame inflicted on Black gendered identity as a byproduct of slavery.

Fear of interracial contact has historically been a source of sexual shame for Black men, shaping how they project their power or lack thereof; corresponding fears from racist white communities translate to fear of Black male sexuality. The implication of sexual shame is an

inescapable function within racialized gendered identity. At an early age, Black men learn from their communities that their “sexual expressions are not desired, [their] bodies are not desired, [their] patterns of loving are not what our loved ones want. This leads to shame and an obsession with being wanted that contorts our ability to cultivate intimacy” (Robinson 113). Chester Himes exposes Jones as an embodiment of this irrational, sexualized fear. Throughout the novel, Jones fantasizes about the idea of killing the white man and raping the white woman, internalizing the thought that he could be positioned to inflict the same feelings of fear and powerlessness that he feels every day onto the white world (Himes 35).

I was scared in a different way. Not of the violence. Not of the mob. Not of the physical hurt. But of America, of American justice. The jury and the judge. The people themselves. Of the inexorability of one conclusion—that I was guilty. In that one brief flash I could see myself trying to prove my innocence and nobody believing it. A White woman yelling ‘Rape’ and a negro caught locked in the room. The whole structure of American thought was against me. (Himes 187)

Jones was raised as a Black man in America and understood his identity through his perception of American law as shrouded in shame, disgust, and degradation. Black men are:

“twice as likely as whites to be arrested for sex offenses, and three times more likely to be accused of forcible rape. But it’s unlikely that they commit sexual assault at higher rates than other ethnic or racial groups. The overrepresentation of Black men in sexual assault cases may be due in part to the fact that they are disproportionately wrongfully accused.” (Chan)

For Jones, there is no presumption of innocence regarding a Black man’s sexuality because, “American tradition had convicted [him] a hundred years before” (Himes 187). When Black men are conditioned to acknowledge their physicality as threatening, dangerous, and disgraceful, the shame of their bodies becomes ingested into their gender identity.

Shame provides a particularly revealing lens through which to examine Black male gendered identity because it exposes the core values, social expectations, and internalized beliefs that shape the experience of being a Black American man. Shame is an unspoken emotion attached to identity, informing behavioral actions; culture is continually competing to conjure the most shame first. Reading the gendered and racialized strategy of experiencing, acknowledging, and processing emotions that feed or produce shame allows us to understand how the Black male gender is constructed to depict power, while also confessing emotions that pertain to shame is considered a sign of weakness. The novels examined in this study demonstrate that shame plays a central role in the construction of Black masculine identity. As characters confront racialized expectations and the persistent demands of white hegemonic standards, shame emerges as both an emotional response and a social force that shapes behavior, self-perception, and interpersonal relationships. By revealing the connection between shame and masculinity, these texts illustrate how Black male identity is continually negotiated within systems of power that equate Blackness with inadequacy while simultaneously demanding conformity to unattainable ideals.

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“Honor in a shrouded hearse”: The Props of Mourning in *Richard III*

Chiara Aleman

Richard III is not solely told through words, but through objects that attempt to interpret and contain the losses suffered. In this Shakespearean history play, the narrative is saturated and shaped by mourning: widows and mothers publicly mourn, processions carry the dead across the stage, and the past refuses to remain buried and unseen. In a past world that has only left behind the printed text, it has also breadcrumb the objects that have meaning that they once carried with them—whether it be off stage or throughout the streets of early modern London. Although the play is set in a medieval past, it stages mourning through early modern funeral customs and—most importantly—objects, making grief materially resonant to the contemporary audience for which the play is performed. These objects of grief reflect a Catholic world of ritualized mourning even as England repositioned itself as Protestant, stripping away any tangible nature of grief. The stage of *Richard III* is a charged space where grief is neither private nor fully resolved: it is contained, revised, and circulated. The stage itself is built from the many collective experiences felt by the early modern audience and its actors who performed them. In the words of Stephen Greenblatt, “The Shakespearean theater depends upon a felt community: there is no dimming of lights, no attempt to isolate and awaken the sensibilities of each individual member of the audience, no sense of the disappearance of the crowd” (507). The history play of *Richard III* is not an exception to the depths of emotional energy it captures through its written words and its objects being used within its performances.

The materiality of grief that the play offers draws attention not only to what mourning signifies for the early modern audience, but also how mourning is performed. Andrew Sofer’s theory of Shakespearean props provides a critical lens for how to interpret the actor and the props they manipulate, defining the prop as “something an object becomes, rather than something an object is: an object must be “triggered” in some way by an actor (like Osric’s hat in *Hamlet*) in order to be a prop” (135). By blending the historical aspect behind these “mourning props” used in funeral settings and the theatrical use that Sofer provides through

his prop studies with Greenblatt's theory of social energy on the Shakespearean stage, I argue that the activation of these props on stage encapsulated and contained the early modern culture's anxieties surrounding loss, grief, and absence.

In the early modern period, funerary objects functioned as material anchors through which grief, authority, and political continuity were made legible, but this transition could only be made seamless by the mourning props of its time: the body of the monarch and the hearse.

The king's body—subjected to its inevitable death—disrupted the lives of the subjects that served it as it entered its final phase: royal subjectivity. The king's body itself played a role as the funeral rites and procession of a king ultimately aimed to smooth over the transfer of power to the next monarch and, as Nigel Llewellyn states, “reestablish social difference” (104). Though merely a hollow vessel that once held the body politic of the monarch, this empty body still remained powerful as a political tool. The monarch was always in the view of the public eye—connecting to their subjects and projecting a sovereign extension of themselves for the public to consume—and the anxiety created by this divinely placed figure no longer being with their subjects stirred unease, causing the royal body to be manipulated and propped for the sake of their subjects. This theme is reinforced when David Cressy alludes to Elizabeth I's death in 1603 and the funeral that followed, recounting the testimony of how “her body was brought by barge to Whitehall and laid in the drawing chamber, ‘where it was watched all night by several lords and ladies’” (428). The act of seeing the royal body in this state—the eyes of high nobles still being locked in its orbit—reveals how the funeral rites of a monarch were not only important as a social passage but also a necessary last public performance.

Additionally, Llewellyn accentuates the visual elements of an early modern royal funeral procession and how “at every stage. . . visual signs clearly played a central role in the imposition of order” (63) and, as Cressy also notes, secured “their dominant position by means of elaborate display” (450). Through the material elements of a funeral procession, these objects aided the culture by signalling the body natural's prestige, but also its unavoidable mortality. Although dead, there is an assertion of social order that must be maintained when it comes to the body of a monarch, presenting it as sovereign, divinely placed, and still polarizing.

The body of the monarch also had to be handled and transported with the same care and prestige it had always been provided when it was living, if not even more reverence than before. The body's mobility solely rested on its subjects now, and within this process of transportation, the hearse played a vital role. Cressy notes the ornamental nature of the early modern hearse was “originally a frame to hold candles and decorations that stood over the body in the course of the service, but gradually the word was used for the whole ensemble that transported a corpse to a grave” (442). This expansion of meaning highlights the hearse as not only a singular object, but a composite structure—one that incorporated not only wood, fabric, a light source, but also the regulated bodies of those either hired or tasked with moving and guarding the corpse of the monarch. Pallbearers, funeral attendants, and guards were folded into this assemblage as their presence was neatly choreographed to maintain a type of visual coherence. In this sense, the live laboring bodies within the funeral procession were rendered objects themselves as they became extensions of the hearse's material forms rather than people who had come to mourn. Thus, the funeral procession operated as a system of

objectified bodies revolving around the hearse in hopes to make meaning of their collective grief and still maintain political order.

When these funerary objects enter the theatrical space of *Richard III*, they cease to function as only ritual instruments and instead become props that can be manipulated by the actors, highlighting the performance element of these cultural objects. Within only the second scene of the play, grief bleeds through to the surface of the narrative as Henry VI's funeral procession marches forward. Wordless actions set the tone with the stage directions: "Enter Lady Anne with the hearse of Harry the 6" in the first Quarto published in 1597, and "Enter the Coarse of Henrie the sixt with Halberds to guard it, Lady Anne being the Mourner" in the first Folio, published in 1623. Shakespeare abandons the blanket term 'hearse' from his first Quarto edition, providing more subjectivity to the griever within the procession and instead objectifying the corpse of Henry VI. This is not out of disrespect to the monarch, but rather to signal the role in which this body is playing at the time: a prop. Sofer further explains the role of a stage corpse within Shakespeare's imagination, stating that "the stage corpse, hovering in our imagination between subject and object through a kind of cognitive dissonance, may paradoxically accrue more Veltruskýan action force than a live character. Homer Swander reminds us that '[a] corpse on stage demands attention'" (139). The stage corpse must be in the occupation of an object that is moved around by subjects rather than objectivity spreading to the rest of the procession, but this choice is motivated by political purpose.

Furthermore, this demand for attention called for by the stage corpse is heightened when complicated by whose body the play is presenting: the body of a monarch. This is different from how the stage corpse of Polonius operates in *Hamlet*; killed on stage but acting as evidence of Hamlet's descent into madness and excessive grief, then dragged out by the mad prince. Henry VI, however, is not killed in front of the audience—the murder is brought out for the audience to see the wickedness that sketches out Richard's character, capturing his willingness to kill a king. Bringing out a stage corpse was rare if not absurd to attempt for an early modern stage production as it tried to avoid breaking the suspended reality the play had built; there are no curtains or lights, only the openness of a stage where nothing can be truly hidden. Shakespeare wrote most of his character's deaths offstage in order for actors to avoid the awkwardness of merely getting up and walking off after being dramatically killed off. Sofer highlights the mechanics of moving the stage corpse—and one of the most used remedies was to just cart the bodies off. This seems to be the default method in Elizabethan and Jacobean drama, if only because it was preferable to having corpses make their own exits (140). The choice to cart on the corpse that was killed offstage—this death occurring even before the start of the play itself—and provide the same objects that are accompanied in an early modern funeral implies the deliberate crafting for an emotional audience response due to the recognizability of these objects. This implicates not only the mourning culture of the time being reflected back to the audience, but the important purpose that these props serve for the agenda of the play. In addressing the corpse directly, Lady Anne's monologue reveals how the hearse and the stage corpse function as a prop that absorbs grief while simultaneously staging political blame.

When Lady Anne enters the scene, she has lost not only a father-in-law (the previous king), but her husband who was slain during the War of the Roses. Though surrounded

by guards and the rest of the procession, she is alone and—as the Folio instructs in its stage direction—the singular mourner of these losses. Within her loneliness, she is also the only true actor during this duration, as the rest of the procession functions more so as extensions of the hearse rather than separate actors. The bodies of the procession are still and voiceless so that the corpse may remain the focal point and symbolic center of the scene and Anne can be the interpreter of these losses. She breaks not only the silence of the scene, but halts the entire funeral procession, commanding,

Set down, set down your honorable load,
If honor may be shrouded in a hearse,
Whilst I awhile obsequiously lament
Th' untimely fall of virtuous Lancaster. (1.2.1-4)

The pause manifests and becomes a personal conversation with her deceased king, implying that this is a more intimate and personal moment between Anne and the corpse. However, her language is politically charged even within the first four lines of her dialogue. Though she is directing her attention to the stage corpse, she talks around it, only talking about the circumstances that led to its untimely end and the role this corpse held while it was living. It is important to note that Anne never refers to the corpse as her father-in-law, but the only tie that matters to the narrative: the loss of a virtuous king. By refusing to name Henry VI through possessive familial language, Anne resists privatizing her grief and instead frames the corpse as a site of political loss, inviting an audience to also mourn for a king they lost long ago before they even entered the theater. The dead body before her is not simply her father-in-law to be mourned, but a monarch whose “virtuous” rule has been violently interrupted, and it is this political identity that gives the corpse its dramatic force and purpose. This use of the corpse destabilizes the funerary ritual’s intended purpose: instead of smoothing over the succession, the stopped procession suspends time and refuses to continue to the next monarch. This suspension of moving the funerary objects forward to the next phase suggests that this loss remains unresolved and publicly seen as unjust for a king to go so early to his grave, and not in God’s own time. In doing this, Anne temporarily controls the meaning of the body, asserting interpretive authority over a prop that Richard soon attempts to usurp.

In slowly moving away from the body, we begin to graze the extensions of it. Clothes are one such extension of the body, as they help make the material essence of a person. The burial shroud acted as the most basic yet essential object of funerary arrangements, often seen as a threshold both the poor and upper class could meet in their semi-equalizing deaths. As Cressy notes, “A winding sheet or burial shroud was the minimal equipment for the properly outfitted corpse, though none but the wealthy could look forward to decomposing in their own wooden box. ‘A shroud to grave men only have,’ intoned the Map of Mortalitie” (430). This piece of cloth would be wrapped around the body, then placed in the coffin for its final phase to be escorted to its grave, but the shroud was also used as a reminder of what is to come. It became a costume for a corpse and another way to signify the dead or the ghostly. Some highly religious people even “kept their shrouds in readiness, as a reminder of their end” (430). A daily yet threatening nudge to the inevitable and promise of life, the early modern

shroud tried to contain what was left of the body as it was subjected to the grave. This final extension of a person's being can also be an attempt to reach back to the living as well.

Within his article, Sofer does not list the shroud of Henry VI in *Richard III* because it is the only instance of a shroud becoming a prop at the hands of the actors; once again, a shroud is something a person wears, falling more into the category of "costume" than prop. Yet, it only makes sense that this prop had never been used because of the oddity of bringing out Henry's stage corpse in a grand procession with full funerary prestige, leaving no detail out, to create the full effect of losing a monarch. At the hands of Lady Anne, this stage corpse is manipulated by her public show of grief to demonstrate a murder of a king taking place, but once Richard halts the funeral procession for a second time—attempting to manipulate the stage corpse as well—the body of Henry refuses his advances. The corpse's resistance becomes visible at the level of the shroud, which suddenly behaves less like funerary cloth and more like living flesh. Lady Anne highlights this during her confrontation with Richard, exclaiming,

O, gentlemen, see, see dead Henry's wounds
Open their congealed mouths and bleed afresh!—
Blush, blush, thou lump of foul deformity,
For 'tis thy presence that exhales this blood
From cold and empty veins where no blood dwells. (1.2.57-58)

In the first line, the need for eyes on this blood is clear as Anne points out its sudden existence. Though we do not know how the blood gets there theatrically, productions have offered their own interpretations by either staining the shroud with blood to have Anne later reveal it or the body of Henry VI actively bleeding in front of the funeral procession, making the body no longer dead. The latter is more aligned with the text, which notes Anne's shock and juxtaposes this sudden rush of blood coming forth to Richard's living "blushing." The sudden living body of a stage corpse is not new to Shakespeare, one of the most memorable being when Desdemona suddenly wakes in *Othello* after her death, only to cast blame onto herself for her demise to save her husband. The technique of briefly reanimating the dead in order to disclose truth or redirect blame recurs across Shakespeare's dramas. However, Henry VI's corpse resists full revival. Unlike Desdemona, who wakes up, explains, and assumes responsibility for her death, Henry never regains full attention till Act 5 as only a ghost—bodiless and unable to participate amongst the living in the way he has a chance to in this scene. Instead, the meaning is displaced onto the shroud as it reveals what was swept under the surface yet still begs to be seen: the accusatory, fresh blood of a king who has been slain.

Because of Henry's lack of speech and decision (on Shakespeare's part) to remain a corpse, it becomes a vessel for political manipulation on stage. Deprived of voice and life, the body can be handled, positioned, halted, and displayed by the living, its meaning shaped by those who claim interpretive authority over it—and in this case, Lady Anne and Richard himself. This reveals the desire to objectify and puppeteer the body, intensifying further as the scene goes on with Richard's desperate attempts. During the second halting of the procession, Richard rhetorically moves towards this act of killing not only Henry, but Lady Anne's husband to be born out of the desire for her body, revealing "Your beauty was the cause of that effect" (1.2.130). The king's body refuses Richard's co-opting the narrative, so

he redirects this desire for control to Anne's body, recasting her as the new site for reshaping this tragedy and his own political future. By Richard claiming her body actually affected him, causing the deaths of both Henry VI and her husband to occur, Richard removes Anne's agency completely, pushing her from active mourner to object of desire. This moment slowly slips into the key of a "wooing" scene, Richard manipulating Anne's body into a temptress with this erotic confession and suddenly becoming an accomplice in her king and husband's own deaths.

There are no movements but the ones Richard generates for Lady Anne as her body is then rendered a substitute prop; one that can be blamed, desired, and possessed when the royal corpse refuses cooperation. The ring that Richard places on her hand seals this transformation, marking her body as something taken up and controlled for political gain rather than a source of resistance. It is important to note that this wooing is only a success because of Anne's susceptibility as she is rendered grief-stricken and attempting to hold onto her role in mourning. As Anne exits the scene, she is no longer the "singular mourner" she once played, but enters a state of objectivity as Richard's own prop to be manipulated for his own political purpose. This is her fate as she marries Richard, and once serving her full purpose, no longer of use to him, she is tossed aside to be killed by his hand offstage. In Richard III's logic—backed by the cultural need to encapsulate grief in an attempt for control over it—anything can truly become a prop.

In the early modern period and throughout *Richard III*, the frantic pursuit of object permanence reveals a cultural desire to contain grief in tangible materials and rituals. Amid the seismic shift from Catholic to Protestant practices during the Reformation, the sudden disappearance of traditional religious rituals and absence of the deceased profoundly shaped both cultural perceptions of grief and the materiality of mourning. Lisa McClain highlights how English Catholic believers were displaced after Elizabeth I's 1558 Act of Uniformity, requiring all subjects to practice the religion of the Church of England. The Protestant reformation essentially hollowed out the material heart of Catholic devotion: "Catholic images, ornaments, and saints' relics, including those of the Magdalene. . . Many English Catholics feared for the fates of their souls in the absence of these traditional avenues to saving grace" (80). McClain focuses on the English Catholics' process to turn to Mary Magdalene, a saint who knew what it meant to lose a part of yourself (the body of Jesus), and attempt to continue on. There is a marked shift from tangible, material objects of devotion to more immaterial forms of faith, governed by these new religious expectations. The once-familiar space of Catholic devotion—filled with tangible objects that were considered extensions of these believers to reach the Divine—became starkly empty. A grief followed this type of loss for the English Catholics as they navigated this new and foreign landscape of religious expression. An emphasis on faith in the Resurrection was quickly implemented, for material things were only here for a short time while Christ's promise of eternal life attempted to cover the needs of the Catholic believer to "see to believe."

The absence of Christ's body and material objects trickled into how bereavement was handled—particularly, the loss of a child, a recurring yet unexplainable loss for the early modern parent. Elizabeth Kolkovich further explores child loss within the early modern period, focusing on societal mourning practices when it comes to the bereaved parents'

public behavior. Kolkovich touches on the idea of faith and grief being put in opposition with one another in the early modern period: one could either rely on their faith and become a stronger believer through that unexplainable tragedy or they can indulge in grieving. Through sermons, Reformed Protestants instructed what a grieving parent must do in order to continue on, with one written sermon asserting that “[t]he maine business of a Christian, is not to expresse sorrow, but submission and subjection to God, to exercise and inure his heart to patience, and to rest in Gods good pleasure and will” (51). The act of mourning or public grieving was not only seen as excessive, but a defiant act against the powers of the Church of England and even the spiritual authority of God. A grieving parent became a site of political and religious unrest due to the absence they had no choice but to face.

Richard III is a play that is highly dependent on sight for political gain. This dependence is extremely prevalent when it comes to its mourning rituals—loss having to be witnessed and weighed by an audience in order for it to be validated. Whether it is Lady Anne, who demands the funeral procession to look at the bleeding body of Henry VI as she exclaims “O, gentlemen, see, see dead Henry’s wounds” (1.2.57), or Richard’s attempt to portray himself as a divinely appointed succession to the throne as Buckingham exclaims “And, see, a book of prayer in his hand, / true ornaments to know a holy man” (3.7.99–100), sight is invoked for the characters that become onlookers to these performances, as well as the early modern audience who watches this royal family and their inner lives. But sight cannot be trusted within this play, as it is often an artificial attempt to be portrayed as something one is not, causing a new manifestation of a prop to be created that is not dependent on the gaze of the audience or its own materiality, but rather charged by the culture the audience inhabits and one that is ultimately an embodiment of the fear they were facing. In Act 4, Scene 4, another prop is introduced to the stage that allows me to expand on Sofer’s original list of props and propose an additional prop that has been used on the Shakespearean stage more than once: absence.

Richard III is not the first instance the prop of absence has been implemented by Shakespeare. It is most notably used in *Macbeth*, as the guard who comes in to only alert Macbeth declares “The Queen, my lord, is dead” (5.5.19). This line causes a sudden absence to crash into the space, propelling Macbeth’s “tomorrow” speech, motivated by the space she has left behind and his grief that will only be painfully prolonged more and more as time passes. Yet, the way absence is implemented as a prop in *Richard III* is unique because of the cause of mourning, who is lost, and how they are remembered. Queen Elizabeth and the Duchess enter the scene where Margaret waits for them, both women finding out about the deaths of the two young princes, Elizabeth’s own children. This room is now filled with women who are husbandless, childless, and kingless, underscoring their lack of control and their mounting grief. Elizabeth begins to lament,

Ah, my poor princes! Ah, my tender babes,
My unblown flowers, new-appearing sweets,
If yet your gentle souls fly in the air
And be not fixed in doom perpetual,
Hover about me with your airy wings
And hear your mother’s lamentation. (4.4.10–15)

The scene itself is surrounded and propelled by the absence that engulfs all the characters present, but most importantly, the absence that is manipulated by the actors as by Sofer's definition. Elizabeth is highlighting the loss of the "princes"—then, in rapid succession—notes that these are her children that she has lost; suggesting that this loss is not only affecting her role as a queen but her role as a mother. Mario Digangi characterizes the scenes featuring Queen Elizabeth, the Duchess of York, and Queen Margaret as the women "using the rhetoric of maternity to assert social and political authority in the face of loss" (348), all being mothers who have lost their sons. But, because of the nature of this loss, the rhetoric of maternity becomes a tool for power. There is a turn towards the metaphysical as sight is abandoned, Elizabeth instead relying on her maternal voice in the void, calling out to her freshly anged sons to be near her even without the bodies they once inhabited. When the physical sensory access is denied—in this case, the two princes' bodies—words begin to manipulate the space their presence once filled.

Abhishek Sarkar adds to the conversation surrounding the death of the young princes and the adult actions that led to their absence. She notes the unique reason behind the princes' deaths and highlights the tragic nature of it, elaborating how they did "not succumb to any disease or natural causes which accounted for the high child mortality in Shakespeare's England, but they are victims of political hostility" (2). This is an act of God's own will that these princes have vanished, but an act of institutional violence that has erased them because of a desire for power—Richard being the reason behind it all. The boys' disappearance then is not the result of chance but of adult political violence, and the absence it produces functions less as a void and more like a manipulable object. By Sofer's standards, a prop is defined by its capacity to be handled, worked, and put to expressive use; the princes' absence operates in exactly that function (136). Without the bodies to anchor meaning, this absence becomes as malleable as a block of marble, ready for the potential to be carved out of mourning and affect rather than governed by materiality. This is furthered as Margaret begins to teach the women how to "curse," advising Elizabeth and the Duchess,

Forbear to sleep the nights, and fast the days;
Compare dead happiness with living woe;
Think that thy babes were sweeter than they were,
And he that slew them fouler than he is.
Bettering thy loss makes the bad causer worse.
Revolving this will teach thee how to curse. (4.4.121-26)

This act of "cursing" becomes a framework of how to mourn in a politically motivated yet powerful way. Queen Margaret—a master of grief as the play frames her after losing all of her family around due to the War of the Roses—also becomes the main prop handler for absence itself as she teaches the other women how to grieve like her: calculated, meticulous, but requiring visits to those uncomfortable absent spaces that once held Elizabeth's children. Her instructions to Elizabeth do not attempt faithful remembrance but deliberate revisions: "Think that thy babes were sweeter than they were, / And he who slew them fouler than he is." Margaret's lesson reveals how memory can be sculpted, smoothing the princes into idealized symbols of innocence that exceeds the reality present. The boys' absence enables

this manipulation to go unchecked, as their identities are stabilized through the adults of the narrative. This process becomes more explicit in Margaret's final piece of advice: "Revolving this will teach thee how to curse." This implies that mourning is rehearsed and even practiced—an act of continual mental manipulation that harnesses grief into a rhetorical force. The princes' absence is not only noted but worked, used again and again until it acquires political efficacy. The absent princes enter their own objectivity as their absence is used by the actors around them, generating meaning not by existing on stage but by being continually reshaped offstage through altered memory and public forms of grief.

The vanished princes, the silenced dead, the unoccupied spaces are not voids, but as Greenblatt suggests, charged presences, objects of grief manipulated, interpreted and weaponized by the living, that aid in the narrative of this "mourning play." Lady Anne, Queen Margaret, and Queen Elizabeth seize these absences as a way to shape their stories, assert authority, and circulate meaning, demonstrating that what is unseen can be politically and emotionally powerful as what is materially present. Shakespeare transforms loss into a stageable force, showing that grief is not limited to bodies, hearses, and shrouds, but also by the spaces and silences that attend them. Within *Richard III*, Shakespeare underscores the social and political dimensions of grief, revealing what one mourns is a piece of who they are and that can be mobilized to remember, to command, and even to curse. The unseen props of the play carry weight, the silenced can speak again through other forms, and even what is no longer present can be manipulated to hold power over its living; all born out of the desire, as Greenblatt once said, "to speak with the dead" (1).

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United We Stand, Divided We Fall: Collective Resistance in *Egyptian Earth* and *Sea of Poppies*

Baylie Jett Mills

Abdel Rahman al-Sharqawi's *Egyptian Earth* is a peasant romance set in 1930s Egypt, while Amitav Ghosh's *Sea of Poppies* is part of a historical fiction trilogy set in the 1830s that follows a ship's journey across the Indian Ocean from Calcutta to Mauritius. *Egyptian Earth* is the story of how a corrupt government official orders the rural peasants, or fellahin, to reduce irrigation days from ten to five and announces a road will be built through their cotton plantations, throwing them into economic turmoil if they do not join forces to fight the exploitation of their land. *Sea of Poppies* tells the stories of several people whose lives intersect on the ship the *Ibis*, showing how British colonialism exploits Indian farmers, forcing them to cultivate opium and indirectly resulting in the forced migration of countless individuals. Despite the different genres and settings of these novels, they share some striking similarities, including depictions of complex power dynamics, exploitation, and oppression of vulnerable populations by those in positions of power. The impact of British colonialism in *Sea of Poppies* and in *Egyptian Earth* manifests as the oppression of vulnerable populations by the elite. The power imbalances created by the wealthy landowners and government officials in Egypt and the British East India Company in Bengal enable them to oppress and exploit the fellahin and the Bengali farmers, respectively. In both stories, farmers find their crops threatened by an oppressive government and face economic exploitation. The way in which their crops are threatened and how exploitation of a commodity directly and indirectly impacts their lives differs, but in both novels, the people ultimately use collective resistance to combat the oppression of colonialism. When juxtaposed, key scenes from both novels reveal that people are connected by the economic exploitation they experience by the British Empire. Highlighting the oppressive links across the Global South, these novels provide a nuanced understanding of sociocultural and historical contexts that give rise to collective resistance efforts.

Several critical works have addressed how in Ghosh's *Sea of Poppies*, the oppressive colonial conditions contribute to the collective resistance of the migrants. Arnab Dutta

Roy writes that the novel shows how oppressive conditions can give rise to “circumstantial solidarities” amongst minority characters with varying socio-cultural backgrounds, which can form the basis “for anti-colonial resistance and activism” (2–3). Similarly, Nisha Eswaran analyzes how collectivity that spans racial, national, caste, and religious differences functions as a viable method of resistance to colonialism, arguing “that in *Sea of Poppies* we can trace a form of collectivity through which people act together, despite differences in experiences, identities, and histories, in order to successfully resist colonial violence” (1). Additionally, Anupama Arora examines how being on the *Ibis* allows for the blending of culture, class, caste, and gender, fostering alliances that otherwise never would have been formed (22). Further, Arora writes that “The crisscrossing oceanic trading routes offer up an affective map of the world of unlikely kinships and intimacies formed on the fluid world of the ocean” (22). In other words, the confined setting of the ship helps facilitate unlikely connections and subsequent collective resistance against colonial oppression. There is not a wide range of scholarship on collective resistance in *Egyptian Earth*, but Jihan Zakarriya touches upon the topic, writing, “The peasants’ broad understating of their responsibility and their collective vision of resistance help them to replace their hierarchies and stratification with a wider, heterogeneity of strategic alliances and compromises” (1222–23). Scholars agree that *Sea of Poppies* and *Egyptian Earth* demonstrate the power of collective resistance to mitigate the detrimental effects of colonial oppression.

Power Imbalances and Exploitation

In *Egyptian Earth*, the power imbalance transpires between the fellahin and the ruling class. The Egyptian peasants are marginalized and exploited by powerful landowners and government officials in spite of attaining independence from Britain in 1922 (Ikeda 385). Carol Bardenstein provides context of their situation and explains how in the aftermath of the formation of the Wafd party, “the 1919 revolution, the 1922 British declaration of Egypt as an independent sovereign state, the 1923 constitution, and the establishment of a parliamentary government” indicated Egypt was on the road to independence and a representative liberal democracy (705). When Ismail Sidky took over in 1930, the constitution was suspended, parliament was dissolved, and Egyptians’ hopes for the future were destroyed as “an era of renewed corruption, despair, and disillusionment” began (Bardenstein 705). This tumultuous atmosphere, characterized by corrupt government officials seizing the power of the people, is the setting in which the story transpires as they must deal with the Pasha’s unfair demands on their water and land and contend with the economic downfall.

The hierarchical power relationship in *Egyptian Earth* between the peasants and the government comes to a boiling point when the government disrupts “the socioeconomic and cultural status quo in the village” (Zakarriya 1221). The government reduces the days the peasants can water their crops from ten days to a mere five. Manipulating their irrigation systems is a form of exploitation and corrupt control at the expense of the livelihood of the villagers, placing them in a position of extreme economic hardship as their crops will wither and die if they comply with orders. The animals are underfed and the people face food insecurity, so threatening their crops literally threatens their lives. The government also decides to build a highway through the peasants’ land which will destroy the crops of many

small landowners. The land is everything to the people, integral to their survival and sense of community. Put in a difficult position with their economic and social systems under attack by oppressive government forces, the peasants realize that their only option is to resist and revolt to rescue their way of life and survive. The government is aligned with the former British colonizers of Egypt; as Chris Searle writes, it is a “puppet government, controlled by Britain, and its ‘one filthy chain’ of local representatives and stooges—‘this pro-English regime that had brought disaster to Egypt’” (105). Thus, *Egyptian Earth* is very much the story of the lingering effects of British colonialism manifesting into oppression by the elite as a battle between the colonizers and the colonized plays out.

Unequal power dynamics are also explored in Ghosh’s *Sea of Poppies* through its diverse cast of characters. Power imbalances play out between the colonizers and the colonized, similar to how the fellahin in *Egyptian Earth* experience unequal power dynamics with the ruling class in the wake of independence. *Sea of Poppies* opens by showcasing the British Empire’s economic domination over the colonized through the opium trade in India. The first chapter introduces readers to Deeti, a high-caste poppy seed farmer who, due to the British East India Company’s lust for revenue from opium production and sales, is no longer able to grow edible crops to support her family. After describing the painstaking process of cultivating poppies, Ghosh writes, “Such punishment was bearable when you had a patch or two of poppies—but what sane person would want to multiply these labours when there were better, more useful crops to grow, like wheat, dal, vegetables? . . . [N]ow the factory’s appetite for opium seemed never to be sated” (27). The colonizers’ insatiable appetite for opium takes an immense financial toll at the expense of small farmers like Deeti, evidenced by the fact that she receives “six dams for the whole harvest. . . not enough to feed a child” (143). Deeti had previously noted that “it’s been seven years since our roof was last thatched” and, if the harvest was good, she would “put all the proceeds into the repairing of the roof” (28). This basic need of repairing her home must be abandoned in favor of purchasing some meager food supplies. Like the fellahin in *Egyptian Earth*, Deeti and her fellow farmers experience food insecurity, showcased by Deeti’s struggle to ensure her six-year-old daughter has food.

The characterization of Deeti as a mother trying to ensure her daughter has both a roof over her head and food to eat capture the experience many of the colonized faced under oppressive government interference. Ghosh explains in “The Opium Department” of *Smoke and Ashes* how “the farmers would have preferred to plant other, more remunerative crops,” but they were prohibited from “appealing to the law without going through the British Opium Agent,” thus they were the victims of coercive practices that resulted in “significant losses on their harvest” (56–57). Facing severe punishments and “punitive surveillance” that fostered “terror and secrecy” among the farmers, the real farmers discussed in *Smoke and Ashes* encountered a corrupt power structure that is reflected in *Sea of Poppies* through characters like Deeti (60). Ghosh uses character depth to embody the struggles of the farmers while allowing readers to both connect with the characters’ struggles and emotions and glean insight into the opium trade, indentured labor, and the complexities of colonial India.

Opium was the key to the colonial economy as “the entire structure depended” on it, a system that rested on exploited labor and what Cedric J. Robinson terms “racial capitalism” (Ghosh, *Smoke and Ashes* 61). This is what Samir Amin argues is the reason for

maldevelopment in the Global South: the impact of the global capitalist system exploiting peripheral countries. Amin writes, “the more the economic system globalizes, the more it generates frustrations in the peripheralized areas, thus constantly reanimating violent nationalistic responses” (21). Ghosh’s *Smoke and Ashes* and *Sea of Poppies* demonstrate how global capitalist systems create economic, emotional, and violent turmoil in peripheralized areas. Underdevelopment is thus a direct result of exploitation, epitomized by colonized characters like Deeti who experience economic and emotional hardships as a result of being forced to grow poppies by the British East India Company.

Unequal Power Among the Colonized

In *Egyptian Earth*, there is a stark power imbalance between the ruling class and the peasantry as the government exploits the peasants, seizes their land and resources, and silences them. There is also a social hierarchy that exists within Egyptian society that complicates their efforts at collective resistance. Some villagers wield more power than others, such as the city-educated Muhammed Effendi holding sway among the villagers and “working-class Khadra and middle-class Wasiyfa” being treated vastly different (Zakarriya 1212). Additionally, Sheikh Shinawi holds power and respect among the villagers for spiritual reasons: “The Sheikh was the village *mufti*, the preacher at the mosque, the teacher of the children, the adviser of the old” (al-Sharqawi 6). Abdul Hadi’s strong personality and the fact that he controls the water-wheel earn him status among the villagers. Similar to the educated Muhammed Effendi, the schoolmaster Sheikh Hassouna holds power and prestige among the peasants and encourages them to unite if they want to retain control of their land. As evidenced, there are clearly power distinctions among the peasants themselves, which further complicates their ability to unite against the government as they first end up in conflict with one another over natural resources.

The villagers do not instantly join forces to oppose their oppressors, initially wielding their individual power against one another for selfish purposes. For example, when the villagers are ordered to irrigate their crops for only five days instead of ten, meaning no use of water-wheels or canals, the villagers intentionally break this order. They are united in their desire to oppose such tyranny, but it takes a crisis to stop them from working against each other in their shared battle. In a climactic scene, Abdul Hadi realizes that Diab is digging a route for water to irrigate his crops, but in the process he cuts off Abdul Hadi’s own water supply. Abdul Hadi believes that Diab is essentially doing what the Pasha did to their village: the Pasha’s land was alongside the river, so he felt this entitled him to take half their water, and similarly, Diab feels he is justified in taking water that flows alongside his land. Diab takes a natural resource without thinking of others, causing a violent fight to break out between the men and other villagers who wage war on each other until a buffalo falls into the well and the people band together to save it.

After the buffalo experience, the villagers subsequently feel “a new bond” from “the common efforts to rescue the buffalo from the well” (al-Sharqawi 124). Finally, Sheikh Yusuf suggests they return to Abdul Hadi’s original plan, to break the bank and irrigate their lands as they want without water-wheels or a set schedule. They know that irrigating as they desire will cost them when the government discovers they are breaking orders, but the villagers are

content that at least they are no longer fighting amongst themselves, a key instance of them building toward collective resistance. Like *Sea of Poppies*, there are class distinctions among the villagers in *Egyptian Earth* due to varying education levels, religious affiliations, physical strength, and more. However, when the villagers realize that they are hoarding resources and fighting over water as greedily as the Pasha, they come to see they are united against a common cause so they must not turn on one another.

Unequal power dynamics are also present in Ghosh's *Sea of Poppies* among the colonized between different social classes, not just between the colonizers and the colonized, showcased through the character of Kalua. In the novel, small farmers like Deeti face economic, social, and environmental inequalities due to colonial exploitation, specifically instigated by the British East India Company. Within Indian society, there are internal power dynamics, as different classes and castes experience varying levels of privilege. Caste dynamics are explored initially through the character of Kalua, a low-caste ox cart driver who is "not permitted the same privileges as those of higher castes. But the life story of Kalua carves his rout from subjugation to liberation" (Mandi 39). As Himachal Pradesh Mandi explains, the caste system was a form of oppression that "branded an unfortunate section of the society as untouchables" and marginalized them "to the periphery of India, not only for its religious and economical hierarchy but also for its cruelty to suppress the subalterns as well as the lower caste people in both ancient and modern Indian society" (39). High and low caste individuals are highlighted through landowning families contrasting with Kalua, who is duped by his own brothers out of property left to him by his parents. Kalua holds little power and faces immense violence and inequality from the villagers who manipulate and humiliate him due to his immense size and intellectual disability.

The inequalities of the caste system are reconfigured while at sea as the *Ibis* allows traditional power structures to disband. The *Ibis*, the ship that unites all the characters, is a former slave ship used to transport the indentured workers, and it essentially becomes a microcosm of colonial power dynamics. British officials and wealthy individuals wield more influence over the lives of the indentured laborers, prisoners, and other passengers. However, Kalua's physical strength and concealed identity allow him to hold more power over his fellow migrants, especially as he is now the husband of Deeti, who is respected by the migrants as well as those of higher caste on board for her wisdom and fairness. Raja Neel Rattan Halder, in contrast, finds himself stripped of his high status and lands due to colonial manipulation and is a prisoner on the ship with no rights and only a fellow prisoner who is a recovering opium addict as a companion. Zachary Reid is an American of mixed race whose status as second mate on the *Ibis* permits him to rise above the limitations of his low-class status on land and his African American ancestry. The *Ibis* journey allows him a chance for concealed identity as he passes as white, resulting in social mobility and the respect of those of a higher class in a world dominated by British imperialism. Paulette Lambert also conceals her identity on board the *Ibis*, similar to Kalua, Deeti, and Zachary. Paulette is a French woman who was raised in an Anglo-Indian household and boards the *Ibis* disguised as an indentured laborer to escape the oppressive nature of her society, where her guardians intend to marry her off against her will and Mr. Burnham sexually harasses her. Paulette subverts social norms as she forges an alliance with fellow passengers to oppose the overt oppression of their society.

In short, the hierarchy of power on board the ship mimics the colonial power dynamics. However, it also shows how even within Indian society, there were still distinctions and inequalities between classes and while at sea, traditional class structures were reconfigured, often allowing those with less power to gain more agency.

The Power of Collective Resistance: United in Opposition

In *Egyptian Earth*, the land and its crops are more than just a livelihood for the peasants; the peasants are united by their deep connection to the land which is a source of their identity and the core element that ensures their collective resistance against the invasive government. Nedal Al-Mousa writes, “The peasants’ developed sense of nationalism manifests itself in their attachment to the land as a part of the decolonization process at work in the novel” (127). Al-Mousa shows how the love of their land, which unites them, helps trigger the decolonization process that plays out. Their strong ties to their land are connected to the symbolic significance of the earth to both their sense of community and their survival. Al-Sharqawi represents the villagers’ deep love of their land and its connection to their sense of self through direct and indirect characterization that shows how the peasants care for the land with the tenderness a parent would a child. For example, Mohammad Abu Suweilim “shook his head at the wide earth through which the first shoots of cotton and maize were shivering. They’ll make these shoots die of thirst, will they? Young shoots, needing water?” (al-Sharqawi 82). Zakarriya encapsulates the peasants’ parental duties toward their land through the characterization of Abdul Hadi and Abu Suweilim who are concerned about the ecological needs of the land in a way that is “patriarchally protective. They are parents to the wheel and the plants and work hard to provide for them” as they defend their socioeconomic system (1215-16). The peasants share a deep love of their land on a personal and economic level and are protective of the crops they raise like a parent is over a child. When the government deprives their crops of sustenance and intends to erase their land entirely with a road, the peasants fight for the survival of the land they nurtured.

There are several moments in *Egyptian Earth* that are both humorous and show effective collective resistance, including when Waseefa dumps a basket of freshly collected cattle excrement over the Omda’s head in a show of support for both her father and the others who were imprisoned. Waseefa demonstrates in this scene that she is not afraid to speak up for what she believes in and take action, even when the person she is speaking to is the immensely powerful Omda. She is quick to defend her mother’s name and the other women do not stand idly by but instead speak up, providing verbal support. The Omda’s response to Waseefa and the women’s verbal assault, as well as Waseefa tugging at his robe, is to turn to physical violence, yelling to the guards to beat the women. The guards “reluctantly” help the Omda fend off the women, keeping in mind it was he who had “written down the names of the villagers” who broke the water rules and “cheated them over the petition” (167). The guards also know people trapped in the prison with Waseefa’s father, and some own land that they know will be taken from them when the road is built. One guard chooses to join in the collective resistance of the women and mimics the Pasha, saying, “go away all of you . . . or you will be dismissed,” while other guards burst into laughter (167). It is solely Abdul Aati who sides with the Pasha, hitting the women with a stick and beating Waseefa with his

feet. After falling to the ground in pain, Waseefa rises when she sees the women returning to the village with cattle excrement to make fuel-pats. She then snatches a basket of cattle excrement and dumps it on the Omda's head, reversing the power imbalance by humiliating him and gaining the support of others. The guards laugh and mock the Omda while the women rush away gleefully. This scene epitomizes how Waseefa's bravery in speaking up to the Omda, as well as her relatively peaceful protest using the excrement, leads to success as she is backed by the support of the village women and the Omda's own guards, increasing her agency and reducing his.

The men who are imprisoned, including Waseefa's father and Abdul Hadi, also practice collective resistance in the form of a chant to oppose the corrupt government, reflective of the political turmoil of 1930s Egypt. When the Magistrate informs them that "their Excellencies, the Ministers of the People's Party" would be honoring the town with a visit, he tells them they must chant, against their beliefs, "Long Live The People's Party! Long Live Sidky!" (al-Sharqawi 181). This scene provides a fictional representation of a real historical context. Noshin Bokth notes that "The Egyptian peasants were marginalised and suffered the most under feudal-imperialist injustices. The government exploited their diminutive status and lack of knowledge and resources, like the peasants of the novel who continue to lose valuable land for roads and lavish palaces to be made." This quote shows how the novel is a reflection of reality as the peasants are manipulated given their low socioeconomic status and have land and resources stripped from them. The novel is set in the early 1930s, a time when Ismail Sidky had the premiership, dissolved parliament, suspended the 1932 Constitution, and formed the People's Party. As Robin Ostle writes, the new electoral laws disenfranchised large portions of the Egyptian population while the Omdas acted as "corrupt instruments of government control" and violence was chronically linked with political activity (Ostle viii). As Ostle shows, the fellahin are the victims of corrupt government oppression and violence as the Omda abuses his power as an agent of the government along with the chief of police, Mahmoud Bey. Searle references how "The Omda deceptively converts a petition from the local farmers to a counterfeit appeal for a main road through the villagers' land which will bring riches only to himself" (105). Additionally, the Pasha exploits the peasants using governmental power, most notably deciding that it is his palace that will be connected by the new road to Cairo, which runs through their land. The harsh decisions of the government against the peasants struck them particularly hard since between 1930 to 1934 there was a period of economic depression where cotton prices dipped extremely low as did the market for other agricultural goods (Ostle ix). The farmers were suffering under tremendous debts already and interest rates for loans skyrocketed, so imagining the dire conditions of the fellahin in the novel when their water privileges were stripped and their land was stolen by the Pasha is devastating. The men's decision to peacefully protest the extreme government interference with their chant is a form of resistance that increases their agency despite the unequal power dynamic.

Faced with the prospect of having to chant praise at Sidky, the prisoners in *Egyptian Earth* instead begin to chant, "Love Live Egypt! Long Live The Waft!" as a form of rejecting colonial oppression (al-Sharqawi 181). They initially tried chanting what was requested of them, but as their voices rose in unison, they unconsciously and collectively reverted to the

chant they once sang in solidarity. The Ministers and the Magistrate boiled with anger and people were beaten and arrested by the police, but they succeeded in making this welcoming party the end of the Magistrate's career. Though the prisoners had been dehumanized and injured in ways that were unimaginable, their collective resistance in the form of this brave chant, similar to Waseefa and the women speaking up to the Pasha, is another instance of the people uniting to show the government that they will not be silenced even as they are actively being oppressed.

Another instance of effective collective resistance to government oppression is the peaceful protest through words led by the local imam, "the most famous reciter of the Koran in the district" (al-Sharqawi 209). When a magistrate visits the village to sentence those opposing the government, a local imam reading the Koran only repeats one phrase: "And behold thine ass!" (al-Sharqawi 212). Like Waseefa who risked her physical safety to oppose the government, the imam, Sheikh Ibrahim, knows that what he is doing can result in severe punishment. The villagers have learned that they are stronger when they work together than when they work alone and this peaceful protest on the part of the religious reader angers the Sheikh-al-Balad, the Omda's presumed successor in the wake of his death, and succeeds in provoking a response and shattering his composure. When the Magistrate enters, the imam says the Koranic phrase, "And behold thine ass," and proceeds to "recite it in the Seven approved ways" (al-Sharqawi 212). All the villagers and the visitors from the town who have come to this service to honor the dead Omda, who has caused them so much turmoil, look at the Magistrate and Mahmoud Bey and stifle laughter as Sheikh Ibrahim continues to pointedly repeat the line and everyone knows that the verse is being aimed at the Magistrate.

Similar to when the women and guards laughed at the Omda as Waseefa poured excrement on him and when the villagers chanted "Love Live Egypt," Sheikh Ibrahim and the villagers succeed in angering the people in authority in a non-violent way while making their beliefs clear. Mahmoud Bey is infuriated, shouting, "Is there nothing in the Koran except this verse?.. Who put you up to this?" while the people all laugh (al-Sharqawi 213). The Magistrate ends up shouting, "Aren't you the ones who shout Long Live the Wafd!?" and this allows the people to voice their side of things with a lawyer saying, "all Egypt shouts that, your Excellency. . . You think you can rule Egypt for ever? This country belongs to its people, not to highwaymen and thieves" (213-4). Thus, Sheikh Ibrahim's decision to repeat the specific verse resulted in the people collectively supporting him with their laughter, which in turn elicited the desired response of anger and allowed the lawyer to succinctly voice their views. In retaliation for the villagers' mockery as well as their taking the iron for the new road and tossing it in the river, the Magistrate, as deputy Omda, "enforce[s] a curfew. . . to prevent any interference with the road" by calling in the Camel Corps (216). Subsequently, the villagers pay a price once more for their collective efforts to oppose the government's oppression, but they succeed in having their voices heard, showing they are opposed to government interference and are willing to fight for the rights to their land.

Collective resistance against oppressive colonial authority is also present in Ghosh's *Sea of Poppies*, and this is made possible by the setting of the ship, which allows them to erase their pasts and reconfigure their identities. When Paulette first meets the fellow women on the ship, she captures their unique situation and bond well when she says, "On a boat of pilgrims, no one can lose caste and everyone is the same. . . we will all be ship-siblings. . . There'll be no

differences between us” (Ghosh, *Sea of Poppies* 328). In *Egyptian Earth*, harsh times call for desperate measures and oppressive government authority leads to alliances that would not have formed otherwise across boundaries of class and gender as people realize they are all fighting the same force, they just need to stop fighting one another. Similarly, regarding *Sea of Poppies*, Arora writes, “Cross-cultural, caste, class, gender, and national collaborations blur all sorts of boundaries and enable the formation of new alliances (both oppressive and liberating)” (22). Arora also notes that it is the “machinations and practices of Empire” that allow for the formation of found families to combat domination and help with resistance while on board the *Ibis* (22). The cast of characters that end up on the *Ibis* come from worlds apart, from addicts, to farmers, to convicts, to runaways, and more. The *Ibis* offers them a chance at a transformed social hierarchy, as being on the ship unmoors and undermines the hierarchy that previously existed. The inherently migratory setting of the ship opens a host of social relations that are not possible elsewhere. For example, Neel, a raja of the landed aristocracy, finds himself friends with an addict and convict, Ah Fatt, who proves to be a loyal friend. Additionally, Deeti finds herself wedded to a new husband who is willing to love her and steadfastly support her in a way that is foreign to her as they abandon their former identities to escape death.

The *Ibis* passengers are not free of social or racial hierarchies, but slightly less rigid and fixed social structures exist and the playing field is transformed as everyone’s former identities are temporarily erased as they set out for a new reality. For example, Deeti is allowed a position of leadership among others, something impossible back home while on the run from her brother-in-law. Zachary is able to pass for white, is highly respected among the upper class, and is viewed as a fine gentleman by the captain. Paulette is able to escape the Burnhams and pass as just another female migrant. In short, the setting of the ship enables the passengers to take on new identities for protection, adopt a new social/racial hierarchy, and come to see that they are more alike than they are different.

Collective resistance against oppressive colonial authority in *Sea of Poppies* manifests as unlikely groups of ordinary people come together to fight exploitation and oppression, much like in *Egyptian Earth*. As Dutta Roy says, “in Ghosh’s *Sea of Poppies*, motifs of shared humanity allow the possibility of individual and collective social resistance against colonial and indigenous forms of oppression” (21). In the novel, we often see forms of individual resistance to colonial oppression that result in collective resistance as the brave individual finds themselves supported by their peers. Arora notes that when Singh’s men brutally assault the lascar Jodu for speaking with the migrant Munia and imprison Munia to punish her, the migrants “threaten to destabilize the ship. Echoing other Middle Passage narratives of mutiny on slave ships, this moment imagines resistance to Empire by ordinary people” (37). Arora uses the word “imagines” to remind readers that this novel, though fictional, is a reflection of realities that transpired as “ordinary people” resisted the British Empire through collective resistance. As Shantanu Chakravarty writes regarding the historical accuracy, “Ghosh depicts the opium trade’s influence on the course of individual lives as well as world history by capturing the socioeconomic and cultural upheavals of the time through colorful storytelling and painstaking historical accuracy” (389). In the scene referenced

by Arora, Deeti is reminiscent of Waseefa in *Egyptian Earth*, whose bravery in speaking up against the Omda inspired the other women to back her up and speak their minds as well.

Deeti encourages the other migrants to come to Munia's aid, saying, "Let's see if we can't rattle the masts on this ship; let's see how long they can ignore us" (Ghosh, *Sea of Poppies* 433). Her use of the word "us" emphasizes the importance of acting as a group since Deeti alone could not have instigated a response from above. Shouting, singing, and stomping their feet in unity "create[s] a deafening noise of resistance" that triggers a reaction from above, allowing Deeti the opportunity to rescue Munia (Arora 37). Arora captures this scene well, writing, "While victimized within arbitrary and random maritime authority structures, the migrants are not hapless coolies and here pose the threat of mutiny to the oppressive regime formed by agents of the imperial state" (37). Eliciting a response from authority figures enables Munia's return and would not have been possible without the migrants' collective efforts, though their actions later result in further turmoil. This scene of unity harkens back to when Paulette first christens them all "ship-siblings" who have cast aside caste and forged bonds as "children of the ship," united in a common desire to oppose oppression (Ghosh, *Sea of Poppies* 328).

Collective resistance against oppressive colonial authority is also present in the *Ibis* mutiny when the *Ibis* enters the climactic storm, figuratively and literally. The mutiny is orchestrated by Serang Ali, but it is a collective rejection of colonial authority and systemic oppression that makes the defiant escape possible by the combined cooperation of people from various backgrounds uniting for the same cause. Several individuals, including Paulette, Baboo, Deeti, and Zachary, are aware of the mutiny that is about to take place and watch the mutineers escape, yet they do nothing to interfere with it, showing their collective support for colonial resistance with this nuanced opposition. The ship had initially been a means of escape and freedom for the migrants, but instead, it has become a microcosm of the colonial hierarchy they escaped from, enforced by the leadership of the British officers. The combined efforts made against the ship's oppressive authority are symbolic of the broader anti-colonial sentiments they felt on land and are a reflection of the historical resistance against imperial rule.

The members of the mutiny, including Serang Ali, Jodu, Neel, Ah Fatt, and Kalua, are all fighting for their own survival, but their rebellion acts as an impactful statement against colonial exploitation that dehumanizes marginalized people like them. They each endured severe abuse at the hands of those who held more power after they sought to defend the ones they care about. For example, a triggering event of the mutiny was the weaponizing of addiction against Ah Fatt, who Bhyro Singh and Mr. Crowle manipulates into urinating on his only friend, Neel. Ah Fatt subsequently exacts his revenge on Mr. Crowle by killing him. Eswaran writes that "Ah Fatt urinates on Neel in exchange for goat dung disguised as opium—the incident demonstrates the necessity of collective resistance and, in part, motivates the prisoners' escape from the chokey and their killing of the British first mate, Jack Crowle" (7). Similarly, Kalua tries to protect Deeti from Bhyro Singh, is tied to the mast and beaten for his actions, and breaks his bonds and kills Singh. The mutinous group that escapes in the longboat demonstrate that they are willing to fight to survive, highlighting that they are not about to give in to tyranny. In short, they are not only seeking freedom from a risky situation once again, they are redefining their identities in an environment that continues to oppress them.

Similar to how the *Ibis* is a microcosm of the larger hierarchical colonial system on land, the *Ibis* mutiny is representative of the colonized people's fight for liberation from tyrannical rule. Their mutiny is akin to how in *Egyptian Earth*, the fellahin decide to "cut the bank of the river . . . [to] irrigate their lands as they wanted" despite the risks (al-Sharqawi 126). The mutiny similarly acts as a dramatic statement that is symbolic of the migrants' intolerance of the colonial power imbalance that threatens their lives. It is representative of how the relentless will to survive shared by these daring individuals is similar to the real fight the colonized faced as they sought to oppose colonial oppression and challenge unequal power dynamics that disenfranchised them.

Continued Manifestations of British Colonialism

Despite the settings, diction, and genres of al-Sharqawi's and Ghosh's novels being drastically different, an analysis of the impact of colonialism reveals key ways the novels relate as oppressive links connect the Global South. Both novels examine complex power dynamics between people in positions of power and those with low socioeconomic status, exploring instances of corruption, exploitation, and oppression. Comparing key scenes involving small farmers shows how both novels deal with the exploitation of commodities and land in different contexts. The intertextual connections reveal how groups of people in different places and times contend with direct and indirect influences of British colonialism, including economic underdevelopment, systemic racism, "lack of access to education and healthcare," impacted cultural identities, and social inequalities, among other issues (Butt). These texts are fictional stories, but they provide representations of real chapters of history and the present. There are vulnerable communities still living with the legacy of power imbalances established by British rule and they must confront the exploitation of both their resources and people. As Julian Go explains, "European powers that colonized the world were wealthy then and remain comparably wealthy now, while most of the ex-colonies of those core powers remain at the lower rungs of the international economic hierarchy" (10). Despite the British Empire being officially withdrawn from places like 1930s Egypt—when al-Sharqawi's text transpires—the persistent unequal distribution of power and wealth demonstrates how certain groups of people are still relegated to a lower place in society. As Mechkarini et al. point out, benefits can arise from "unpacking and revealing the often dark reality of the colonial encounter, and exposing the lingering presence and impact of imperial power and after-effects upon world matters" (826). Further investigation of the lasting impression of British colonialism, as well as the role collective resistance plays in mitigating exploitation of vulnerable populations, could be conducted by analyzing other novels intertextually, uncovering ways different populations interact with the same problems and offering a deeper understanding of the cultural and historical contexts they represent.

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A Plea for Trans/Multilingual Editing In Academic and Non-Academic Publishing

Ellyssa Paik

As I work towards a career in book editing, I've looked online for house style guides to prepare for the trade and start familiarizing myself with popular editing rules. Much to my luck, most of the ones I could find were for academic publishers and university presses, and ones for fiction were usually not available for the public. Across the various style guides that I have seen, though, many of them cite *The Chicago Manual of Style* as a foundational reference that informs editing practices for both academic and non-academic publishing (Butcher; Wiley-Blackwell). In it, I noticed a section titled "Standard' English" in a chapter called "Grammar and Usage" written by Bryan A. Garner (*Chicago*). Denied the full contents by a subscription-based paywall, I found the original monograph titled *The Chicago Guide to Grammar, Usage, and Punctuation*. I was shocked and disappointed to learn just how deified Standardized English (SE) still is in something so ingrained in publishing as the Chicago style guide: Garner calling it the "best English. . .shorn of dialect and idioms;" that being an expert in it somehow makes the speaker/writer a more successful, intelligent, and sympathetic person; that there are "unimpeachable uses of language" in which, "the goal is to stay within the mainstream of *literate* language" as if there are impure and illiterate languages which should be stamped out (Garner 1; 3; 223–24; my emphasis).

I disagree with Garner's sentiments and maintain that translanguaging is necessary in editing for there to truly be improvement towards a more linguistically inclusive future. I argue for editors, with our own various literacies, to be able to comfortably and confidently legitimize and uplift the vast plethora of Englishes beyond SE without resorting to policing identity and culture-based modes of articulation and expression out of literature.

Editors work in between the stages of text creation and text dissemination, manipulating a writer's piece so that it may be primed for publication and understood by target audiences. Sam Clem's redefinition of technical editing positions editors as advocates "for underrepresented audiences and authors" and enactors of social justice at the copyediting level (53). By making certain decisions in what is or isn't 'correct' or 'good' enough, in what

conveys the author's writing in a way that appeals to the biases of the publisher and editor themselves, editors hold a unique position as gatekeepers of language (Burrough-Boenisch; Freeman; Hartse and Kubota). They control the communication success between the writer and audience through the filter of the publisher's values and ideologies. As a whole, editing practices and methodologies relatively lack critical interrogation (Blauner; Kotze), including the role and power of the editor in either upholding or rejecting racist and patriarchal standards and aesthetics.

Editing tends to appeal to systemic and dominant institutions of taste and standard, as editors are in simultaneous conversation with their employer's rules and societal language expectations. They must determine what is "suitable for dissemination to its intended audience" (Burrough-Boenisch 142), "appropriate for their context" (Clem 53), and intelligible in the cases of non-standard English variety use (Görlach 87). The difficulty in fostering suitability, appropriateness, and intelligibility, all subjective markers of a text's success, in a way that is more inclusive of non-standard language and multilingualism lies in the ever present and deeply rooted system of SE (Blauner; Clem and Cheek; Hartse and Kubota; Kotze; Lillis and Curry; Pandey). As "the demands for standard English that exist in academic [and non-academic] publishing make it difficult for editors, publishers, and writers to connect theory with practice" (Hartse & Kubota 72), multilingualism and translingual principles in textual editing "is either invisibilized or peripherized in the overwhelming presence of the transactional worth of English" (Pandey 84). The effort, then, to make the seemingly invisible decision, to perform the peripherized act, comes down to the editor's personal intention and approach.

The idea of fluid text, as described by John Bryant, acknowledges and embraces the notion that a text with its versions is never static. "Fluid texts are the material evidence of *shifting intentions*" as it moves between collaborators: the writer, the editor, the publisher, and the reader (9). As such, a manuscript morphs and reforms to align with each collaborator's biases and intentions, allowing editors at all levels to hold levels of authority over the text that can rival the author's (Burrough-Boenisch; Clem; Freeman). Theresa Lillis and Mary Jane Curry refer to "editors, reviewers, academic peers, and English-speaking friends and colleagues" as "literacy brokers," mediators between the speaker/writer and the audience (4). The role of the mediator lends itself well to the impression of an editor as one who filters or translates an original text so that the audience can 'better' understand. The gravity of their responsibility becomes clearer because of the dilemmas between editing for correctness and accuracy versus editing to preserve individuality (Blauner; Görlach). Robin Freeman explains the editor's additional influence over language by stating, "[p]ublishers and their editors occupy powerful positions within the public sphere as arbiters of public taste and determiners of those voices that will be publicly uttered and find a readership and those voices that will remain silenced" (134). Editors curate and cultivate "uniform" and standardized language by legitimizing "variety-specific usages" in their acceptance of those linguistic choices (Kotze 2). Published language's unquestioned ability to legitimize and sustain certain language conventions (diction, grammar, spelling, form) carries with it the potential to maintain sterilized and inauthentic writing standards as the expectation and norm. As a result, the editor's intention becomes that much more vital to examine as filtrations and edits under

the guidance of limits such as SE can have vastly negative consequences that range from nonconsensually altering an author's intent, to violently erasing diverse cultural expression and language.

While strides have been made in publishing to be more attuned and aware of potential offensive language with the adaptation of roles such as the sensitivity reader, editing—and especially copyediting—remains largely grounded in upholding the rules and voice of SE. In the current climate of editing amidst unresolved issues of race and white patriarchy, Freeman highlights that non-Indigenous editors of Indigenous texts in Australia are not equipped or trained to deal with the “uncomfortable territories of race, politics and power” that inherently come with those texts (133). These editors have not lived those experiences themselves, but still hold editorial (and authorial) power over those works as their privileged gatekeepers and literacy brokers. Though Freeman's subject group does not address the state of this type of training (or lack thereof) in the American editorial sphere, the apparent lack of inclusivity (Clem and Cheek) and instances of purely cosmetic implementations of multilingualism (Pandey) indicate related ongoing issues of monolingualism within editing. The preference for monolingualism reveals a resistance to genuine efforts in reflecting the realities of a multilingual world and uplifting marginalized voices in Western publishing. SE still firmly has a hold on editing as disingenuous uses of multilingualism appeal to monolingualistic agendas, and proficiency in SE is still a tool used by writers to grant their characters more agency than their non-standard English speaking counterparts (Pandey).

Though it may not be the miracle cure to combatting SE monolingualism, perseverance for translingualism remains valuable and necessary for striving towards a more equitably multilingual future. The challenges of incorporating those values into editing are undeniably linked to the difficulties in breaking away from SE in a society that believes the majoritized writing voice as superior. Persistent devaluing to the extent of dehumanizing users of spoken and written non-standard Englishes remains a major obstacle. According to Garner:

[n]ot everyone aspires to the standard language—and as a result our culture becomes more varied and interesting. But anyone who does aspire to it will find that it can be cultivated, partly through wide reading of serious writing and partly through close study of its techniques. Although nobody speaks or writes standard literary English infallibly—just as nobody behaves or exercises judgment infallibly—good English exists as certainly as good behavior and good judgment do. (2)

The first sentence rings true, that deviation and independence inspire linguistic variety and richness within discourse communities with results such as new forms of slang or regional language distinctions. As for the rest of the statement, it instills the problematic belief that SE is more than just a language. To Garner, and by extension *The Chicago Manual*, it is the “best English” (1), a marker of character within a person, a superior way of living that should be aspired to in the way that one should aspire to have “good behavior and good judgement” (2). The implication would then be that any form of non-standard English is an indicator of not only a lack of education, but also a lack of character, of motivation or ambition, of behavior and judgement. The less a speech has an upper middle class, white, male voice, the less ‘serious’

or ‘good’ it is. It’s apparently no matter that, as stated by April Baker-Bell, there “is a larger system of white linguistic and cultural hegemony that advances the needs, self interests, and racial privileges of whites at the expense of linguistically marginalized communities of color” (16). There seems to be a lack of need to address that race and gender based privilege allows dominant groups to “aspire to [SE]” in the first place. Those without that privilege are faced with social and institutional barriers and are punished due to their lack of resources that keep them from properly learning and using SE. The belief seems to simply be that everyone *should want* to be skilled in SE by changing their non-standard speaking practices to match the standard, not to question the colonial origins and undefinable nature of SE, or see the value in the expressions and ideas that come from minoritized modes. Striving for racial equality rather than equity stems from color blind racism as it ignores the lack of systemic support for marginalized groups while the majority progresses with easier access to resources. It assumes that everyone has equal access to learning and “cultivat[ing]” SE and that achieving success is simply a matter of fluency. By claiming that SE is the ultimate form of speaking and writing, Garner effectively deems all other Englishes as undeserving of recognition. SE monolingualism forces alternative Englishes to find ways to justify their validity and value to those who are unwilling to listen or understand if it is not SE. For minoritized writers who are attempting to publish, this can mean conforming their writing during the creation process to fit within a rigid and limited style that isn’t their own, forced to convey meaning in a way that automatically appeals to a white reader. It can also mean facing modifications from an unchecked editor whose priority is to strip away any deviance from SE instead of enabling their writer to write in their authentic voice.

Style guides such as *Butcher’s Copy-Editing* (2006) published by Cambridge University Press and the *Wiley-Blackwell House Style Guide* (2007) use subjective and imprecise descriptions to classify apparently unpublishable language use aside from grammatical choices, including words like “misleading, ambiguous or obscure English” (Butcher 32) or “strange wording” (Wiley-Blackwell 12). The *Butcher’s* guide also advises editors that “[i]f your publisher does not have a rigid house style, it is usually easier and safer to consistently implement the author’s own conventions” (Butcher 33). This is understandable enough—ignoring that “usually” is not a defined parameter—considering that a consistent linguistic habit is preferable over inconsistent and varied choices. However, this is “provided they [the author] are clear and sensible,” putting the responsibility of ‘sensibility’ for a biased reader onto the writer and the definition of ‘sensibility’ onto the biased editor (Butcher 33). These types of words and phrases in a guide carry negative connotations, which associate not only with the writing but the writers themselves, telling the editor how to feel about unfamiliar linguistic choices rather than allowing them to make their own judgement. While language interpretation may inherently be unique to each reader/listener, adjectives such as these other non-standard English, determining it as unworthy for publication and something to be corrected. Style guides that employ SE dominance enable and reward the erasure of minoritized voices before their writing is presented to audiences, allowing SE to remain favored starting at the editor and ending at the reader, leaving the writer without control.

Garner’s statement on Standard Written English (SWE) further blurs the already vague bounds of SE with generalizations and reliance on connotative phrases that mask a racist

undertone, more easily swaying less than critical editors into agreeing with and unknowingly perpetuating its monolingualistic ideology. The rather short statement—considering its proportion to the rest of the guide—explains the objectives of the whole manual and the SE supremacy which it subscribes to, reading as follows in its entirety:

Standard Written English. In any age, careful users of language will make distinctions; careless users of language will blur them. We can tell, by the words that someone uses and the way they go together, something about the education and background of that person. We know whether people speak educated English and write what is commonly referred to as Standard Written English.

Just as the best-written English reads as if it were spoken—it is speakable—the best-spoken English is refined enough that it could be transcribed with minimal editing. But few speakers approach that ideal—and no sensible person would want to at all moments. Even so, polished writers and speakers tend to narrow the gap between the written word and the spoken word. (Garner 223)

By devaluing all other Englishes aside from SWE as uneducated and indifferently supposing the writer's background as something vulgar and inferior based on their language use, Garner's statement enables editors who use this guide to feel more justified when erasing any traces of non-SWE. More than that, the push for SE as the "best-written" and "best-spoken" establishes an unspoken but very clear responsibility and duty for the editor to weed out the supposedly inferior and undesirable Englishes. This instruction, however, immediately falls apart when Garner assumes that editors and other users of this guide will somehow know what he means by so-called "careless" and "blurry" uses of language. Language in and of itself is an amalgamation of culture, identity, history, and mode, a blurry mesh of societally agreed upon means of meaning-making screened through individual perspectives and knowledge for the difficult purpose of communication. In the way that a student can take a foreign language course for specialized use, SE is just another learnable tool to produce specific forms of discourse in specific situations. With that in mind, if the best-written word should read "as if it were spoken" and the "best-spoken English is refined enough that it could be transcribed with minimal editing," what makes non-standard English less speakable or transcribable? If a text effectively narrows the gap between, say, written African American English (AAE) and spoken AAE or some other written and spoken "blurred" language, does that then not qualify that text as "best-written" and the writer as "polished"? This sort of judgement ultimately comes down to the editor's literacies and ability to identify and adapt to the text, rather than the systems in place choosing to inefficiently and stubbornly cling onto only one limited form of English. Language itself should not be a reason for editors to judge the character and abilities of the writer, nor should editors limit their literacy to just one way of Englishing. Editing should come from a place of empathy and compassion, a desire to expand one's literacy to prioritize what the writer is trying to say and enable them to say it in the way that is the most successful for their language. Editors who subscribe to SE superiority continue to perpetuate the monolingual agenda that benefits those already in power. For there to be a significant stand against SE monolingualism, further scholarship and criticism

needs to challenge editorial style guides and dominant editing ideologies for non-standard Englishes to have a lasting chance at publication and dissemination. It cannot only be on the minoritized writer to prove their language to those whose privilege depends on violently maintaining racial and linguistic hierarchies.

Jonathan Rosa and Nelson Flores emphasize the need to observe and interrogate the “white listening subject” instead of focusing only on the “language-minoritized” speaker (“Masterclass”). The white listening subject is the perceiver, the privileged evaluator who determines what deserves acknowledgement based on their own personal idea of what qualifies as SE. Rather than constantly justifying and proving in new and more convoluted ways that minoritized Englishes are just as legitimate and deserving of respect, Rosa and Flores question and seek to destabilize the majoritized listener’s previously unrestrained linguistic authority. It is not the speaker or writer that needs to adapt and prove their own worth; it is the listener who should be held accountable for how they listen. In her TED Talk, Jamila Lyiscott makes a similar appeal for uplifting non-standard English speaking in higher education, particularly because minoritized voices offer ways of thinking in critical conversations that SE is incapable of achieving on its own (“Why English Class”). Much like Rosa and Flores, Lyiscott questions the authoritative and majoritized institution and its lack of self-reflection and adaptation to students. Rosa, Flores, and Lyiscott demand for a paradigm shift wherein the subject of interrogation is no longer the subjugated voice but the judging subjugator, the SE enforcer. Culture and society often take a published piece more seriously, as deserving of belief and respect, than an unpublished manuscript regardless of its fluidity between stages of production. In order for there to truly be acceptance of non-standard writing post-publication, change must begin in the pre-publication stages, during production when content is still liminal and editors’ choices are not yet immortalized in print to inform grammar and style norms. Thus, scholars and publishers alike must investigate and eradicate SE superiority in editing for writers to have more linguistic freedom and to allow for the growth of human knowledge and empathy that can only come from legitimizing minoritized work.

The publishing industry has been a white male dominated field that still holds up the western canon of literature on a pedestal while often granting multilingual authors publication for only their superficial appeal to multilingual audiences rather than for their diverse perspectives and ideas. Editors who want to push back against SE monolingualism must compete with this reality along with the expectation that they must suppress their desire to resist if they are to keep their positions. Disregarding their publisher’s style guide can be seen as a sign of disobedience and thus prone to reprehension. Editors who are born into English-speaking, monolingual households and environments with financial advantages to higher education and resources that teach SE, “are more likely to . . . uphold white linguistic hegemony by way of their privilege, power, and lack of awareness of language varieties other than their own” (Baker-Bell 100). Multilingual editors are systemically set up to disproportionately face greater hurdles to employment and, if hired, encounter greater consequences from their publishers for thinking and practicing multilingually. The absence of attention to this inequity can only further enable western publishing to remain monolingualistic and perpetuate SE as superior. For the American linguistic landscape as

a whole to fully embrace the value of Englishes beyond SE, the listening subjects, enforcers of language, and editors who exist in between writers and readers at the mercy of language policing must interrogate and challenge the prevalence of SE superiority within academic and non-academic publishing. The encouragement of multilingual literacy and writing needs to begin at the editorial stage so that minoritized writers have a fairer shot at publishing their own authentic voices and readers will gradually have more access to multilingual content from which to learn from and be moved by.

Now more than ever, as institutions vilify Critical Race Theory out of education and ban books that challenge white male supremacy or ratify America's history of violent racism, the future of language inclusivity depends on producers of written language to take a stand against monolingualism and validate of non-standard English at the publication level. Rather than labeling non-standard English as incorrect or strange or undesirable, style guides should embrace the reality of an ever diversifying linguistic landscape by having language that regards all forms of writing as serious through fair consideration and critique. These inclusive guides may become the start of an editor's journey into expanding one literacy into an arsenal of literacies, enabling greater capability of acceptance and empathy. Discourse around the shortage of diversity in the publishing field has been a popular subject, while monolingual methods of editing encouraged by publishers have not gotten as much attention. There is still much to be done in the ways of allowing publishing to be a more equitable field, where accepting diverse authors' works is not to simply appear inclusive and minoritized writers do not have to fear losing an opportunity to someone else whose writing appeals more to SE. Exposing the commonness of SE monolingualism in the infrastructures of publishing is a step towards loosening its grasp on the industry, and the goal of editing can shift from indifferent correction and erasure to facilitating support and knowledge-making.

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