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Watermark accepts submissions annually between October and February. We are dedicated to publishing original critical and theoretical essays concerned with literature of all genres and periods, as well as works representing current issues in the fields of rhetoric and composition. Reviews of current works of literary criticism or theory are also welcome.

All submissions must be accompanied by a cover letter that includes the author's name, phone number, email address, and the title of the essay or book review. All essay submissions should be approximately 12-15 pages and must be typed in MLA format with a standard 12 pt. font. Book reviews ought to be 750-1,000 words in length. As this journal is intended to provide a forum for emerging voices, only student work will be considered for publication. Submissions will not be returned. Please direct all questions to editor@watermarkjournal.com and address all submissions to:

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EDITOR'S NOTE:

For this eighth volume of *Watermark* we received essays that interrogate the English Literary canon from its Beowulf beginnings to the postmodern contemporary. This volume, in particular, spans across time and discipline, examining not only classic prose works, but also poetry and film as well. While the essays within this volume are paradigmatic of a graduate program's literature journal, they are also much more. *Watermark* does not adhere to a particular theme, which allows the journal the unique opportunity to address a wide variety of works and topics. This ability assures that no matter what readers' interests may be, there is something for everyone in *Watermark*.

In addition to the usual call for papers, this edition features essays that were read at the 3rd Annual California State University, Long Beach Department of English Graduate Student Interdisciplinary Conference, Re/Inventions. This conference has proven to be extremely fruitful, including submissions from all over the United States and across the Pond. Similarly, the response to our call for papers was abundant. Our staff of readers had their work cut out for them, choosing judiciously which essays to include. This strong response from the academic community suggests that the staff of the ninth volume will face the same positive challenge of having more excellent essays than room to publish.

This edition of *Watermark*, like its predecessors, could not have gone to press without the tireless efforts of our readers and editors who so graciously volunteered their time to make this volume a reality. On behalf of the entire *Watermark* staff, I would also like to extend our heartfelt thanks to Dr. George Hart for championing the journal's mission of providing a forum for students to present their scholarship; Dr. Eileen Klink for her visionary departmental leadership; Lisa Behrendt, Janice Young, and Doris Pintscher for all their hard work behind the scenes; Dean Tsuyuki for breathing life into *Watermark* with his keen eye for design; and all of the English Department faculty and staff, for continually motivating, inspiring, and mentoring students toward continued success.

Mary Sotnick
Editor

JEREMIAH ALLEN

From Object to *Figure*: Tracing Subjectivity in the Electrate Apparatus

Although the chora can be designated and regulated, it can never be definitely posited: as a result, one can situate the chora and, if necessary, lend it a topology, but one can never give it axiomatic form.' --Julia Kristeva

Object-oriented criticism and it's metaphysics counterpart "thing theory"—both of which are among the more recent theoretical lenses trending in the humanities and the seemingly latest philosophical gem mined from the nineteen-eighties, a phenomenon which also appears to be at peak trend—are both appealing and challenging as an apparatus for discussing rhetoric. We may never be certain how or whether a given object that (apparently) exists physically, can experience a sense of self in relation to others, or even a conscious apparatus to discern *self* from *other*, but if and when a given object does—gains subjectivity, its sense of self is derived in large part from its relationship with other "things" (see Sartre, and for a more compositional application, see Kinneavy). "A "subject,"or "writing subject," which we will loosely define here as any deliberate application of consciousness—e.g., using the technology of writing, *literacy*—experiences others in ways limited by its own perception of the role it plays in relation to other "things". "A thing" is distinguished from other objects when it becomes an essential component to the self/other

construction of a consciousness and its extension into the conceptual realm of identity. According to critic Graham Harman, the significance of a thing is often ignored until the thing is broken, absent, or otherwise unable to perform its function in relation to the subject who unknowingly relies on the thing (Harman 186). The "thing" therefore is a receptacle of meaning, an empty container that we place meaning onto, in order to regulate a self—objects are the binding agents of the otherwise free-floating, nebulous and loose set of experiences we try to wrangle and shape into a meaningful set of boundaries we call a self.

Applying this philosophy to a study of digital rhetoric, or how meaning is transmitted using digital tools, let us begin this comparison by discussing Ulmer's concept of *electracy*. *Electracy*, which is a term that contains electricity, literacy, and trace is the extension of print literacy into digital media, the next stage of the technology of language, which indicates a new paradigm of thought and theory. *Electracy* breaks from literacy in a number of important and still many yet undefined ways, while resembling many aspects of orality. Ulmer developed his theory of *electracy* primarily from the work of Marshall McLuhan and Walter J. Ong. To begin to provide dimension to the concept of electracy, I rely heavily on the work of Sarah J. Arroyo and her reading of Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, which introduces the concept of "electrate singularities," which in short are the ad-hoc personalities or *selves* that come together in digital space to create rhetorical meaning. Reading Arroyo, and her counterpart Alex Reid through object-oriented rhetoricians and theorists such as Bill Brown and Graham Harman, I propose that in *electracy*, a new way of understanding a subject is available in the form of "the figure," a term proposed by Gregory Ulmer. *Figure* is related to *chora*, a term deployed by deconstructionists that has its roots in Greek concept of receptacle, interval or space, and it is a concept that Arroyo expands and demonstrates in her book.[1] *Chora* can be regarded as what post-structuralists from Barthes to Derrida consider to be "third" meaning, or that which the linear technology of writing, which cannot account for all possible connections between ideas, fails to fully illustrate. Literacy is described by Ulmerians as logically and locally driven in "stasis theory" of argumentation: that points are static, and liner thinking and reasoning progress from an intended stance. Unlike *stasis*, which can be defined as the ground an argument stands on, *chora* emits multiplicities of meaning, and is less like the ground that we speak from and more like the air in which ideas are communicated. The *figure* must be described in relation to the literate static idea of an *argument* because, according to Ulmer, *figure* is the electrate transformation of the literate concept of an *argument*. Therefore, *chora* should generate the *figure* in the same way that the framework of a *category* generates an argument[2]. A figure is like a shadow that grows or shrinks depending on the angle and quality of light shed upon it, it changes shape (and therefore meaning) with various positions and poses, and can strike such a pose in a number of different ways to influence interpretation. If we take Arroyo's metaphor for *chora* as the dancing floor, then the figure is an apt metaphor for identities that are produced chorically.

Object-Oriented Criticism/Rhetoric

In his introductory article on objected-oriented theory and literary criticism, Graham Harman summarizes his work on the theory of what mainstream philosophers deem "speculative realism." Harman traces this theory as it stems from the "correlationist" argument, which contends that "we cannot think a reality outside a thought, for in so doing we instantly convert it into a thought" (185). The "real" is almost impossible to talk about because what we each say when we mean "the real world" is ever filtered *individually* through the senses and converted into electric impulses through the nervous system, eventually to be interpreted as

an impression in the brain, what we may call *thought*. This process is analogous to what we do with information through language and what complicates rhetorical strategies, or as stated by Victor Vitanza in his "Three Countertheses: Or, A Critical In(ter)vention into Composition Theories and Pedagogies": "if something exists it cannot [ought not/ should not] be known" (152, author's brackets). This "Gorgian principle of epistemology" illustrates the problem of realist inquiry. However, Vitanza applies this inquiry to composition studies and concludes that language, as a technology, suffers from the same problem in that it is a *translation* of "real" phenomena, and cannot express the "real" in all of its aspects.

For Harman, the problem of a speculative reality forms the basis for an inquiry into object-oriented rhetoric where "both theory and praxis are distortions of [the object] in its subterranean reality" (186). All that we can know and do with a given object is limited by how we relate to that object, but objects can form relationships with other objects that we do not have access to because as a knower, out point of view is limited to our own relationship with things. A "subterranean" reality is the unknowable reality, the unique reality of each individual perceiver, that cannot be communicated or expressed satisfactorily because of the relative and completely subjective understanding of the real. This "true nature" is inaccessible even to the thing itself because it can only be experienced through relationships with other things. Harman goes on to conclude that, "objects distort one another even in sheer causal interaction. . . . [These objects] may not be 'conscious' of it in human fashion, yet such entities fail to exhaust the reality of the [object] to no less a degree than human praxis or theory" (187). The notion that all things enjoy their own versions of reality, and affect other objects in limited ways is fruitful to a discussion of subjectivity, a discussion integral to post-structuralist inquiry in the field of rhetoric and composition. Applying Vitanza's countertheses to Deleuze and Guattari's work with singularities, Arroyo describes how social media culture on sites such as YouTube create identities which are both symbiotic and simultaneous: "tubers," the vloggers who create video content on Youtube, and viewers who respond with comments and occasionally videos of their own, influence the identity construction of the tuber, as "vloggers are more than exposed to their own images, their images are made and remade in front of them through the dynamic of others' participation" (89). While tubers work to express a "self" digitally through video and comments, their followers and detractors both respond, helping to shape that "author," who responds to their feedback, generating content to requite their participation.

Arroyo applies Deleuze and Guattari's concept of *singularities* to describe an identity that does not rely on "grand narratives" because the narrow trajectory that narrative drives identity through does not account for the temporality of constantly reforming subjective stances. A "singularity," then, is when *chora* meets a particular *stance*, but in electracy, choric demands allow only for momentary stopping points—not necessarily linear, and not easily definable in terms of progression.

For Leotard, grand narratives died in the chaos of the industrialized war-ravaged landscape and psychogeographic response to the post-war rearrangement of national boundaries in twentieth century Europe[3], but I contend that grand narratives are a literate practice (although I agree with Ulmer that narrative was a product of orality). Grand narratives, in an electrate sense, do not make sense as the *chora* cannot be subjected to large overarching thematic rationalizations. Deleuze and Guatarri foresaw this effect as a change in how subjective identity is constructed, where that self is "deoedipalized" and "deterritorialized" into "whatever singularities," which, according to Arroyo "remains in a state of constant becoming . . . [which] is 'neither generic or individual' . . . As a radical singularity, the whatever being exists only in relation to another whatever

being" (36). This situates the self as an unstable construction and electracy provides new ways to create identity for the meaning making machinery of the psyche.

Narrative

In the history of human meaning making, narrative has solved a problem with the relationship man has historically had with the self and other. "Thing theory" has attempted to explain this phenomenon through the examination of humanity's ongoing relationship with objects. In "An Introduction to Thing Theory," Bill Brown des how "[t]hings lie beyond the grid of intelligibility the way mere things lie outside the grid of museal exhibition, outside the order of objects" (5). For Brown, "things" are separate from other objects in that we subconsciously form for them identities, reflections of our own consciousness perhaps. These identities are separate from the casual relationship we perceive other objects to have within a cultural context. Brown notes that, "The question [of what a thing is] is less about 'what things are for a given society, than about what claims are made on your attention and on your action are made on behalf of things'" (9). We can therefore consider objects, elevated to the status of things, as shaping subjective identities. In the same way that an archeologist will look at artifacts to piece together a narrative about an extinct culture, individuals use personal objects to form narratives about themselves and how they fit into the social and metaphysical world. This is how I define a "totem" in orality, which is another Ulmerian term and is the pre-literate predecessor to the literate practice of categorizing. Categorizing shows things with similar charateristics or traits while totems show how various objects, ideas, and things work together, are part of a narrative. Family heirlooms, then, are physical representations of the narrative of personal and family history, they help to place individuals into a narrative about their role in a family and culture.

This placement is in part based on how the literate apparatus shapes our thinking. Ulmer's table, mentioned above, notes that in literacy, the idea of a totem is transformed into a category. Categories are definitive and object-oriented in the sense that they separate the other from the self. As J.C. Alexander notes,

> Every piece of stuff belongs to a category, "an ephemeral attribute of a flow of symbolic interactions among active people competent in the conventions of a certain cultural milieu." A material object "is transformed from a piece of stuff into a social object" . . . only by its "embedment in a narrative." It is by such "narrative binding" that "bits of coloured cloth become flags [and] clothes become uniforms." (784)

Alexander's point indicates what objects do for social identity and narrative, as displaying a flag or putting on a uniform not only situate the self in a narrative context, but draw boundaries around groups of people, defining who the "us" and "them" are, reinforcing the self/other binary into institutional and nationalist ideological forces. Further, we can say that grand narratives attempt to put humankind in some sort of theoretical framework where true/false dichotomies can firmly be established, to say nothing about right/wrong. To the modern literate mind, that question of "authority to act" no longer had any of the old Catholic restraint and subservience to God, but a downright compulsory function to seize control of ideological forces and harness human will and resulting production, to mobilize a state for war. According to Slavoj Žižek in *Welcome to the Desert of the Real!*, "In contrast to the nineteenth century of utopian or 'scientific' projects and ideals, plans for the future, the twentieth century aimed at delivering the thing itself - at directly realizing the longed-for New Order" (5). It is astonishing how it took only a century for the collective force of human discovery and will to lead to the doorstep of its own annihilation, a doomsday clock constantly

within less than a ninety-degree arm swing away from the last midnight. Arguably, the political and social forces behind the world wars still has momentum, as the perennial conflicts within the middle east continue to playout without any sign of resolution, which surely shows as a sign that the age of unchecked techno-social experimentation is far from over.

We are in the project of replacing the dark stain of fierce nationalism with a more smiley and friendly corporate transnationalism, but the concern here is how literacy empowers these political forces, and the hallmark of cultural hegemony is always narrative. If literacy transposed the subjective meaning derived from narrative into grand narratives, and post-modern thinking declares those narratives dead, then the energy associated with that movement must be replaced. According to Vitanza, counter-narratives bubble up from the fragmentary remains of overarching theories and it is these mini-narratives that electracy empowers (163). Corporations take advantage of this now by harnessing the market data aggregation power of social media and strive to tailor all aspects of marketing, from brand concepts to advertising to final products, to individual consumers' tastes. Corporate cultures have, at the heart of their structures, a spirit of individual competition within the company, as opposed to collaboration—a model that often inhibits more than encourages invention as opposed to the type of production that the internet fosters, which is very collaborative and in the spirit of fun and play, rather than gaining advantage over others. Therefore, my prediction is that corporations as they are now will ever be able to grasp the grassroots cultural productions that move through communities like "reddit" and "tumblr" like wildfire because the end goal of production is pleasure and collaboration and not (fiscal) profit.

The internet is noteworthy already for its role in the continual development of highly specialized communities. Like-minded individuals band together over a domain of knowledge: a fandom is formed around a

comic series, a group of Wikipedia editors zealously protect the integrity of their entries. A useful way to think of how these users work together to create subjective identities that reflect their work and knowledge is Alex Reid's "Assemblage Theory." Reid considers the fragmentary discourses described by Vitanza (and their role in forming subjectivity) and applies them to Deleuze and Guattari's singularities; he notes that "assemblage theory offers a means to map material, technological, and other social forces and uncover points of exposure and profanation" (3). I will explain more about the role of assemblage theory in this context in the discussion on chora below, but the main point here is that assemblages are a useful way of accounting for subjectivity in an age where digital "objects" are slowly replacing their physical counterparts. In assessing thing theory, John Plotz notes that such criticism "focuses on the sense of failure, or partial failure, to name or classify. Thing theory highlights, or ought to highlight, approaches to the margins—of language, of cognition, of material substance (110). Thing theory and object-oriented criticism point out the inability for a subject to imagine a reality outside of its own experience. Moreover, a subject is unable to imagine a *self* without the help of external objects to define its place along the spectrum of metaphysics and rational thought—leading us back to the fundamental binary of self/other, is/is not, thing/object. The world a subject perceives is inevitably derived from the influence of "others" in the realm, themselves either perceiving or not, and one cannot be a *self* without accounting for the others' "selfness" or "not selfness" as well. "Reality" is shaped by the interactions and juxtapositions with others[4]. The more a subject relies on certain objects, the less it sees the objects for what they are, as the object has become a "thing," an extension of the subject's being. In that sense, when object-oriented critics state that a "thing" is not recognized as a "thing" until it is broken, they mean that the "thing" has become so incorporated into who a *self* is that the object's own essence is forgotten

about until the thing is no longer available to perform its subjectifying function—whatever that may be. That stripping away is painful, whether it be the anguish at the death of a spouse or parent, or losing your favorite pen, that sense of loss is so painful because you are losing that thing which shaped part of your sense of self, and therefore you lose a bit of that self because you can no longer see yourself reflected in that other object, or "thing."

Chora

For Ulmerians, chora is way of identifying how a *trace*, especially that of an object's reality (which is never identified fully, but does breakthrough in punctums-like moments), can still exist outside of recognizable reality—what I mean is a relativist/correlative reality defined by subjectivity. According to Scot Barnett in "Toward an Object-Oriented Rhetoric,"

> The question of Being and its forgetting in contemporary thought can only be revealed through our . . . attunement to Being's essential withdrawal, its necessary concealment from human consciousness that paradoxically sets the stage for the possible concealment of Being Heidegger locates in human activities such as poetry, thinking, and art. (2)

Roland Barthes defined *punctum* as the irrational, emotional presence which certain photos seemed to illicit within him. The *punctum* contains the trace of what is filtered into the subconscious, the supposed dross that is burned off when conscious beings forge themselves subjective identities, using narrative as a mold. However, those irrational meanings could have rational uses, and they furthermore never hide far from the truth as presented in narrative and argument. Those realizations break through at such moments when we try to encounter things, ironically, as they are and not as they relate to the self. What we are ultimately looking for is that Derridean trace, that "gap", for "material objects—these missing masses—have included: technology, the body, space and place, and the natural world. Not separate or merely additional constituents in rhetorical situations, these materialities and their intertwinings constitute our reality—are part of the very is-ness of that reality . . ." (Barnett 1). Reality, and the construction of the self, which stems from the understanding of that reality, or in rhetorical terms, "the subject" is clearly incomplete, and I contend, unstable as well, if we account for the fact that grand-narratives and identities tied to other literate ideals are on the wane with the rise of electrate production. We are moving away from a culture which relies on physical things to one of digital things and the remainder of this essay will deal with those implications. The "self" is still constructed by sources outside the self, but as we do more of our activities online and share those activities through digital means, things like book collections or video libraries, which once stood for our achievement in encountering the world of thought, can be much more easily (and thoroughly) represented with the "about me" section of social media websites[5].

The constant and changing streams of information available online are the new signifiers of identity and social place. I recently had a conversation with a friend who asked me if a relationship was really "official" if it wasn't noted on her Facebook profile. In the same sense, a listing of cultural influences such as "liking" a band, movie, or comic strip on these types of social media sites is a deliberate construction of electrate identity in the same way that hanging a painting on the wall or wearing a favorite band t-shirt is the literate equivalent of these behaviors. However, the most immediate and recognizable difference between the physical and the virtual is that due to the ephemeral nature of the digital stream, one can just as easily replace all of those social markers at no material cost. Today I could identify as an urban rock-a-billy, tomorrow,

a bohemian hipster. The ultra-malleability of identity is well suited to the predictions of deconstruction theorists. Subjective identities become more unstable the more they are digitally developed.,and as Deleuze and Gutarri note, this is the subjective desire of the de-Oedipalized self: the production of identity in the continuous making and remaking of the subject (Qtd. In Arroyo 32). This is the concept of self that is identified as a "singularity" in assemblage theory. Deleuze and Guattari mark singularities as individuals taking part in assemblages: "[A]leatory connections . . . brought together from several directions and discourses" (33). The assemblage is not a singular subject, but the total force of singularities to construct a common, shared identity.

Reid elaborates greatly on how assemblage theory works, noting that "[i]ndividuals as subjects are not produced through the interiorized relations of the properties of the subjects component parts; instead the subject only emerges through exteriorized relations (or assemblages) between parts that actualize particular capacities (Exposing Assemblages 5). Another major change that assemblage theory points to is that the self (however it is constituted) is reinvigorated in discourse, whereas the project (or effect) of literacy was to remove the self from objective representation, to present "facts" as opposed to a "moral right." The hilariously ironic fallacy that undercuts any "philosophy" derived from science is that of science's pretension of "objectivity," as if empirical data could ever be described outside of the individual situatedness of the observer. Electracy moves to restore the nodes of selfhood that the literate apparatus attempted to neuter—i.e., the repressed form of the subjective understanding so important to an experienced morality are rewired in the electrate apparatus. Again, however, this subjectivity will be constructed through electrate, not literate means because we no longer exclusively cling to objects to establish that sense of self, but are increasingly open to digital expressions of self. As Reid further articulates, "[W]here objects are made sacred by removing them from common use, they are conversely made profane by their exposure to non-sacred spaces" (3). This "profanation" is a possible indication of how we will view objects in the future when physical reality is subsumed by the virtual. Things will not be truly "real" until they are somehow represented by digital means. The next permutation of Beaudrillard's *simulacrum* is online.

The Figure

This upheaval in how subjects currently construct reality means that how we present information must also change. When we embrace *chora*, we can use it to construct the figure. I define *figure* as the use of language to call forth a shared reality, an assemblage of related singularities that establish ideas that are related and relatable on a "gut" level—where information is filtered through past (subjective) experience(s), but not necessarily logical (static) associations. Connections can be "felt" in essence, even if not necessarily processed on a conscious, (fully) reasoned level. These "agreed upon associations" are not necessarily understood by the singularities that make up the assemblages. This phenomenon is not new however, and has a correlation in the nebulous concept of "cool"—a concept that is never definable, but merely identifiable. Jeff Rice in *The Rhetoric of Cool* establishes that "[c]ool media operates by choral logic: Users of a given term's various meanings must actively engage with those meanings in rhetorical ways, discovering unfamiliar and unexpected juxtapositions as they compose" (35). The meaning of cool, often defined by what it is not, is easily identifiable by most people with an understanding of popular culture, and it is this inarticulable knowledge that goes into the construction of the figure.

Digitally produced rhetorics can serve as an answer to Vitanza's third counterthesis, a presentation of language that is symbiotic with interpretation, meaning that cannot be read without subjective, bodily,

and emotive reason, and therefore an inversion of traditional, literate stasis. Arroyo sums up the thrust of Vitanza's argument against how (composition) theory is employed by noting that "inventions can be generated or written without having been thought first, [therefore,] the notion that we turn theories into practice is not possible" (112). Ulmer calls this representation of knowledge a "tangle," one that cannot be defined through categorization (because the whole is greater, as signified, with signifying elements that are simply traces and cannot be adequately illustrated through literal definition (112). The *figure* is the identity that electrate communities call forth to produce a message, a temporary confluence of facts and values that may carry over to the next singularity (Arroyo 38), but are by no means permanent as they may be irrelevant to the next iteration of self and message.

The figure *is* the dancer on the floor, but that identity is subject to how the dancer moves—not only through the combinations and shapes dictated by the dance, but also with/in relation to the other dancers in his midst. In balletic terminology, the *pas de deux* is rhetorical because both dancers' bodies tell a story framed by the dancing floor. Apart, each dancer signifies other meanings that cannot consist of all of the same meaning as when their bodies align together in the dance. The dancers' identities change the moment they begin to dance in relation to each other, and can henceforth, while engaged in the dance, only be understood in terms of their shared reality.

The remaining task is to explicate in detail and example the *figure* and its trajectory, how it uses the chora to create new ways of knowing. The "choric" nature of this essay is not quite the developed *figure* that we are yet to see—we are all neophytes in *electracy* and the challenge is in determining how much can be described and in what language, because in electracy, being able to tell the dancer from the dance is irrelevant. The *figure* is the summation of the dancer and the dance.

Endnotes

[1] For a comprehensive demonstration of Ulmer's concept of *chora* please see Bahareh Alaei and Sarah Arroyo's "The Dancing Floor," available on Youtube.com.

[2] I am using Ulmer's in/famous table, which compares electracy to orality and literacy, which is published here: http://ulmer.networkedbook.org/the-learning-screen-introduction-electracy/.

[3] A psychogeographic reading of Leotard is well beyond the scope of this essay, but something that could prove to be a fruitful discussion.

[4] Kinneavy describes how Sartre identifies that subjects must recognize others who are objects as subjects in their own right and that subjects themselves must recognize their roles as objects in other subjects experience.

[5] As my editor has very insightfully pointed out, social media websites themselves attempt to encapsulate our identities by limiting choices, especially twitter, which forces succinctness and encourage pithiness above development of ideas, or Instagram and tumblr, which are favor almost exlusively images (and more recently video, too). Conversely, these platforms allow us to select which personal elements in our narrative we want to present or hide, therefore taking a highly editorial stance in the production of subjective selves.

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SARA BITAR

Diaspora Studies: The Identity of Being In-Between

If diaspora, as a noun, refers to the dispersion—the whole body of a minority (in the case of this essay, the Jewish minority) being dispersed among nations—then Diaspora Studies can be seen as the critical framework through which to converse about the specific issues of both Diaspora as well as to the effects of globalization. The study of ethnic populations in the Diaspora carries a connotation of being forced to relocate due to racism, war, nationalism, or larger issues of forced national borders. In this way, Diaspora Studies can be enveloped within an overarching study of Globalization Theory. Examples of this can be seen in peoples can be affected by imperialism, labor migration, or capitalist economies. Additionally, Diaspora Studies seeks to analyze specific issues that affect ethnic minorities often forced out of their common homeland as they scatter globally and the they encounter—issues of assimilation versus isolation, relationships to other communities within the diaspora, ties to their ancestral homeland, collective versus individual identity, and racial politics. The term Diaspora has been used to refer to the historical movements of dispersed Jews outside of Israel and the particular issues of cultural development within that population, both among themselves as well as among the culture of their host country. The assumption of

identity among dispersed individuals is an aspect that Diaspora Studies seeks to understand with special attention to how identity is created without clearly defined geographical origins or homeland. Globalization theory also looks at identity formation, but insists on one hegemonic identity, thus suggesting that one would need to lose individual and collective citizenship in favor of a more globalized citizenry.

Identity is formed on several levels ranging from ethnic to individual and collective identity, and, with that in mind, Diaspora Studies is a thematic framework through which to view hybridized identity or an identity of being "in-between." There is a feeling of living a life in-between places or spaces within the Jewish diaspora. The predicament of marginality is a feeling best summed up by Leo Spitzer, who writes "I belong nowhere, and everywhere am a stranger" (Spitzer 138). In America, where the "interaction of cultures is multiple and complex," Diaspora Studies is an appropriate lens of investigation because "it calls attention to the complexities that migrations engender and, moreover, to the social patterns repeatedly challenged by lives in dispersion" (Vieira 1). Feeling as if one is a stranger everywhere has a crucial role in how a personal identity is formed; in order for one to generate personal identity, there often needs to be validation from others, unless one's identity is formed as a social outcast. For example, Melville Herskovitz writes of identity being something that can be processed by "reabsorption," thus insinuating that identity is learned (qtd in Boyarin 703). If identity is learned, it is learned by the constant interaction of the self amidst others. Within the diversity of American culture, one can see a comingling of characteristics that links to a larger collective and cultural identification as American. However, there are specific "asymmetries of Jewish cultural identity" in that a "hyphenated cultural identity" is often enforced as a subtle prejudicial marker (Vieira 2). In that sense, is one a Jewish-American or is one an American-Jew? Nathan Englander's short story "What We Talk About When We Talk About Anne Frank" is an excellent frame to examine such issues of identity and racial politics encompassed within globalization and Diaspora Studies. His literature embodies Jewish diasporic citizenship in the West with the multiple layers of identity: religious, cultural, and personal. Ultimately his work alludes to the past, while looking to the future of the Jewish Diaspora. As I previously stated, both Diaspora Studies and Globalization Theory address identity issues, but globalization does not work as a solution for the problems with cultivating an identity. By insisting on one globalized identity, it fails to account for the breadth of differences among people; if it worked, then one would not need to identify as an American-Jew or Jewish-American at all because differences between people would be erased. Diaspora Studies is significantly more adept at exploring identification issues, from both a personal and collective perspective, while Globalization theory fails to address the concepts of racial, religious, and national differences that are part of assuming a personal and collective identity.

Diaspora Studies reframes the problems of exile into a critical framework, which establishes a way to talk about the issues of living without a homeland. Moreover, there is a renewed interest in the field "as well as with the overall phenomena of displacement and migration" (Vieira 1). Gershom Sholem comments that there is a sense that Jewish diaspora is a condition of "being elsewhere" and simultaneously "at home." It is this feeling of being in two places at once that complicates the individual's sense of nationality and renders one as "caught in-between". This liminal space is aggressive in its ability to make someone feel like an other or an outcast, and for a minority that is accustomed to living on the margins of society, that space becomes an identity that is a "hybrid reality of people's lives" (Vieira 2). However, this reality is a difficult one because it creates feelings of exile and estrangement. If we return to globalization, we can see that the solution to dispersal can be the expansion of a new

global collectivity and the erasing of individuality. Indeed, going global is expressed as a movement "at the expense of national identity," and if nationality is no longer relevant, then being a member of the Diaspora is not a problem (Lane 860). In that way, everyone would take on a diasporic identity as national borders would become extraneous. However, globalization cannot ignore the "psychological pains that diaspora, forced migration and exile generate and…the actual experience of difference as undergone by diasporic peoples in their countries of residence" (Kuortti and Nyman 3). Diaspora Studies clearly identifies the problem of being othered in a hegemonic culture that incessantly denies the "psychological pains" of dispersal. The authors also argue that being a diasporic citizen often means "forced" migration and "exile." These conditions necessitate a specific experience of difference, and this state of difference becomes the state of being diasporic.

The effects of globalization permeate the everyday aspects of individual lives. As such, the way people interact with themselves as well as the way they form a sense of personal identity is most clearly impacted through what literary theorists term hybridity. Homi K Bhabha, an eminent theorist of hybridity, writes of this space as a "liminal space, in-between the designations of identity" as a place where one can move one's identity as if on a stairwell. Hybridity is a place of transformation where identity that is fixed is criticized as being based on essentialism (qtd in Kuortii, Nyman 3). However, in the Diaspora, the formation of "Jew" is an abstraction both religious and cultural; in that regard, "Jewish" has historically taken on its own hybridized identity. Moreover, there is a distinction made between being Jewish and practicing Judaism. Therefore, being a Jew is itself a transformative state because it is something that is evolving over time as it mingles with the collective culture of the host country it encounters. An increase in globalization means an increase in hegemonic culture at the expense of minority cultures; as one dominant system gains power, it does so by rendering other modes of society less significant. Thus, globalization corrodes individuality in favor of a larger hegemonic collective. Joel Kuorrti and Jopi Nyman remark that the "contemporary world is characterized by transnational migrations, cultural appropriations, and diasporic peoples, all contributing to increased cultural contact and mixing, and to the intermingling of the local and the global" (3). For Jews, a "diasporic peoples," migration is often something that is itself a state of being, for if one has always been exiled, then one's known state is perpetually lived in motion. Additionally, this adds to the appropriation of culture through a heightened awareness of "contact and mixing" with the host country for Jews. In that way, the guest/host binary is efficient for assessing the space that is created through the "intermingling of the local [guest culture] and global [host culture]." That space is one that allows hybridization to occur and posits the problem of identification when one is, for example, an American who practices Judaism. It also allows one to take on an identity as an American-Jew as well as a Jewish-American. Both are hybrid identities, but if one is placed in a position that forces one to prioritize nationality over cultural or religious identity then problems can occur. In that way, identity is not obvious, and both globalization and diaspora problematize personal as well as collective identification.

The formation of religious, personal, and collective identities is a major thematic point for Nathan Englander's short story "What We Talk About When We Talk About Anne Frank." Briefly, the short story has, at its center, two Jewish couples that play a morbid game in which they try to imagine which of their "gentile" neighbors would save them in the event of another holocaust. Englander writes of the female protagonists as being "two young women living in New York on the edge of two worlds" (Englander 14). This concept of being in two places at once directly points to an earlier point in the essay by Gershom Sholem about

the diasporic condition being both elsewhere and at home. Englander is working within that binary distinction to create his character's identities. The young women each end up in different parts of the world, with one in Israel and one in Florida. It is this internationalization that is important to recognize as exclusive to the Diaspora. Furthermore, the creation of Israel complicates the relationship to homeland for the Jewish diasporic citizen. Englander's short story makes evident that not every member of the Diaspora chooses to be part of the homeland. However, the connection to each other is never lost and Deb remarks that her attitude about being Jewish changes from "seeing Lauren, after all this time" (Englander 19). A sense of personal identity becomes rooted in associating with people whom one believes to be similar John Ower notes this as "Jews forming a collective based on overlapping categories of class, religion, and culture" (qtd in Singer 3). In Englander's story, Lauren and Deb necessitate their similarities based on their religious and cultural affiliations as Jewish women. Ultimately, writers like Nathan Englander refer to the Holocaust as a way of remembering that Jews have historically been marginalized and forced into exile by severe persecution. For his characters, that sense of dread is never far away. Lily Cho stresses it as "the experience of racialization as the cause for diasporic belonging Minority marks a relation denned by racialization and experienced as diaspora" (qtd in Singer 9). Englander's characters are ever aware of their marginalization, how that is inextricably linked to being racialized as Jews, and how that creates diasporic identity.

In globalization, an erasure of nationality occurs, and that erasure allows for the freedom of transnational migration. In "Hybridity and Cultural Rights," David Huddart argues that there is a "global citizenship central to the population movements of globalization Minority perspective seems most useful in the formulation of such a citizenship" (Huddart 37). If one is a citizen everywhere, then one should feel as if one belongs everywhere. However, it is not as simple as that because of the complicated struggles inherent to being a diasporic citizen. The Jewish minority survived only by migration but was not treated as a citizen everywhere. In that regard, it is important to remember that the doors of neighboring nations closed to Jewish refugees during the Holocaust. However, in the spaces Jews were allowed to settle, there was often the binary of assimilation and non-assimilation. In "Minority Cosmopolitanism" Susan Koshy contends that there are "dilemmas of alienation that make [for] eager assimilation" (Koshy 600). It is no doubt that when faced with "alienation," a globalized citizen would choose assimilation when the alternatives are negative and often encompass persecution in the host country. In that sense, in order for the Jewish diasporic citizen to become a globalized citizen, he would need to lose his individual and collective citizenship as a Jew so that he may be conferred with a new global one.

Within globalization, inhabitants voluntarily move across borders, and Englander makes that distinction clear through his characters' movements. They start off in a Yeshiva school in New York, and then "Lauren met Mark and they went off to the Holy Land and went from Orthodox to *Ultra*-Orthodox" (Englander 11). The implication is that the movement from one place to another had an effect in how Lauren and Mark identified themselves because their very way of practicing Judaism changes. It is by virtue of their arrival in a new space that their sense of individual citizenship is changed by the collective culture in the "Holy Land". By contrast, Deborah and her husband live in south Florida and are referred to often as American-Jews by their Israeli friends, Mark and Lauren. They see themselves as true Jews by virtue of their association with Israel, and confer the identity of American on Deborah and her husband. Here, the argument that globalization brings about globalized citizenship fails because if Deborah and her husband were

truly citizens of the world, Lauren and Mark would not mark them as "American-Jews." It is as if the Israeli characters need to be able to export an identity on their American friends, which begs the question of why that is necessary for them. Furthermore, Mark exclaims that Deborah's son "does not seem Jewish to [him]" (Englander 27). This adds another complicated dimension to identifying oneself as Jewish because it makes "Jewish" something related to appearances or something that is outwardly noticeable. Thus, Globalization Theory cannot take away common social conventions, which are apt to assign a dialectic of difference to other citizens. This failure of globalization to erase concepts of racial, religious, and national difference is complicated in light of the belief that globalization creates one hegemonic identity as opposed to individual diasporic identities.

Diasporic identity is a condition that cannot be solved by globalization alone, and it is a condition that needs to be framed. In "Minority Cosmopolitanism," Koshy argues that globalization brings with it new categories of "immigrant, refugee, resident alien, members of a racial minority" that it is unable to provide for. However, "a diasporic citizenship encompasses these differences and is presented not as an identity but as a condition under globalization that affects the long-settled and the migrant in multiple locations"(594). In other words, being a member of the Diaspora can be a solution to the problems of globalization. Globalization brings out new ways to typify people as they relate to migration and the binary of native and stranger. Often, this binary is inflicted on people due to a social hierarchy that is based on racial politics For example, the Jew is an "other" always living in foreign lands and not considered part of the dominant Caucasian hegemony, which is complicated when one considers that there are Caucasian Jews. Thus, maintaining a homeland in Israel is a solution that Mark and Lauren choose in Englander's short story, but even that is not the answer

because it displaces Palestinians. Therefore, Koshy believes that accepting diasporic citizenship is a tool for "encompassing difference" and solving the affectations felt by the "migrant in multiple locations". Deborah and her husband, in Englander's narrative, demonstrate the acceptance of a diasporic citizenship, but it is clear that their acceptance even within their own community is called in to question. Their son doesn't have the appearance of being "Jewish," and they are thought of as Jews who maintain their identity solely through an obsession with the Holocaust. When Deborah tries to assert that one can have Jewish culture, Mark retorts "culture is nothing". Culture is some construction of the modern world And because of that, it is not fixed; it is ever-changing, and a weak way to bind generations"(Englander 28). His point is in agreement with Daniel and Jonathon Boyarin, who argue that "cultures, as well as identities, are constantly being remade" (Boyarin 721). Thus, the Diaspora cannot be bound by culture because culture is untenable and fails to ground one in a stable reality. Nevertheless, the solution cannot be ignoring the meaning and value of having a homeland and the importance of feeling as if one has origins.

Diaspora Studies and Globalization Theory are closely related to each other, with Diaspora Studies resting underneath the umbrella of globalization. Both have valuable insight about the condition of the diasporic citizen, and both provide an interesting critical frame for studying literature. However, globalization fails to account for difference and the very real pain of being dispersed since it seems to extoll accepting trans-nationality as a destination point for global communities. Furthermore, it is believed that globalization will bring about one world identity and break down individual difference. Diaspora Studies does the opposite because it provides a critical vantage point through which one can bring these issues in to academic dialogue and discussion. Several literary critics have taken on these theories and expanded their own ideas

about globalization and diaspora with many offering their own solutions to being a diasporic citizen. Diaspora Studies is an effective tool for assessing character identity in Nathan Englander's short story "What We Talk About When We Talk About Anne Frank" because it allows for the examination of the complexity of Jewish identity as it can range from religious to social to individual. Where Diaspora Studies also succeeds is in its ability to assess the racial and prejudicial tensions of living in the Diaspora and the complications that arise from being dispersed.

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DANILO CAPUTO

David Foster Wallace and Feeding the Mob in "Consider the Lobster"

Observing the glossed images of the elaborately prepared meat dishes featured in *Elle* magazine, Roland Barthes in his essay "Ornamental Culture" from *Mythologies* (1957) declares that what is being presented is "a cuisine of surfaces and alibis which consistently endeavors to attenuate or even disguise the primary nature of foodstuffs [and] the brutality of meats" (142) to the consumer. Barthes's statement on the mythological veiling occurring in food evinces the ideological production and articulation of a "food myth" that conceals the more brutal and uncomfortable reality of what is being consumed right under our unsuspecting noses. His cultural-culinary criticism, in other words, begins to expose the prepared dishes' origins in animal slaughter and unveils the dishes for what they really are: dead animals.

Nearly half a century later, David Faster Wallace has extended Barthes's agenda of demythologizing food in his essay "Consider the Lobster" (2004), documenting the Maine Lobster Festival that has incorporated even the backstage of food production into the ritual of mass commercial consumption and spectacle. Documenting the maddening crowds of festival-goers scrambling to watch the lobsters boiled alive in the "World's Largest Lobster Cooker" and the ceremonial "Cooking Competitions," and even participating himself in the massive feasts at the picnic tables, Wallace traverses the Boschian nightmare of carnivalesque animal consumption in order to "work out and articulate some of the troubling questions that arise amid all the laughter and saltation and community pride of the Maine Lobster Festival" (253), noting that "the whole animal-cruelty-and-eating issue is not just complex . . . [but] also uncomfortable" (246). I argue that Wallace's semioclasmic essay works through the discomfort of thinking about animals-as-food and in doing so reveals the inherent anthropocentrism embedded in our very food ethics. I contextualize Wallace's essay within the emerging and interdisciplinary field of animal studies, and explore how Wallace situates the (human) epistemological struggle toward a coherent animal ontology in relation to dealing with the ambivalence that emerges from killing and eating animals. I will argue that the animal-oriented theme in "Consider the Lobster" intersectionally informs his general post-humanist ethics prevalent in Wallace's literary corpus.

Wallace reveals that the problems of comprehending a stable animal ontology is a problem of an anthropocentric epistemology, an approach to knowledge that problematically presupposes humans as the central and most significant species and assesses reality exclusively through limited human perspectives. Wallace observes that while everybody thinks they know what a lobster is, "[a]s usual . . . there's much more to know than most of us care about—it's all a matter of what your interests are" (236-37). While he attempts in his idiosyncratically exhaustive and humorous fashion to taxonomically, etymologically, historically, culinarily, and neurologically dissect the lobster, Wallace notably falls short of any form of certainty by contending that all of the knowable information is foundationally anthropocentric speculation—knowing what a lobster *is* in relational terms to the human in no way tells us what it is really like *to be* a lobster. Wallace here hits the crux in the ethical debate on eating

animals: since we cannot possibly know what it is like *to be* a lobster, we do not know precisely *if* and/or *how* it experiences pain. "Since pain is a totally subjective mental experience," he writes, "we do not have direct access to anyone or *anything's* pain but our own" (246). Furthermore, as animals do not possess a language with which to convey their subjective mental experience to humans, it becomes only "the first layer of additional complications in trying to extend our reasoning about pain and morality to animals" (246). The subjectivity of a lobster is inaccessible, and thus its ontology also. Therefore, our anthropocentric knowledge of lobsters is and only can be subjunctive at best, and especially so when it comes to the ethical assessment of animal cruelty and consumption.

This epistemological crisis of never approximating the animal Other is also perpetuated be a process of human cognitive dissonance called *anthropodenial*—what Jonathan Safran Foer in *Eating Animals* notes as a "refusal to concede significant experiential likeness between humans and other animals" (46). The word encapsulates the conundrum Wallace faces at the festival regarding the consuming mass's contention that the lobsters do not feel pain when they are boiled alive. Wallace notes that the psuedo-neuroscientific justification propagandized in the promotional programs distributed at the event forwards that there is a part of the brain in people and animals that allows us to feel pain which lobsters do not have—the cerebral cortex (245). He continues:

> Still, after all the abstract intellection, there remain the facts of the frantically clanking lid, the pathetic clinging to the edge of the pot. Standing at the stove, it is hard to deny in any meaningful way that this is a living creature experiencing pain and wishing to avoid/escape the painful experience. (251)

It is at an ethical junction such as this in "determining whether a living creature has the capacity to suffer" (248) where humans implement anthropodenial. That such work is done through a supposedly humanist and therefore *humane* ethical framework to simultaneously *implement* and *deny* what is apparently the suffering of one species inflicted by another reveals it to be an anthropocentric enterprise founded on an unscrupulous practice that promotes the exploitation, degradation, and suffering of other beings that it supposedly endeavors to absolve.

In his later works *The Animal That Therefore I Am* and "Eating Well," Derrida similarly notes the human-animal binary's failure to stabilize on either ontological or ethical grounds, coining a hysterically polysyllabic syllogism to express the anthropocentric mode through which we frame animals: *carnophallogocentrism*. Despite how ridiculously pedantic this word may appear, the term offers an useful and ironically succinct way of describing not only human-animal relations, but, for Derrida, the entire construction of Western subjectivity. Breaking it up by its suffixes (carno-phallo-logo-centrism), we can discern a network of relations that Derrida highlights as the *sacrificial, masculine,* and *speaking* dimensions central to constructing a human ontology. Derrida point outs that the animal Other—much like the marginalized Other across gender, race, and class—has been excluded from their status as full subjects, and that moreover, animals have been *sacrificed* in the *making* of the human. He declares that "we are all mixed up in an eating of flesh . . . [both] real and symbolic" ("An Interview"), and broadens his scope of the West's "phallogocentrism" by adding the prefix "carno" because "We are all [including vegetarians] carnivores in the symbolic sense" ("Eating Well" 282).

As such, Wallace's question as to whether it is ethically sound to "boil a sentient creature alive merely for our gustatory pleasure" (243) to the readers and meat-eaters of *Gourmet* magazine speaks to a larger question involving the unsettling of the ontological grounds of the human subject itself. The question of the animal is responded with a question of the human—a question that inevitably strips the human of its own inscribed

subjectivity. "The Animal looks at us and we are naked before it," Derrida asserts, "Thinking perhaps begins there" (*The Animal That Therefore I Am* 29). This ontological nudity set by the awareness of how arbitrarily and carnophallogocentrically we consider the animal Other is the source of Wallace's constant uncomfortable demeanor at the Maine Lobster Festival, such that the reversed central question Wallace poses is if *we* are all right with eating animals that will probably suffer during the process of being turned into your food (253-4).

For many, it is a difficult question to answer and typically met with ambivalence. There are ways that various cultures work through this ambivalence in ways that are much less tedious and demanding than rigorous philosophical inquiry to make it ethically sound for humans to kill and eat animals without feeling troubled. One such way is through the simple but ubiquitous act of storytelling. In *Eating Animals*, Foer states: "As far back in time as records stretch, humans have expressed ambivalence about the violence and death inherent in eating animals. So we've told stories" (101). These stories are pervasive, timeless, significant, as Foer notes:

> Meat is bound up with the story of who we are and who we want to be from the book of Genesis to the latest farm bill. It raises significant philosophical questions and is a $140 billion-plus a year industry that occupies nearly a third of the land on the planet, shapes ocean ecosystems, and may well determine the future of the earth's climate. (32)

Talking about animal consumption is a global issue, but it is also vastly ignored. Wallace appears to recognize that this oversight is in part operative on "semantic moral distancing"—the renaming and thus separating of the animal from the food it is turned into. This mythologizing practice of linguistic cover-up involve "cows" becoming rendered into "beef" and "pigs" into "pork," harkening back to Barthes's comments on the attenuation and disguising that goes into presenting the food in *Elle*. Interestingly, the method does not seem to be as necessary as we move down the phylogenic scale, as Wallace notes:

> Is it significant that "lobster," "fish," and "chicken" are our culture's words for both the animal and the meat, whereas most mammals seem to require euphemisms like "beef" and "pork" that help us separate the meat we eat from the living creature the meat once was? Is this evidence that some kind of deep unease about eating higher animals is endemic enough to show up in English usage, but that the unease diminishes as we move out of the mammalian order? (247 n.15)

Wallace is calling out the issue of *speciesism*: any discrimination or prejudice based on an animal's species. Our very language shows that our ambivalence towards eating animals varies in degree according to the species of the consumed. Accordingly, Wallace pinpoints something singularly unique to the Maine Lobster Festival: nowhere else in the United States with no other "higher" species do we create such a spectacle of representing an animal being turned into food. Watching the lobsters thrown into the World's Largest Lobster Cooker, he writes: "Try to imagine a Nebraska Beef Festival at which part of the festivities is watching trucks pull up and the live cattle get driven down the ramp and slaughtered right there on the World's Largest Killing Floor or something—there's no way" (247). Wallace is right. There is no way. And that it is because of some kind of mere speciesism is a good theory, but he also points us to something further: an advocacy toward a radical ethics of "considerate" posthumanist thinking.

There is something significant and unique about "Consider the Lobster." Beyond deconstructing the banality, kitschiness, and crassness that a tourist trap like the Maine Lobster Festival exemplifies, it actually signals us toward a more radical crisis of a problematic animal ethics that is

uncontestedly ubiquitous, such that Wallace finally poses whether future generations might regard our present agribusiness and eating practices in much the same way we now view cruel or inhumane practices of the past (253). Wallace is completely uncomfortable with the enterprise, stuck between realizing that the killing of sentient creatures is solely for his gustatory pleasure but still trying to exert the anthropodenial that would convince him that animals are less morally important than human beings. But his newly-formed awareness of his anthropodenial leads him to acknowledge that he cannot actually defend or justify his eating of animals with any sort of coherent ethical system, admitting that it is selfishly convenient and only in his self-interest to harbor such a sentiment so that it is carnophallogocentrism exemplifying this hysterical perpetuation of mass consumption and spectacle. Wallace's essay veers away from a PETA-esque vegan manifesto operative on some kind of a totalitarian propagandist rhetoric or a moral-parading soapbox. Rather, as the essay title implies, it is a matter of paramount consideration: the radical imperative to continually demythologize, denaturalize, and decenter, and to genuinely *consider* the animal Other.

Wallace's lobsters speak to a larger thematic concern in his work: namely, the over-saturation of entertainment in contemporary culture, as well as his desire to move beyond, or rather return from, what he notes as the toxic postmodern culture of irony, narcissism, and nihilism. "Consider the Lobster" ought to be read in intersection with these themes. After all, the Maine Lobster Festival, much like the dangerously lethal entertainment society in *Infinite Jest,* reveals an insidious blind spot in humanism. His essay is an expansive consideration of the pain, suffering, and fear of modern life that extends beyond the human, venturing into a posthumanist desire to rethink the ontological demarcation of the human and the animal. Wallace's encounter with the animal Other proves to be many beyond his essay, from the Wittgenstein-quoting cockatiel in *The Broom of the System*, Randy Lenz's brutality toward the dogs in *Infinite Jest,* or how Julie's three-year reign on *Jeopardy!* comes to an end due to her contempt for animals in "Little Expressionless Animals" from *Girl With Curious Hair*. For his own acts of consideration, Wallace has received the oxymoronic titles of "postmodern moralist" and "posthumanist sentimentalist." I do not think he would have minded these titles—in fact, I think he would have been quite comfortable with them.

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SHANNON CURLEY

Dead Man Walking: Provoking Audiences to Reconsider the Legal and Moral Implications of the Death Penalty Through Film Narrative

The 1995 film, *Dead Man Walking,* directed by Tim Robbins, and based on the nonfiction novel by Sister Helen Prejean, addresses issues of capital punishment through the story of Matthew Poncelet, a fictional analog of convicted murderer Elmo Patrick Sonnier, who was executed at Angola Prison, in Louisiana, in 1984. Throughout the film, the anti-death penalty sentiments of the primary narrative are mediated by a secondary narrative, told through visual and verbal flashbacks, depicting justifications for pro-capital punishment sentiments. According to Robbins, "What a film has to do to be successful is to make people rethink their position, no matter what side of the debate they're on" (qtd. in Dionisopoulos 293). In following this logic, the film version of *Dead Man Walking* remains relatively impartial, and therefore acts as a catalyst for reconsideration of beliefs about the legality and morality of the death penalty, forcing the viewer to reach his or her own conclusions regarding both the events in the film, and the legal system and its relationship to legal and moral justice.

Robbins' directorial construction of *Dead Man Walking* employs what Rasmussen and Downey call "dialectical disorientation" (1989),

a rhetorical device used to convolute an individual's notions of truth and logic by presenting two or more contradicting truths as equally supportable and valid (qtd. in Dionisopoulos 292). In the film, dialectical disorientation becomes an important persuasive tool by "creating and exacerbating irresolvable tension between competing and irreconcilable perspectives concerning the death penalty," through the use of flashbacks to the murder and events surrounding the crime (Dionisopoulos 292). For example, when Poncelet is at his most frightened at the end of the film, as the execution approaches, the most detailed and gruesome depictions of the murder are revealed; when Poncelet is made to seem most human in the primary narrative, his actions in the secondary narrative make him seem the most monstrous. As George Dionisopoulos notes, "the rhetorical force of *Dead Man Walking* is grounded precisely in its refusal to resolve the tension of its narrative" (294). In any given circumstance, "any felt sympathy for one character will be balanced against sympathy for another" (300). The film does not allow for any easy conclusions, and therefore requires a high degree of audience participation in determining the prevailing message of the story.

According to James Boyd White, an audience understands a narrative "by imaginatively entering and participating in the constructed world which enables them to learn, and eventually to judge the norms of each community inscribed in a narrative"– a process he calls "imaginary participation" (qtd. in Dionisopoulos 294). In *Dead Man Walking*, there are two constructed 'worlds': that of the legal system, Sister Helen Prejean, and Matthew Poncelet – the convicted and "wrongfully sentenced" man; and that of the victims' families, the murdered children, and Matthew Poncelet –the brutal killer. The former 'world' is explored in the present and primary narrative which shows the legal system as corrupt, Sister Helen Prejean as the voice of reason and God, and Poncelet as an evolving character, eventually humbled by his shame and fear. The latter 'world' is shown in the past and secondary narrative, showing the families' reactions to their children's murders, the children themselves being killed, and Poncelet as cruel, sadistic, and merciless. By juxtaposing these two contradictory narratives, Robbins makes no truth claims or claims about the legality of the events in the film. As the director explained in an interview with *Cineaste,* "it's the middle ground I'm interested in" (Robbins 8). Therefore, with no clearly endorsed moral or legal position, "We must look to spectators' perceptions rather than the film text itself to understand how it conveys meaning," (Bond 21) and how audience members engage in and understand the film.

In considering "imaginative participation" by viewers of *Dead Man Walking*, two other critical terms come to mind: empathetic cooperation and imaginative reconstruction. Christine Sylvester offers the term "empathetic cooperation" to describe the way in which people become "relationally rather than reactively autonomous with those we have defined as unmistakably other, with those who are not inside 'our' community, our value system" (119). Additionally, "empathy enables respectful negotiations with contentious others because we can recognize involuntary similarities across difference as well as differences that mark independent identity" (119). Essentially, by acknowledging similarities, one is able to better empathize with another person (or character) even in unfamiliar circumstances. This "emotional identification" and cooperation is critical to a "collaborative and relational search for justice" (Sylvester 120, 257).

Like Sylvester, Diana Meyer sees empathy as "a response to a 'dilemma of difference'" and believes that "impartial reason therefore needs empathy as a base for moral reflection and moral judgment, because 'empathy not only enables people to discern situations that call for a moral response, but also it is needed to identify morally significant considerations'" (qtd. in Molloy 471). *Dead Man Walking* is a film that

relies heavily on the audience's empathy, since its impartiality does not offer any distinct roadmap for how viewers are "supposed" to feel by the end of the film. The audience may participate in what Meyer calls "imaginative reconstruction," an alternative form of empathy by which "to empathize with another...is to construct in imagination an experience resembling that of another person" (qtd. in Molloy 472). In layman's terms, it is the ability to put oneself in another's shoes.

In *Dead Man Walking*, this imaginative reconstruction, along with imaginative participation and empathetic cooperation, is supported by one major theme: family. Two opposing family constructs are introduced: the Percy's and the Delacroix's, and the Poncelet's. In the primary narrative, the audience becomes most familiar with the feelings of the Poncelet family, although the Percys and Delacroixs do make several appearances. In the secondary narrative, the Percys and Delacroixs tell the story of their children's murders, alongside visuals of the search party and the identification of the bodies of Hope Percy and Walter Delacroix.

In the primary narrative, the audience is primed to feel compassion towards the Poncelet family as Poncelet's mother, Lucille, cries and stresses that "Mattie had a hard life, but he was a good boy" (*Dead Man Walking*). As the narrative progresses, the audience meets more of Poncelet's family, including his youngest brother, right before Poncelet's execution. Through imaginative participation and reconstruction, viewers cannot help but consider what it must be like to be in this family's shoes, waiting for the inevitable death of their eldest son and brother. As Poncelet interacts with his family, he becomes more relatable and more human, joking with his brothers and worrying about his mother, asking on several occasions, "Is Mama alright?" (*Dead Man Walking*). In an instance of empathetic cooperation, the audience sympathizes, if only momentarily, with the victim's family and is subtly prompted to question whether killing Poncelet really is the only way to achieve justice; through imaginative reconstruction, "One can imagine one's grief without grieving oneself" (Molloy 472). In these portrayals of the convict's family, "the film sets out precisely to blur the boundary between victim and victimizer and expose the limits of justice" (Molloy 468).

However, this primary narrative does not stand alone. In the secondary narrative, the audience is introduced to verbal and visual flashbacks of events surrounding the murder, told through personal memory, and a recreation of the night of the murders. When Sister Helen Prejean goes to see Mr. Delacroix at his home, he reflects on his wife's experience after hearing of her son's murder: "She wept a river, poor woman... Whole days, nights, for weeks, months" (*Dead Man Walking*). This memory prompts the audience to feel sympathy, understanding a mother's grief over the death of her son – a sympathy notably similar to that felt for Lucille Poncelet, whose son will also be dead soon. Mr. Delacroix then shares with Prejean his memories of Walter's first steps and his first date with Hope – recollections that establish family bonds and further create sympathies among audience members who are reminded of the importance of family and the trauma of losing a loved one. Later, when Prejean visits the Percys, Mary Beth Percy recalls her last moments with her daughter in which she pinned the hem of her skirt before sending her out on her date with Walter, compelling the audience to relate to the role of motherhood. She then describes the days surrounding the murders as the scenes flash to Hope's empty bed the morning after she is killed, the search party three days later, and the discovery of the bodies, both lying facedown in the woods. Mary Beth tells Prejean that her brother, a dentist, was the one to identify Hope's body; Clyde Percy remarks, "Before he'd stuck his hand into that bag with all that lime in it and fished Hope's jaw out, he'd been against the death penalty. After that, he was all for it" (*Dead Man Walking*). Like Mary Beth's brother, when faced with the most brutal evidence, Prejean questions her own

stance on Poncelet's case; to Clyde she says, "l just want to help him take responsibility for what he did," but shortly afterwards she expresses doubt about her own involvement, asking, "What am l doing with this guy? I must be nuts" (*Dead Man Walking*).

Importantly, Prejean must witness both sides of the story and determine for herself what is legally and morally right. If "a point of view is to be associated with a set of 'assumptions' which the film is said to express" (Wilson 1027), then writing Prejean as the protagonist of the film allows no assumptions to be made by the film, but rather it allows for both sides of the Poncelet case to be told with equal consideration. As a participant active in the primary narrative, but with more access to the secondary narrative than most, Prejean is a interlocutor for their opposing points of view. However, as she freely admits, "I've never done this before. I'm trying..." (*Dead Man Walking*). Despite being a woman of the church, she is just as uncertain as anyone else about what is "right" and what is "wrong" in Poncelet's case. It seems that by being forced to get to know both sides of the story, Prejean is subject to dialectical disorientation and must therefore sort out for herself just where on the capital punishment issue she stands. Similarly, to the extent that "empathy means a communication across equal *and* unequal subject positions" (Molloy 470), *Dead Man Walking* challenges its audience members to develop empathy for characters on all sides of the capital punishment argument, and to employ imaginative participation and reconstruction in order to work through dialectical disorientation and fairly determine for themselves where they stand on the death penalty.

To further understand *Dead Man Walking* as a film that challenges notions of law, legality, and justice, *Dead Man Walking* can be viewed in many senses as a documentary, despite being partially fictionalized. The film is an adaptation of real-life events and characters, as written in Sister Helen Prejean's personal account, and does not seek to bend the narrative towards any particular stance. Furthermore, as Regina Austin notes, "Reality is not just out there, waiting to be captured by the camera; rather, reality is what the camera constructs through the deployment of the rhetorical or narrative devices by which reality is described...All discursive forms – documentary included – are, if not fictional, at least *fictive*" (qtd. in Bond 5). Given these assessments, *Dead Man Walking* can be credibly analyzed as a pseudo-documentary film.

As Cynthia Bond notes in "Documenting Law: Reality and Representation on Trial," "Both documentaries and legal practices participate in a discourse of the real, evoking in the spectator/participant expectations of revelations of truth" (4). In both the primary and secondary narratives in *Dead Man Walking*, truths are revealed for both the victims and the convicted. In the primary narrative, Poncelet evolves from angry, unrepentant villain, unwilling to accept responsibility, to a scared, grieving young man, all too aware of his hideous crimes. In the secondary narrative, the victims transform from mere names in a case file to real, living beings, murdered before the audiences' eyes, whose images are brought back one final time right at Poncelet's execution, as if to remind spectators just who is responsible for their deaths. As the film reaches its close, the truth of Poncelet's fear and regret is paired up with the truth of his brutal crimes; thus, rather than making it "easy at this point to allow audience members to resolve the film's tension by accepting a claim concerning the brutality of capital punishment," the film "moves into a powerful and dramatic denouement that complicates any simple resolutions" (Dionisopoulos 303). By presenting these two narratives of truth, Robbins' continues to employ dialectical disorientation, a technique that not only convolutes prior opinions of audience members on characters in the film, but also opinions on the U.S. legal system, and its ability to fairly rule on matters of morality and human rights.

Audience members tend to see films, especially documentaries, as

"master narratives of human experience;" for filmmakers, this expectation is "crucial to understanding public perceptions of the ability of law to operate according to notions of truth and justice or other social values" (Bond 11). Although Robbins' intent is not necessarily to sway his audience for or against capital punishment, it may be to sway them against previously held certitude about the interdependent and intrinsic relationship between law and justice. If a film that is intended to portray the realities of the legal system cannot reach any inarguable and clear conclusions, then how capable can the legal system possibly be of accomplishing that same task? As Bond says, "law documentaries may underline the shared representation techniques of law and film to reveal the vexed nature of accessing reality or the truth in both realms" (14). In both law and film, truth and confidence in determining truths, depends largely on audience understanding and approval; without a coherent narrative argument, audience members will not view the argument as credible. *Dead Man Walking* intentionally offers two compelling yet distinctly different narrative arguments to perpetuate dialectic disorientation throughout the film, convoluting audiences' confidence in filmic, as well as legal, testimony. Indeed, in *Dead Man Walking* and in real life, "Truth is a matter to be puzzled out and constructed, through interpretation and rational reflection" (Bond 34). If justice is a matter of truth and the law struggles to depict its truths accurately, then justice is another matter of dialectical disorientation. What is morally "right" and morally "wrong?" And more importantly, who is qualified enough to decide?

Throughout the film, Robbins intentionally undermines any sense of clarity through cinematic techniques such as non-chronological flashbacks and, in the penultimate execution scene, the return of deceased characters. According to George Wilson, "film can be employed to give artistic shape to various assumptions and questions about our perceptual relationship to the world" (Wilson 1034). In discussing the last scenes in the film, which juxtapose Poncelet's execution and redemption with the murder of Walter Delacroix and Hope Percy, Robbins said: "I felt it was really necessary to take people to the point of compassion and tears and then challenge them in a very real and honest way and ask, 'Can you still feel compassion?'" (8). In depending on this compassion from his audience members, Robbins invites empathetic cooperation as well as imaginative reconstruction and participation in reasoning through dialectical disorientation – a disorientation supplemented by the shifting narratives within the film. As Wilson relates, "Unreliability in film has to do with the unreliability of what we are shown or what we infer from what we are shown in a visual medium" (1042). Throughout *Dead Man Walking,* this "disorienting" unreliability further forces viewers into dialectical disorientation and the questioning of assumptions about moral, legal, and just truths.

In his final moments of life, Matthew Poncelet's words are dialectically disorienting in their own right: " Killing is wrong, no matter who does it, me, or ya'll, or your government" (*Dead Man Walking)*. On the one hand, killing is wrong and Poncelet must be punished; on the other, killing is wrong and Poncelet must not be punished by the same act for which he was convicted. Robbins does not offer an opinion in this final scene, but rather lets the film speak for itself. Although it is true that "any attempts on the viewer's part to sympathize/empathize with the condemned man are effectively thwarted by Robbins' consistent use of flashbacks to the crime scene" (Molloy 480-1), the penchant to view Poncelet solely as a monster or an emotionally void villain are just as consistently thwarted by accounts that call for empathy. Even when Walter and Hope are shown for last time, first as reflections at the execution, and then as spread-eagled corpses in the woods, Poncelet is still momentarily offered up for sympathy as he lies strapped down on the execution table, helpless

to fight for his life and forced to feel it drain out of him drip by drip. The murder scenes are brutal and shocking, but the execution scenes are just as– if not more– meticulously cruel and void of human feeling. The murders are carried out for no reason at all, such that the execution — condoned, and yet so similar in many ways — begs the question of where one draws the line of morality.

According to Robbins, *Dead Man Walking* is "directed at morality, which crosses political lines"(6). One explication of morality and the justice system in the film is found in the distinction between Poncelet's sentencing, and the sentencing of his accomplice Carl Vitello – a distinction that points to what Christopher Meade calls the "arbitrariness of capital punishment" (751). Vitello, responsible for the rape and murder of Hope Percy, testifies against Poncelet and is sentenced to life without parole. Poncelet, responsible for the rape of Hope Percy and murder of Walter Delacroix, does not testify against Vitello and is sentenced to death row, and eventual execution. Notably, this is a direct extrapolation from Elmo Patrick Sonnier's and his brother Eddie's sentencing in 1995. In *State v. Sonnier* and *Dead Man Walking*, both men commit the same crime and yet receive dramatically different punishments, a distinction that serves as a commentary on the razor thin line between the value of life and death in the legal system, and a questioning of what role morality and justice have in such apparently random legal rulings. In fact, "although there are approximately 20,000 homicides each year in the United States, the death penalty is imposed in only approximately 250 cases per year" (Meade 751). This "rare" and "random" assignment of punishment creates "a pattern of arbitrariness" that undermines the widely held belief that matters of law are fairly and objectively determined, and therefore indisputably right and just (Meade 751). On execution in the U.S. legal system, Robbins says, "If we were to execute all the people on death row, we'd be having executions every day until the turn of the century. We don't have the stomach for that. Morally, as a nation, it would bankrupt us" (6). In *Dead Man Walking*, the morality of the audience and its conception of the relationship between law and justice is, from the start of the film, challenged by this disorienting, and apparently arbitrary, distinction between the punishments of two men for the exact same crime.

On representing different narratives and opinions, Dionisopoulos argues that "depicting all options as inadequate or incomplete renders problematic the prospect that any single alternative can provide a certain resolution to the tension" (293). In *Dead Man Walking*, depicting all options as equally adequate and complete has the same effect. Rather than being a negative outcome to the film, this dialectical disorientation provides for an understanding that there is no "single alternative," but rather many alternatives, which people must work through on their own in order to establish which is the best course of action. In conveying this impartiality throughout, *Dead Man Walking* maintains an extremely credible narrative that fairly offers both sides of the capital punishment argument without placing more or less value on either stance. As Dionisopoulos notes, "A film that simply reiterated the arguments that Prejean argued in her book...would probably have been embraced by one side and dismissed by the other" (293); as it stands, the unbiased narrative in the movie *Dead Man Walking* allows for people on either side of the capital punishment argument to reconsider where they stand and why.

By presenting parallel narratives on social, moral, and political injustice, *Dead Man Walking* points to the discrepancies within the U.S. legal system that make these sorts of competing narratives possible. It is the negotiability of alleged justice in legal matters that is the weakness of the institution of law itself – a concept implicated by *Dead Man Walking,* and its employment of dialectical disorientation in the narrative of capital punishment. As Robbins accurately points out, "the death penalty is not

a deterrent. Studies have found that murder rates actually increase when executions occur" (4). Although capital punishment was, and is, certainly one of the more debated U.S. legal policies, its susceptibility to dialectical disorientation is a sign of the fallibility of the U.S. legal system as a whole. If the law deems capital punishment acceptable because it is "just" and brings "order" to society, as law and legal processes are supposedly meant to do – yet the statistics reveal that it is not actually effective in reducing crime rates, and therefore not effective in maintaining order – audiences are left to question what other areas of the legal system subscribe to similar notions of "truth" and "justice" that may be just as ineffective.

As a multi-narrative "think piece," *Dead Man Walking* demands individual interpretation and consideration, allows for passionate exposition of both sides of the capital punishment issue, and ultimately results in a more credible articulation of the legal and moral conflict inherent in these debates, as well as all debates involving matters of law, justice, morality, and human rights. If "the common sense notion is that films 'lie' and documentaries tell the 'truth,'" as Bond notes (37), then *Dead Man Walking,* as both a representation of justice, and an account of a real-life legal event, does both – simultaneously disorienting and disillusioning its audiences as to notions of legal and moral truth. *Dead Man Walking* creates sympathetic characters and scenarios in order to force its viewers into more empathic and responsible positions as individuals – both as viewers of the film and as citizens under U.S. law.

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KARLING KAISER

Killing the Individual in the Crosshairs of Time: Deconstructing Time in *Mrs. Dalloway*

Time, it seems, is an indisputable notion. It is a force that exists and operates far beyond our understanding and far beyond our influence. Time is linear: it exists for the moment and then moves on, always moving forward. We don't often believe in the alternative perceptions of time; the notion that time is not an unyielding force driving life forward seems to frighten us. However, it has been suggested that time is not so easily understood. Kurt Vonnegut's novel *Slaughterhouse-Five* suggests that time was a mountain range, that each moment in time had happened already and that all moments were coexisting, waiting for a visit from the individual; Jorge Luis Borges' story *The Aleph* envisions a point in space that contained all of the universe's time and all of its knowledge in one single place. These conceptions, along with many others like them, posit that time could exist as a mountain range, an infinite particle, a web, or a series of waves; they suggest that moments in time could coexist. These notions of time disprove the prevailing idea of the past-and-present binary and thus imply a sense of fulfillment therein. By viewing time as existing all at once rather than within (or without) the binary constructed frame of the present, we are meant to feel that nothing is ever lost because it is always existing.

In Virginia Woolf's novel *Mrs. Dalloway,* the prevailing notion of time is deconstructed. However, the ever-presence of all time does not incite a sense of fulfillment but rather implies a grand absence. In the novel, Woolf reveals that the structured notion of time is not quite as stable as it seems, and that within the experience of the present lives the past; Woolf's portrait of time in *Mrs. Dalloway* is "out-of-joint" (Chen and Lai 231). As a result, the validity of presence itself is called into question. Because time is "out-of-joint," so is the individual's sense of self. In the novel, characters like Clarissa Dalloway and Septimus Smith attempt to find meaning in their existence by examining their place in time. In very different ways, the two attempt to achieve selfhood in the present while still holding on to their past identities. Because of this inability to reconcile oneself in time, the individual is constantly splitting off into smaller fragments until, ultimately, the individual is destroyed. In this essay, I will argue a Derridian reading of *Mrs. Dalloway* in which the concept of time is merely a means of representation. I will argue that, in the novel, time is never a concrete structure, and, therefore, the individual cannot be defined in such terms. By reaching for meaning and identification in allusive moments from both the past and present, Clarissa Dalloway and Septimus Smith seek out nothing but empty representations of identity and, in the end, lose themselves completely.

This absence of identity can be understood by addressing Jacques Derrida's concept of the abyss. In his book *Of Grammatology,* Derrida states that "[r]epresentation *in the abyss* of presence is not an accident of presence; the desire of presence is, on the contrary, born from the abyss (the indefinite multiplication) of representation, from the representation of representation, etc" (Derrida 1696). Derrida claims that things and events (and, thus, time) are merely concepts born out of a series of representations and are, at the core, empty. Because of this lack of structure, there is no inherent meaning and nowhere to place meaning. The desire for presence, Derrida states, comes from this absence but—

because of the emptiness inherent—a presence will always be a substitution for the abyss; there will never be a true presence. In connecting this to the concept of time, we might posit that it too is nothing more than a series of substitutions. Time is an amalgamation of all possible events and is "haunted by its otherness or specter" and "can never achieve its full and sensible present as totality" (Chen and Lai 231). Therefore, time cannot be a means to create meaning or identity. Because it can never be complete itself, it cannot provide meaning for the individual.

Woolf plays upon the Derridian concept of the abyss in creating multiple understandings of time, none of which seem wholly real or true. In the novel, the sense of time is "entangled, confused, and mad" (Chen and Lai 232), even though the narrative is created around a sense of time that is assumed to be objective. This central narrative that is essentially "true" deals with the physical world and the events of the present. This narrative focuses on a day in the life of an upper-middle-class housewife named Clarissa Dalloway as she prepares for a party. Throughout this particular narrative, time moves forward, people and things exist in the moment, and nothing about the events at hand seem questionable; everything is true. After we as readers are guided along Clarissa's physical path through a London setting at the start of the novel, we are stopped at a point where Clarissa notes her presence:

> She was not old yet. She had just broken into her fifty-second year. Months and months of it were still untouched. June, July, August! Each still remained almost whole, and, as if to catch the falling drop, Clarissa (crossing to the dressing table) plunged into the very heart of the moment, transfixed it, there--the moment of this June morning on which was the pressure of all the other mornings, seeing the glass, the dressing-table, and all the bottles afresh, collecting the whole of her at one point (as she looked into the glass), seeing the delicate pink face of the woman who was that very night to give a party; of Clarissa Dalloway; of herself. (Woolf 36-37)

In this moment in the narrative, Clarissa is aware of her temporality. She acknowledges the time that has passed, the time that has yet to come, and the features of her existence; she notes her age, her form, and her relation to the physical reality around her. Clarissa understands the passage of time and does not deny her existence in the present. Though this concept of real time is primarily articulated through Clarissa Dalloway's narrative, it is also made clear in the introduction of Septimus Smith. Septimus, too, exists on a temporal plane and is understood by readers as he is described to be in "this moment of June" (Woolf 4). He is first described, like Clarissa, by means of his age, appearance, and place in the present: "Septimus Warren Smith, aged about thirty, pale-faced, beak-nosed, wearing brown shoes and a shabby overcoat...weighted there, rooted to the pavement" (Woolf 14-15). These initial descriptions of Clarissa and Septimus are elements of Woolf's central narrative that, perhaps, is intended to be a means to draw readers into a false sense of security and understanding. Woolf sets up this "objective" sense of narrative time to provide the novel with a familiar setting and awareness of reality. It is this comforting notion of time that Woolf uses as a departure point in the narrative; the narrative's present is the point in the text "where we already believe ourselves to be" (Derrida 1696).

The seemingly objective sense of the present apparent in the central narrative, however, quickly disproves itself. It is the "real" sense of time in the novel that provides a variety of antitheses and alternative definitions. The most direct antithesis in the hierarchical binary of time is Kristeva's sense of *le temps de femmes* or *women's time,* which is described as being subjective and psychological (Kuhlken 341) and often refers to the conception of the past and interruption of memory. In the novel, the narrative that chronicles the events of Clarissa's present (understood as the life of Mrs. Richard Dalloway) is constantly being interrupted by moments from her past. The events that are playing out in the central

narrative are interrupted at random and without explanation, and, oftentimes, the past gets mistaken for the present. On the first page of the novel, for example, the narrative is dropped into the present for a mere few lines until an abrupt shift into Clarissa's memory:

> What a lark! What a plunge! For so it had always seemed to her, when, with a little squeak of the hinges, which she could hear now, she had burst open the French windows and plunged at Bourton into the open air. How fresh, how calm, stiller than this of course, the air was in the early morning; like the flap of a wave; the kiss of a wave; chill and sharp and yet (for a girl of eighteen as she then was) solemn... (Woolf 3)

This interjection of the past into the present occurs throughout the entire novel and, at times, even seems to overtake the central narrative because the frequency and length of the interludes are often more fulfilling and meaningful than the narrative's actual "truth," or its present. And, just as the constant interruptions of Clarissa Dalloway's past disrupt the narrative present, Septimus Smith's relationship to the novel's sense of objective time is also called into question. Though Septimus is introduced as existing in the present, his own understanding of the reasons for his existence question the validity of this temporal reality. He is aware of his physicality, of his placement in time, yet he wonders "for what purpose" (15) he exists. Thus, the antithesis of Woolf's central narrative and "objective" time can be defined as subjective and past, appearing in the form of Clarissa's memories and Septimus' mistrust in his present reality. The presence of a binary opposition in the novel acts as a means of self-destruction. Because the novel's sense of time as described in the central narrative is being confronted by its own opposition, the constructs of reality begin to crumble.

Aside from the novel's main portrayal of time as it is defined through the past-and-present binary, there is also the question of time as either learned or experienced. This conception of time deals with the individual's perception of time as either learned from historical events and, thus, through collective knowledge or by way of personal experience. This idea of time pits a universal "truth" against a multitude of personal truths. In *Mrs. Dalloway,* the universal concept of time is a post-World War I London in which peace has been restored and society functions normally despite the horrors that occurred during wartime. Septimus Smith, a veteran of the war, is an historical artifact of this time period. However, he is not an emblem of the "deceitful public history" (Humm 646), but instead exists as a reminder of the true horrors of the war. Depressed and suicidal, Septimus Smith challenges the prevailing concept of the post-war world as peaceful; he symbolizes the "incompetence" of the violence and the "shattered romantic notions of just and chivalric warfare" (Bethea 249). His personal experience as a war veteran provides an antithesis to the time as marked in history.

Though Woolf's novel presents time through several different hierarchical oppositions, it ultimately comes down to the temporal definition of time as it exists in the past-and-present binary. In the novel, Woolf makes an effort to clearly address the differences between the narrative's present and its past; she uses language to set the tone for the past and present and to elucidate the way their differences have an effect on the individual. The present is depicted through the use of stiff, structured language. It is often described in terms of the physical setting and seldom relies on discourse or a sequence of events. The present, it seems, is dependent on the tangible elements and the individual's relation to them. At the beginning of the novel, the present is set in place as Clarissa journeys into the streets of London:

> She stiffened a little on the kerb, waiting for Durtnall's van to pass...There she perched, never seeing him, waiting to cross, very upright...For having lived in Westminster--how many years now? over twenty,--one feels even in the midst of traffic, or waking at night, Clarissa was positive, a particular hush...before

> Big Ben strikes. There! Out it boomed. First a warning, musical; then the hour, irrevocable. The leaden circles dissolved in the air. Such fools we are, she thought, crossing Victoria Street. For Heaven only knows why one loves it so...the carriages, motor cars, omnibuses, vans, sandwich men shuffling and swinging; brass bands; barrel organs; in the triumph and the jungle and the strange high singing of some aeroplane overhead was what she loved; life; London; this moment of June. (Woolf 4)

In this particular passage from the novel, Woolf paints the present as it exists for Clarissa: a post-war London where the streets are busy with the hum of life and Big Ben marks the movement of time forward. It is clear that Woolf is blending the physical setting of the story (London and all of the physical pieces therein) with the description of the present. She aligns the present with the physical world and even makes the passing of time something tangible. By assigning the tracking of time to Big Ben, Woolf allocates tangibility to the otherwise intangible; Woolf makes each moment in time "leaden," and thus something that exists in the real world. This depiction of the present, like the language used, is rigid and concrete and, as a result, might often be perceived as strong. However, the language used here also implies a sense of emptiness and fear that greatly overwhelms the allusions to strength. The fact that Clarissa is constantly "waiting" and feeling "a particular hush" at the awareness of time leads us to believe that there is a lack of fulfillment in the present. Despite the abundance of life apparent in the London streets, the present is still missing something, something that will appease the individual's sense of stability. Furthermore, the present is not only hollow but also fearsome. Big Ben, the structure that marks the passing of time, is also a death knell. Clarissa's acknowledgement of Big Ben as "it boomed" and marked the hour "irrevocable" reveals the present as an unyielding force. Therefore it becomes clear that time can move forward even with an overwhelming sense of absence; time can move forward without concern for the individual and does not even require the individual's existence.

The past, quite contrarily, is almost dream-like in its description. The memories introduced often recount events of particular importance, and, unlike the language used to articulate the present, the language used here is effortless, exciting, and romantic. This is perhaps most apparent in Clarissa's memory of her kiss with Sally Seton, an event that she recalls as "the most exquisite moment of her whole life" in which "[t]he whole world might have turned upside down" (Woolf 35). She recalls the moment with great clarity, as though it were happening again:

> But she could remember going cold with excitement, and doing her hair in a a kind of ecstasy...with the rooks flaunting up and down in the pink evening light, and dressing, and going downstairs, and feeling as she crossed the hall "if it were now to die 'twere now to be most happy." That was her feeling--Othello's feeling, and she felt it, she was convinced, as strongly as Shakespeare meant Othello to feel it, all because she was coming down to dinner in a white frock to meet Sally Seton! (Woolf 34-35)

Here, the past is described in such elaborate language that it is almost dream-like. In contrast to the narrative's present, the past is described in very light, poetic language that plays upon the emotions of the moment instead of the actual physical elements. However, while the past is articulated in such meaningful and fulfilling terms, it is merely an illusion. Like the present, the past is lacking. Though these moments from the past are recalled as though they were just happening, the truth is that the moment has passed. In remembering Sally Seton, Clarissa remembers the night, but "[s]he could not even get an echo of her old emotion" (34). Despite the meaning that is injected into the language of the past, the reality is that it is just as empty as the present because it is fleeting and no longer an actuality.

This conception of time within the novel is problematic in

understanding the point of the narrative. With the sense of time crumbling as the novel progresses, it makes it difficult for the reader to discern the past from the present; it is difficult to uncover the truth beneath the wreckage. However, what is more problematic than the issues the reader must face in attempting to make sense of the novel is what these issues mean for the individuals within the narrative. Because the concept of time is so broken within the novel, the characters have trouble forming their identity. The lack of a stable construction of time leaves characters like Clarissa Dalloway and Septimus Smith no place to make themselves known, both to others and, most importantly, to themselves.

The conflicting nature of the past and present in the narrative is problematic for Clarissa Dalloway because, as Shannon Forbes posits, she "desperately desires to possess a Victorian, stable, unified self" (40). Forbes argues that Clarissa fails to achieve a "Victorian self"—a concept of one's identity that is complete, stable, and without influence from the social sphere—because she is inherently split. Forbes contends that the title of the novel itself lends to an understanding of Clarissa's character and identity. The title does not specify anything but a vacant name: she is neither Mrs. Richard Dalloway nor Clarissa, although she strives to be wholly both. Because the title leaves her name relatively ambiguous, there is an implied absence in her identity. Forbes equates this emptiness with Clarissa's attempt to perform the role of Mrs. Richard Dalloway while still holding on strongly to her "true" self, even though there is nothing left (39-40). However, it is not simply Clarissa's conflict between the commitment to her role as Mrs. Richard Dalloway and her own sense of identity that leaves her with an absence. It is also her inability to reconcile her place in time.

Throughout the novel, Clarissa struggles to create a stable identity, to find a place in time in which the meaning of her life truly lies. Clarissa is split between the past—a long-gone realm that holds the exquisite moments and the lives she led before becoming Mrs. Richard Dalloway—and the present—a world of errands, people, and parties that comprise her reality. Even though Clarissa attempts to commit to her role in the present as the dutiful housewife and party hostess, she still continues to plunge into the recesses of her mind and revisit moments from her past, moments in which she was a different person, in which she was not Mrs. Richard Dalloway. Because Clarissa is constantly shifting back and forth between her past and present, she is unable to fully comprehend one sense of time and reality; she is unable to form a stable sense of identity. Cristina Delgado García argues that Clarissa Dalloway's incomplete sense of self is due to her refusal to acknowledge any means of identity as whole or unified:

> Woolf's technique to construct the self can be read through Saussure's synchronic and diachronic axes. In relation to the synchronic, *Mrs. Dalloway* claims to receive meaning from her relation to coexisting selves, exactly as the linguistic sign is given value on the synchronic axis "from the simultaneous presence of other terms" without considering here "the intervention of time" [Saussure 2004: 64] Indeed, Woolf's protagonist rejects the closure and definiteness of an essentialist understanding of identity and refuses to ever affirm of anybody "that they were this or were that" [Woolf 2000: 7]. (Garcia 17)

Clarissa is unable to accept a stable, fixed sense of identity because she is bound both to her past and her present. She is bound to the present for reasons that need little explanation. The present is not only home to her physical existence, but it is also where she has committed herself for the foreseeable future. Clarissa chooses to settle into life as Mrs. Richard Dalloway and, in the hope that she will someday find meaning, she must continue to fulfill her social duties. Her past, however, calls to her for reasons that are more psychological. Though Clarissa lives in the present and commits to her social obligations, her heart and head are married to the exquisite moments and complex events of her past. The rich

memories Clarissa recalls pull her away from her social presence and split her in two, with one half desiring personal validation by way of society and the other half chasing the passions of the past. Because Clarissa can't seem to reconcile her past, she is ultimately left to live in a world that is empty for her while chasing a once-fulfilling world that no longer exists.

Clarissa's inability to accept her place in the present is due in part to her awareness of her own aging and the passing of time. When the novel starts, Clarissa acknowledges the "leaden" passing of time and seems to fear its power and omnipotence. As the novel progresses, this fear of Clarissa's seems to become increasingly worse when it is said that "she feared time itself" and feared "how year by year her share was sliced." She was no longer able to absorb the "colours, salts, [and] tones of existence" that were so prevalent in her youth (Woolf 30). Clarissa, though not old yet, is beginning to realize that at the age of fifty-two, her life has become nothing more than a series of social events, errands, and formalities; Clarissa is becoming aware of the series of substitutions in her world, of the abyss of presence. Thus, it is interesting that Clarissa's fear comes to the surface on the very day that she is to throw a party. This juxtaposes the empty experiences of Clarissa's present—the errands, the parties, and the people—with the rich "tones of existence" from her past. As Jane Duran (citing Simone de Beauvoir) posits in her analysis of Virginia Woolf's concept of time in *To the Lighthouse* that there is "an emphasis on the internally-felt disparity between the past and the present...There is a paucity of experience-of-the-present among the very elderly, and a reliance on the past" (301). Although Woolf's protagonist in *Mrs. Dalloway* is not "very elderly," she is still aged enough to notice the passing of time and to reflect on previous eras within her own life. Clarissa seeks to find meaning in the exquisite moments from her past, meaning that is unavailable to her now. However, she is still committed to the role she plays in the present. She is married to Richard Dalloway and thus married to that particular life. Even though she recalls moments from her past in hopes of rekindling the rich passions of life, she is unable to allow the past to come to life in the present. Clarissa wants desperately to return to her past, yet, when the past tries to make itself known in the present, she is unable to allow it:

> She was upset by his visit. She had felt a great deal; had for a moment, when she kissed his hand, regretted, envied him even, remembered possibly (for he saw her look it) something he had said--how they would change the world if she married him perhaps; whereas, it was this; it was middle age; it was mediocrity; then forced herself with her indomitable vitality to put all that aside, there being in her a thread of life which for toughness, endurance, power to overcome obstacles, and carry her triumphantly through he had never known the like of. (Woolf 155)

Here Clarissa is upset by the intrusion of Peter Walsh, a figure from her past. Though she remembers him in the past with great fondness, he cannot fit rightly into the present because he disrupts the unified (though hollow) identity Clarissa attempts to create for herself. Peter Walsh's presence problematizes the "Victorian self" inherent in Mrs. Dalloway: wife, mother, and party hostess. Thus it seems that Clarissa's inability to choose between her past and present is directly linked to her fear of age. Clarissa fears the emptiness of her life and the increasing emptiness of the years to come, and thus she seeks refuge in the past: a time in which meaning is guaranteed, even though it is no longer attainable.

Like Clarissa, Septimus Smith is also unhappy with his place in the present. He feels, as Clarissa does, stuck in an oppressive present void of any meaning. However, his relationship to the past is quite different than Clarissa's. While Clarissa looks back on her memories as being the exhilarating and exquisite times that gave her life purpose, Septimus recalls his past as the time that robbed him of any hope for meaning. It was Septimus' experiences during World War I that numbed him. However,

once the war was over, he became aware and afraid of his inability to feel:

> The War had taught him. It was sublime. He had gone through the whole show, friendship, European War, death, had won promotion, was still under thirty and was bound to survive. He was right there. The last shelled missed him. He watched them explode with indifference...For now that it was all over, truce signed, and the dead buried, he had, especially in the evening, these sudden thunder-claps of fear. he could not feel. (Woolf 86-87)

The horrors of the war made Septimus hollow and unfeeling, traits that, at the time, seemed to give him strength. Yet in retrospect, Septimus understands that his loss of humanity and emotion during wartime may have kept him alive, but, as he asks himself, "for what purpose?" (Woolf 15). His loss of meaning in the war essentially reduces him to nothing more than an historical artifact: a walking corpse, and a reminder of a pointless war.

Therefore Septimus is also torn between the past and the present. He is cemented in the present, not in hopes of fulfilling some social role, but because he survived the war; Septimus' commitment to the present is purely physical and a direct result of the events from his past. However, while Clarissa spends her time split between the past and present, Septimus—though physically "present"—never seems to accept his place there and, ultimately, changes the events of his past by committing suicide. By committing suicide he essentially defies the events of the war (and the post-war). He defies the experiences that kept him alive; he kills himself and wipes his physical presence from the world. Septimus defies time. When Clarissa learns of Septimus' death, she commends him for preserving himself. While the others "went on living," Septimus had preserved "a thing there was that mattered; a thing, wreathed about with chatter, defaced, obscured...let drop every day in corruption, lies, chatter" (Woolf 184). His death, to Clarissa, defied the slow rot of the empty years ahead. It saved the individual who felt "the impossibility of reaching the centre" (184). Septimus' suicide, therefore, results in the loss of his physical self but the preservation of his identity; Septimus' death signifies a means of stabilizing the self. Because he kills himself, he takes the power from the mad force of time and no longer has to suffer the search for meaning in an abyss.

In *Mrs. Dalloway,* understanding a stable concept of time is at the core of understanding the individual. Woolf intentionally breaks apart the binary of time to create a rupture in the formation of a whole and unified self. This rupture in the concept of time and the narratives of Clarissa Dalloway and Septimus Smith reveal that, despite the desire to be whole, the individual—constantly torn between multiple presences throughout different moments in time—will always be split. The individual will always desire a presence, wherever that presence may be, and will always attempt to find meaning therein. However, the concept of time as it is understood in the novel denies the possibility of achieving a whole and unified self. Because of the instability of time in the novel, individuals like Clarissa Dalloway and Septimus Smith cannot reside in totality at any point in their lives. The nature of time does not allow for a stable presence and therefore does not permit the individual the right to become whole. In the novel, Woolf disjoints the perceived notion of time as structured to elucidate this absence and ultimately reveals that the only way to be wholly oneself is to escape the fleeting world completely.

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PHƯƠNG LƯU

Capital "L" Literature: The Invisibility of the Arab American Writer

Within the framework of ethnic literature, the canon of Western literature (particularly literature stemming from dead white males) continually plays a role in how ethnic American literature is read and critiqued. To read ethnic literature under the Western canon is a bastardization of a literature that speaks to the heterogeneous experiences of Asian American people. As Lisa Lowe says, "Asian American literature expresses heterogeneity not merely in the constituency it is construed to 'represent' but in the manners by which it puts into relief the material conditions of production" (54). In her essay, "Canon, Institutionalization, Identity: Contradictions for Asian American Studies," Lowe investigates the Western literary canon in conjunction with Asian American literature. She particularly looks into how the institution of the University teaches ethnic literature. She writes that the role of the University is to maintain and perpetuate the notion of the Western literary canon. Lowe continues, arguing that Ethnic studies departments challenge traditional departments (51). Asian American literature explores the cultural ramifications of not only the assimilation process, but also the stereotypical perceptions of being Asian. In other words, Asian American literature contextualizes the way in which identity is formed through the process of assimilation into

American society. This is done through the negotiation of cultural and developmental practices through narratives (in turn, the disruption of the Western literary canon) and the creation of a new literary genre and identity for Asian American people.

There is more to the category of Asian American than just continental Asia. The term "Asian American" refers to pan-Asia, from those within the periphery of Asia to those in the Middle East. It is to this particular region I look. Arab American literature simultaneously performs the same subversive functions that Asian American literature does. Shailija Patel explores this particular concept as well, particularly through the lens of post-9/11 racism. She writes that "[t]he notion of literature as singular, monolith is a fantasy. If 9/11 offers anything to 'Literature,' it would be the dissolution of that fantasy, for the reality of *literatures*" (268). Patel writes that there is heterogeneity to literature. This directly speaks to what Lowe speaks of: the heterogeneity of Asian American literature. Asian American literature and, in turn, Arab American literature, gives voice to the experiences of those who are not being represented in the Western literary canon. Simultaneously, it speaks to the experiences that are not part of the dominant culture, politics, and experience; rather, it speaks to the experience of the ethnic Oriental as not seen through dominant Western eyes. In other words, ethnic literature speaks not to the success story of assimilation (the best story of people of color and of different culture assimilate to Western society—the superior society); instead, it explores the hegemonic concept of Western culture as the ideal culture. Lowe calls these types of stories "developmental narratives."

Avery Gordon knows these stories by another name: slave narratives. Gordon writes that the "slave narrative was an authenticated testimony, written by slave or former slaves in an autobiographical address, that sought to reverse for the author and the society the conditions of bondage it described" (143). This slave narrative, as Gordon argues, is the ideal horrific and horrid conditions of slavery written by "true slaves." As Gordon later explains, this is problematic because it compromises the authenticity of slave narratives—not in the sense that slave narratives are not true, but because they are written for a white patriarchal audience and emphasize control over other beings. In other words, the slave narrative is a story written for a free, white audience. It is a story that follows certain key events, and, if it deviates, it is no longer considered a "true" slave narrative. When applied to the category of Asian American literature, these narratives highlight a similar concept. Lowe writes:

> reading the [Asian American] novel as an analogue of the European novel subordinates Asian American culture in several significant ways: not only does the form itself structurally imply an integration and submission of individual particularity to a universalized social norm…, but in privileging a nineteenth-century European genre as the model to be approximated, Asian American literature is cast as imitation, mimicry, the underdeveloped Other (55).

Lowe emphasizes the same problematic situation of privileging the white Western literary canon. She writes that reading an Asian American novel through the lens of such a canon erases and eradicates its subversive nature and message. Such a reading compromises the process of assimilation that is being depicted in any such novel. Such a reading edifies, and forces the Western literary canon as the ideal, while simultaneously disrupting the power of Asian American literature. Furthermore, reading Asian American literature without considering Arab American literature as part of that category also has the same issue of a lack of representation. Allen Webb writes about his experience in teaching Middle Eastern literature to middle school students. He notes two outcomes: his students are "humaniz[ing] Islam and Muslim people, and learn[ing] about Arabs, Turks, Kurds, Persians, and Pushtans", which leads to students "[i]dentify

with characters from contemporary literature by a living Middle Eastern writer was transforming their understanding and building a bridge between American and Palestinian experiences" (80-81). His particular method notes the way in which the Western culture inculcates racist stereotypes through social media, television, news networks, etc. By introducing students to Middle Eastern literature, he exposes them to the concept that Arab Americans are humans. However, while his intent is pure, his method is problematic, especially when he writes that he has guest speakers come speak to students—as though these people represent the entirety of a race and ethnicity. Furthermore, his teaching method is almost entirely dependent on "humanizing" the Other—which is not the point of ethnic literature. There is no subversion to his teaching. Nonetheless, he is a prime example of how traditions are slightly changing.

Unfortunately, there is a fine line Asian people, and Arab people, must walk in terms of their literary presentation. Mazen Naous writes about this problem, particularly in terms of invisibility. Naous writes:

> [Arab people] and Arab Americans more often inhabit a place of *hyper-in-visibility*. What I mean by the term hyper-in-visibility is hyper awareness of presence both visible and invisible in a post-9/11 U.S. This renders [Arab people] and Arab Americans in visibility, striving for visibility and place while challenging a hyper-visibility that seeks to reduce them to abstractions as inhuman and inhumane terrorist outsiders (250).

Hyper-in-visibility refers to the way in which Arab people are perceived to be outside Western ideology, while simultaneously, they are seen as the antithesis, as the other side (the bad side) of the Western vs. Eastern dichotomy. In other words, while outside of the Western culture and society, Arab people and culture are used to define what "Western" means. Arab people are seen as the physical embodiment of what is not American. This is where Webb's teaching methods become problematic: he humanizes terrorists, rather than teaching tolerance. It is true that humanizing a group of people can lead to a linking between groups of people; however, the purpose of Asian American literature, and in turn Arab American literature, is not to teach humanity. It is to show the diverse experiences of Ethnic Americans, while pointing out the racism inherent in Western society.

However, this directly leads to the intervention Ali S. Asani makes. Asani argues for a pluralism which would lead to religious, cultural and ethnic tolerance. She speaks directly to the ignorant notion that the Quran encourages separatism and terrorism. Making the argument that Islamophobia is inherently against American values, she writes: "[e] very Islamophobic statement or action, no matter how ridiculous, is a deliberate attack on the pluralistic fabric of our society and on our shared values that demand justice, respect, tolerance, and compassion for all who live on our nation" (51). She makes this argument by citing the pluralism rooted within the Quran, which celebrates differences. Asani makes it clear that Islamophobia is in direct defiance of the shared value of tolerance and freedom inherent in the American value system. Any situation that promotes such hate and intolerance undercuts and undervalues the morals of American society. Ranjini Srikanth makes the same argument regarding Islamophobia. He notes that such a movement denies the fear and wounds that are created by the War on Terrorism. He writes that in order to heal as a nation, as a global society,

> We must weave in the devastation and deep wounds of individuals and communities caught in the dragnet of state power, held in detention centers without cause, tortured, humiliated, stripped of their dignity as humans, severed from their families, deported, de-humanized, and victimized by the United States' Global War on Terror (2).

This is how Arab American literature must make its intervention—and

it does. Arab American literature speaks directly to those who fear and misunderstand it. Arab American literature acknowledges stereotypes and racism. Yet it does so not in a devious manner as to underrate and highlight the ignorance, but instead to have a conversation with it. The conversation is held in a manner of understanding and openness. It is a communal conversation—a conversation with no oppression or subjugation to a specific ideology. It is a conversation rooted in the creation of tolerance and unity. It is a conversation speaking not only to those who will listen or those who refuse to do so, but also to those who might not have known—to those who do not realize their own reluctant submission.

This intervention is best understood by putting Wendy Cheng, Mazen Naous, and Carol Fadda-Conrey into conversation with each other. Arab American literature is, as Cheng states, what reading *Black Marxism* and *Orientalism* together should be; it "shows us what might be gained from deconstructing the dialectic of knowledge production and power and unearthing the histories and meanings of revolutionary struggles for liberation" (4). This is basically what Lowe and Patel call for—a discussion and dissection of what is mean by capital "L" literature. To read Asian American and, in turn, Arab American literature, as the process and means of deconstructing the process of knowledge (i.e. how it is gained, who has access to it, who dictates what is considered to be Truth, how it is distributed, etc.) and the power inherent in knowledge production, is to read Asian American literature as subversive to the Western literary canon. This is the power of the heterogeneity of ethnic literature. Simultaneously, Carol Fadda-Conrey, in conversation with Gloria Anzuldúa's theory of the borderlands, writes that the "internal differences [of Arab American literature] need to be recognized in order to create solid bridges that would facilitate border-crossings among themselves as well as between them and other communities of color, thus enabling them to coexist in the ethnic borderland" (193). Using Anzuldúa as a catalyst, Fadda-Conrey articulates the same process. The borderlands are the areas in which stated identity norms can be argued, disrupted, and disarticulated. The borderlands, in turn, can be linked to Asian American literature, in that both are sites of subversion and both have the power to question Western ideology. As a borderland, a site for investigation, a site for disruption, a site for questioning the processes of power and knowledge, Asian American literature and, in turn, Arab American literature, is the key to decoding and deconstructing the Western literary canon. Asian American literature allows for the violent silencing process of assimilation to be depicted. This literature exposes the oppressive nature of the Western literary canon. It is as Lowe says: "Asian American literature defies canonization in that it is a literature that is still being written—unclosed, unfixed body of work whose center and orthodoxies shift as the makeup of the Asian-origin constituency shifts, and within which new voices are continually being articulated" (61). Asian American literature, Arab American literature, and American ethnic literature speak to those who are silenced, those who are not represented within the Western literary canon. These literatures speak to those who are unable to speak for themselves. They give voice to the silenced.

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LAUREN MACINTYRE

Voyage dans la Lune: Mina Loy's Lunar Landscape and Feminine Politics

Lunar Baedecker[1] is Mina Loy's first and only self-selected collection of poetry. Printed in 1923 by the publishing company Contact Press (which also printed the works of Ernest Hemingway and William Carlos Williams), critic Michael Thurston states, "*Lunar Baedecker* was printed on cheap paper and sold for $1.50" (412). Although Loy was critically acclaimed by contemporary poets like Ezra Pound, Gertrude Stein, William Carlos Williams, and Marianne Moore and was even ranked amongst their poetic stature, *Lunar Baedecker* fell out of print by the 1930's and was not rediscovered until the 1980's where it began to receive more critical attention (Thurston 412). Due to this dramatic disappearance in Loy's poetic career, it is not surprising then that it is nearly impossible to find *Lunar Baedecker* in print anywhere that is not sold at a collectible itemized price ($125+ compared to the mere $1.50 it originally printed for). Subsequent editions of *Lunar Baedecker*, including *Lunar Baedecker and Time-Tables* (1958), *The Last Lunar Baedecker* (1982) and *The Lost Lunar Baedecker* (1996) do not do Loy's original version justice, as they rearrange and tamper with the original order and editing of *Lunar Baedecker*. I want to open with this history because I think it is important to understand where our critical analysis of

Loy's poetics is coming from. In my research, I chose to reference authors who only look to Loy's original collection, for the sole reason that it is the truest depiction of Loy as a poet. *Lunar Baedecker* (1923) contains nineteen poems organized in the following order:

Poems 1921-1922
Lunar Baedeker
Apology Of Genius
Joyce's Ulysses
English Rose
Crab-Angel
Der Blinde Junge
Ignoramus
Poe
Brancusi's Golden Bird
"The Starry Sky" of Wyndham Lewis
O Hell

And

Poems of 1914-1915
Love Songs I-XIII
Café du Neant
Magasins Du Louvre
Italian Pictures:
July in Vallambrosa
The Costa San Gorgio
Costa Magic
Sketch of a Man on a Platform
Parturition

The organization of Loy's original *Lunar Baedecker* is important for two reasons. One, she starts the collection with her later poems from 1921-1922 and ends with her earlier poems from 1914-1915. Loy's backward progression depicts her poetic collection as an archive, and reflects the ways in which her earlier and later poems respond to each and traverse lineal boundaries (Burke 325). Two, this publication only includes thirteen of the thirty-four "Love Songs." "Love Songs," in the 1923 collection, then refer to this body of thirteen, while the body of thirty-four refer to what Loy later names "Songs to Joannes"[2]. Thurston notes that both of these poems are so radically different, in that Loy reorders and edits them so distinctly, that they can in no way be considered the same poem (416). It is with these specifications that I want to clarify the importance, once again, of which edition of *Lunar Baedecker* critics choose to stem their analysis from. With that being said, all of my research and personal analysis comes from Loy's 1923 original publication of *Lunar Baedecker*.

Reclaiming Loy's work as a significant contribution to modernist poetics not only resurrects Loy as a participant in this movement, but also establishes her as a pioneering figure. "Now, when poetry reflects concerns with sexual difference as well as the relations between language and perception," Carolyn Burke (Loy's biographist) indicates, "she seems decades ahead of her time" (v-vi). As a modernist, she experiments heavily with the abstract and fragmented structuring of language and images to grapple with the tensions of the "self," and employs powerful and taboo feminist politics to break from traditional poetics. Her use of free verse and feminist discourse "in the 1910s seemed to lead to free love" (Burke v). Discussions of sex, childbirth, menstruation, pornography, virginity, affairs, lust, eroticism, and exoticism are the root for most, if not all, of her poems and demonstrate her unabashed courage to speak of the unspeakable because, in her own words, "there is *nothing impure in sex*—except in the mental attitude to it" (Kouidis 29).

Loy understood that her radical and open discussion of "feminism" did not fit within contemporary discourse, as she writes in 1915, "what I feel now are feminine politics—but in a cosmic way that may not fit in anywhere" (Kouidis 28). Her "cosmic" understanding of "feminine politics" is the entirety of *Lunar Baedecker*. As the title suggests, and

as Michael Thurston and Carolyn Burke discuss, *Lunar Baedecker* is a suitable title for Loy's poems in many ways. Thurston explains that "Baedecker" alludes to what would be commonly associated, in Loy's era, to a guidebook, travelguide, or a map outlining routes[3]. "Lunar" then would refer to the moon, an uncharted or "unfamiliar terrain," as Thurston notes, and, "*Lunar Baedecker*, then, would be a guide to fantastic landscapes, or to those states conventionally associated with the moon: femininity, creativity, madness" (411). Burke goes further with this notion to state that Loy "saw herself as a cartographer of the imagination" (vi) and "provides us with a Baedeker of modernism—a guide to the imaginative landscapes created and inhabited by this quirky woman" (ix). The cyclical phases of the moon, and its circular properties, are also critical to the meaning of the title, as Loy frequently uses the imagery and language of circles and rotation in charting the female self and womanhood. Feminist critic, Camille Paglia, argues that "Nature's cycles are woman's cycles" and that a woman's "sexual maturity means marriage to the moon, waxing and waning in lunar phases" (10-11). *Lunar Baedecker* then becomes Loy's blueprint of not only poetic modernism, but also early feminist discourse. Through her lunar landscape, she guides her reader's to profound insights and discoveries of "feminine politics," or as Burke states, "she forced readers to think—whether they liked it or not" (v).

It is not surprising then that Loy begins her collection with a poem entitled "Lunar Baedeker," to commence her poetic quest. The first lines of the poem serve to immediately chart her "lunar" landscape, which will, throughout the text, serve to represent women and the beautiful creatures of society's underworld:

> A silver Lucifer
> serves
> cocaine in cornucopia
> To some somnambulists
> of adolescent thighs
> draped
> in satirical draperies

Loy personifies the moon as a "silver Lucifer" to imply the fallen nature of those associated with the moon, and darkness. The moon, the "silver Lucifer," is the source of life and being for the fallen, or as Loy describes them, "somnambulists / of adolescent thighs." The "cocaine" that the moon serves to these underbellies of society illustrates an image of speckled stars strewn across the sky, illuminated by the moon, and consumed by those in a waking-sleep; and also suggests a hallucinatory state mentioned later in the poem:

> the eye-white sky-light
> white-light district of lunar lusts
> Stellectric signs
> WING SHOWS ON STARWAY
> ZODIAC CAROUSEL
> Cyclones
> of ecstatic dust
> and ashes whirl
> crusaders
> from hallucinatory citadels
> of shattered glass
> into evacuate craters

The visual elements of irradiate sensation in the "Stellectric signs" of Loy's extraterrestrial landscape creates not only vision, but also movement. The carousel-cyclone-whirl-shattered-like motion will be a prominent technique found throughout *Lunar Baedecker*. Such chaos and volatility marks the characteristics of the terrain Loy explores and employs for her feminist subject material. As I will discuss in her later poems, Loy often uses circular and round imagery to describe the subject of the female. She

makes it very clear that they do not exist on a linear plane (like man), but "like epicycles on the celestial maps" and saw growth, coming into being, and "travel as an elliptical form of quest" (Burke vii). Although as a free-verse poet, adopting no strict meter or rhyme, looking back to the quoted passages, the very language and word structure of the poem complements this "elliptical" movement. The beginning of the poem is dominated by the "s" sound, an already curved, and circular note and then shifts into a hard "c," which too visually accompanies the circular vision, and finally flows into a soft "d" to round-off the "s" and "c." Throughout the poem these letters prevail, along with the spherical "p" and "o." Because of this, Loy allows her readers to not only hear the circular motion of the poem, but to see it. With the prevalent use of round sounds and letters, a spiraling effect occurs and the reader becomes hypnotized by the poem's form. This "lush pattern of sounds" and emphasis on concrete images "have replaced meter and rhyme as the controlling devices" (Kouidis 100-101). It seems that through her words, Loy herself is serving us "cocaine in cornucopia," for as readers and listeners we become induced by her words.

As Loy reaches the conclusion of the poem, she introduces her feminine politics:

> From the shores
> of oval oceans
> in the oxidized Orient
> Onyx-eyed Odalisques
> and ornithologists
> observe the flight
> of Eros obsolete
>
> And "Immortality"
> mildews
> in the museums of the moon

Yet, before one can begin to comprehend the substance of these lines, a sensuous impact of language, images, sounds, and motion overtakes them. Pound, after reading *Lunar Baedecker*, characterized Loy as a poet "more of the head than the heart" because she was "fascinated by words and challenged the reader to a strenuous navigation of her verbal labyrinths" (94). Her labyrinth of language also points to Paglia's notion that a "woman's body is a labyrinth in which man is lost" (12). Finding one's way out of this complicated, irregular network of passages or paths, suggests then not only understanding language, but a woman's body and self. Looking now to her lines, Loy's labyrinth of language unfolds by examining the specific images of the poem. Onyx is stone ranging in a variety of colors, odalisques are female slaves or concubines, ornithologists are those who study birds, and Eros is the god of Love. "Onyx-eyed Odalisques / and ornithologists" then would suggest a kaleidoscope-like vision—a vision of fragmentation, disorder, refraction, and flight. If the Odalisques represent the "Orient" or the "other," then a new vision (contesting tradition) and reading of the subject in speculation (Eros) is presented in these lines—one that is all encompassing. Reduced to a bird, Eros is not seen as a god in this poem, but an animal, and therefore no longer immortal. His very meaning (or being) is treated as something that is "obsolete:" a traditional form of love that is outdated and that must be renewed—a topic that Loy will explore in the upcoming poems. Yet, in this opening poem alone, Loy begins to successfully chart her lunar landscape and feminine politic as she closely aligns the moon with woman, and woman with the moon. As the poem concludes:

> NOCTURNAL CYCLOPS
> CRYSTAL CONCUBINE
>
> Pocked with personification
> the fossil virgin of the skies
> waxes and wanes

"Apology of a Genius," follows directly after "Lunar Baedeker" and continues the same lunar themes and images introduced in the first poem. Yet, while the first sought to introduce the lunar landscape, this poem continues on and seeks to reclaim the identities of the moon's dwellers:

> Lepers of the moon
> all magically diseased
> we come among you
> innocent
> of our luminous sores

And as Loy, in the first poem, immediately rejects Eros, this poem, too, seems to reject the traditional narratives of gender and sex designed by patriarchy:

> Our wills are formed
> by curious disciplines
> beyond your laws
> …..
> In the raw caverns of the Increate
> we forge the dusk of Chaos
> to that imperious jewelry of the Universe
> --the Beautiful—

The remaining poems of the first half of *Lunar Baedecker*, like her longer poem "English Rose," which denounces the stereotypical and constricting function of the "Rose of arrested impulses", the carnivalistic "Crab-Angel" that champions a chimera-like woman, and "Der Blinde Junge" or "Ignoramus" that both reclaim women's intelligence, all explore this divide between the traditional, constricting "masculine" world, and the circular, dilating "feminine" cosmic world.

The second half of *Lunar Baedecker* opens with "Love Songs." There is no direct narrative or thought progression in "Love Songs;" instead, it's form represents the shattered disillusionment of "love," or as Burke puts, "illuminates the motions of the mind (207). Traversing boundaries of time and experience each of the "Love Songs" creates "fragments of love: sometimes in coherent, autonomous images; sometimes in complex collages" (Kouidis 63). It relates femininity, once again, to a non-linear existence, and in fact, regards femininity as disrupting the traditional linear existence of masculinity, and narrative of patriarchal love. The first "Love Song" immediately proves so:

> I
> Spawn of fantasies
> Sifting the appraisable
> Pig Cupid his rosy snout
> Rooting erotic garbage
> "Once upon a time"

Loy, once again, resurfaces the image of Eros in the form of "Pig Cupid." As the opening to the thirteen "Love Songs," Part I immediately abandons and even mocks the traditional sense of "love," by delineating "Once upon a time" stories to "erotic garbage." Just as Eros flight was deemed obsolete in "Lunar Baedeker," Pig Cupid's time-old tales can be thrown in the dump too.

After a sensational start, Part I continues with:

> I would an eye in a Bengal light
> Eternity in a sky-rocket
> Constellations in an ocean
> Whose rivers run no fresher
> Than a trickle of saliva
>
> These are suspect places

The celestial images of "light," "eternity," "sky," and "constellations," and the earthly images of "ocean," "rivers," and "saliva" interconnects earth's watery realm and the cosmic. As Paglia states a "woman's body is a sea

acted upon by the month's lunar wave-motion." (11). Now woman is both the moon and the water, she is the gravity, the centrifugal force, the rising and falling of sea level, she is the disrupting of balance causing waves and tides and storms, the Moon's orbit, the push, the pull, she is both the Moon and Sea. It's interesting then to note how, in the middle of Part I, Loy inserts a particular image to offset the fluid language: the "sky-rocket." "The rocket is also the most vivid of the poems' many images of flight, symbol of psychic and sexual freedom," Kouidis states, "It is a phallic image possessing aggressive, directional vitality. The water image juxtaposed to the sky-rocket symbolizes female sexuality, placid and all-encompassing" (70). If the "sky-rocket" is to represent a phallic symbol as Kouidis suggests, and the watery ocean is to represent a yonic symbol as Paglia notes, then the sexual innuendo of the rocket intruding this all-encompassing, female space is unavoidable. As the rocket personifies a man-made, aggressive force, this sexual encounter could be seen as a violent act; and Loy, in fact, does state, "these are suspect places."

Part IV of "Love Songs" alludes to other "suspect places" when Loy introduces theories of evolution:

> IV
> Evolution fall foul of
> Sexual equality
> Prettily miscalcuate
> Similitude
>
> Unnatural selection
> Breed such sons and daughters
> As shall jibber at each other
> Uninterpretable cryptonyms
> Under the moon

If evolution is the linear process of biological change, then we already know that Loy would have revolted against it, for as her poems have indicated, women do not function or grow on a linear plane, but on a cyclical one. In the late 19th and early 20th century much of the debate on sexual inequality rested on Darwinian notions of evolution and survival of the fittest. Involved in many proto-feminist debates of "equality" herself, Loy argued, "the goal of equality of the sexes was illusory" and called the feminist movement of her time, which called for such equality of the sexes, "Inadequate" (Burke 179). While evolution theory's popularity increased, it was used more frequently to satisfy the justification of male control. Paglia asserts "Evolutionary or apocalyptic history is a male wish list with a happy ending, a phallic peak" and because of that there is no way women, in her cyclical nature, could agree or participate within it (10). Loy, as Part IV tells, understood evolutionary theory as counterproductive and "unnatural" as it produces assumptions that separate men and women to the point that each sex becomes "uninterpretable" to the other. For Loy, her dismal of "equality of the sexes," rested in this very fact, that it is not being equal to someone else that matters, but being able to understand and interpret another person. Yet, just as Loy offers hope and possibility, in part XII, for reconciliation of the sexes through nature,

> XII
> Shedding our petty pruderies
> From slit eyes
>
> We sidle up
> To Nature
> --- --- --- that irate pornographist

she concludes "Love Songs" with a pessimistic tone of "never reaching:"

> XIII
> The wind stuffs the scum of the white street
> Into my lungs and my nostrils
> Exhilarated birds

Prolonging flight into the night
Never reaching--- --- --- --- ---

The last poem featured in *Lunar Baedecker* is the liberating and raw discovery of self through childbirth: "Parturition". The second half of *Lunar Baedecker* is then framed by these two powerful and serious poems, "Love Songs" and "Parturition". In between, Loy uses more imagery of centrifugal, concentric, and centripetal forces as she travels through different settings in poems like "Café du Neant" and "Magasins Du Louvre. She also uses playful, loud, and colorful language in her trilogy of *Italian pictures*: "July in Vallambrosa," "The Costa San Gorgio," and "Costa Magic." But, to end her collection with the tour de force of "Parturition," points to Loy's key success in *Lunar Baedecker*, as she is so grandly and perfectly able to engineer the finale of her feminine politics. She begins:

I am the centre
Of a circle of pain
Exceeding its boundaries in every direction
The business of the bland sun
Has no affair with me
In my congested cosmos of agony
From which there is no escape
On infinitely prolonged nerve-vibrations
Or in contraction
To the pinpoint nucleus of being
Locate an irritation without
It is within
Within
It is without.

What's so unique about "Parturition" is, as critic Tara Prescott mentions, "In Victorian culture children were central, especially male heirs and namesakes, but Loy places her emphasis on the woman rather than the child (196). Indeed, for once, the mother is the focal point, her feat is the acclaimed, her body is finally acknowledged, and she (the mother) is unafraid to claim herself as the center, "I am the centre of pain."[4] Such a candid discussion of childbirth was unheard of for Loy's time, yet she writes about it with such ease and certainty, that she is able to reclaim the entire history of its silence. Paglia, with liberating purpose like Loy, affirms the importance of childbirth as "Pregnancy demonstrates the deterministic character of woman's sexuality. Every pregnant woman has a body and self-taken over by a chthonian force beyond her control. In the welcome pregnancy, this is a happy sacrifice." (11). And it is by acknowledging this sacrifice as "happy" or "pleasurable" that Loy is undoing the traditional myths of suffering and pain that "weakened" women:

There is a climax in sensibility
When pain surpassing itself
Becomes exotic
And the ego succeeds in unifying the positive and
negative poles of sensation
Uniting the opposing and resisting forces
In lascivious revelation

Kouidis acclaims Loy's redefinition of the modules of pain for "She has tried to free woman from passive slavery to her unique pain by using pain creatively to arrive at a clear understanding of the female experience. In giving birth to the child, she gives birth to her self" (40). Pain is no longer a weakness, in Loy's description, but strength. Through creating new life in another, the woman has created new life in her self—an experience exclusive to women. It is no wonder then that Loy omits male presence in this poem. Not only on a metaphysical plane is he missing, as he cannot exist in her cyclic nature, due to his linear nature, but on a physical plane

as well, as Loy writes he is somewhere else "running upstairs" while "I am climbing the distorted mountain of agony." This "distorted" climb refers, once again, to Loy's rejection of linear progress.

"Parturition" relies heavily on circular imagery to depict the image of childbirth and female growth. Loy, in the first lines of the poem, immediately associates the pregnant woman with the moon, as she has no concern "for the bland business of the sun." Loy also uses irregular line length and indented spacing to reflect the spasms of pain and the metaphysical quest shaped by them (Kouidis 125). Prescott interestingly argues that the poem "presents the expanding cervix, and if the reader were to sketch the figure which she describes, the resulting image could appear as the birth canal at the center of the labia majora, a "pin-point" at the center of a widening circle, a "nucleus" at the center of orbiting electrons, or perhaps even a supernova (198). Expanding off that point, I would too point out the roundness of a pregnant woman's belly that houses the child until birth. Everything about this poem reflects the spatial, circular tract of the female experience. Rather than looking to pregnancy and childbirth as a biological process (a linear sequence of events), Loy transcends these boundaries and merges them with "cosmic becoming" (Kouidis 124):

> I am absorbed
> Into
> The was-is-ever-shall-be
> Of cosmic reproductivity

Lunar Baedecker is a unique collection of poetic honesty, as Loy uncensors and revitalizes the constraints of life, self, and womanhood, and audaciously "finds beauty in the cosmic struggle" (Kouidis 134). Women come to life in this collection, they find life, they give life, and they reclaim life. Loy's ability to traverse traditional boundaries of femininity and extend it to the cosmic, celestial realm of chaos, gives women the chance to find themselves in ways they never were able to before. Her commitment to circular imagery, spiraling labyrinths, cycles of nature and so forth depict women not only as whole, all encompassing beings, but also as infinite souls, coming full circle in their quest and discovery of self.

Endnotes

[1] Baedecker, which is supposed to be spelled Baedeker, is a publishing error. Although, the first poem in the collection titled *Lunar Baedeker*, is spelled correctly.

[2] All thirty-four "Love Songs" were written prior to the publication of *Luna Baedecker*. Loy's decision to omit 21 of the "Love Songs" indicates radical editing and repurposing on the effect of the poem as a whole.

[3] Karl Baedeker, a German physicist and publisher who founded a company that produced authoritative guidebooks (source: Wikipedia).

[4] Camille Paglia states "Woman's centrality gives her a stability of identity. She does not have to become but only to be" (9). Finding one's center, one's core, one's inner peace is the foundation of identity. A woman needs not look outside of herself, but inside to find her true self.

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KAYLEIGH QUARTERMAN

"Nothing Can Exist Except What's There": The Artist's Attempt to Make (No)thing into Some Thing in John Ashbery's "Self-Portrait in a Convex Mirror"

"Good artists exist simply in what they make, and consequently are perfectly uninteresting in what they are." —Oscar Wilde

What exactly is art's purpose or (object)ive? According to Oscar Wilde, art exists so that great artists may become immortalized in some sense, which, for many artists, has been a source of motivation for their works. In "Self-Portrait in a Convex Mirror," John Ashbery's obsession to highlight the ever pressing question of art's purpose (especially in reference to the self) is present throughout his poem inspired by Francesco Parmigianino's Renaissance painting of the same name, a painting with layers of reflection for which Ashbery's speaker constantly interrogates, proclaiming that "My guide in these matters is your *self*" (191, added emphasis).

Ashbery's poem revolves around issues of the self as represented or explained by the artist, the artist being, specifically, himself and Parmigianino as well as artists in general. With both a creative explication of Parmigianino's painting and also a depiction of his ideas of the self's constructs in his own artistic medium, Ashbery illustrates a larger spectrum of thought and understanding of art through specific examples in the poem. The speaker in "Self-Portrait in a Convex Mirror" highlights the complexities of explaining the intangible self through its tangible representations, beginning the poem with an assertion that "The soul establishes itself" (188), alluding to a need for permanence by using the verb, "establishes."

I will argue that Jacques Lacan's theories of the self and, specifically, what he calls the "mirror stage" connects to the speaker's interpretations of the self and how the internal self is dependent on an external medium for understanding. Additionally, I will incorporate Jean Baudrillard's theories of simulacra to Ashbery's poem in that the Real (or the object) cannot exist or be, in fact, "real" if the subject (or the self) cannot exist fixedly because, as Richard Stamelman says in "Critical Reflections: Poetry and Art Criticism in Ashbery's 'Self-Portrait in a Convex Mirror'": "The self can be neither seen—it changes too rapidly for a whole image to be grasped—nor known—it is consistently undoing what it has just built, always presenting itself as different from what it has just disclosed about itself" (611). Thus, the self exists paradoxically in a figurative continuum in that it is consistently changing, but, simultaneously, it cannot exist on a physical continuum as art does; meanwhile, art's physicality is fixed, but its meaning is ever changing. Tying into this paradox, the speaker sprinkles elaborate contradictions throughout the text: "Like a wave breaking on a rock, giving up / Its shape in a gesture which expresses that shape" (193). Like the portrait's and the poem's attempt to describe the self, they both "give up" their shapes in order to "express [their] shapes"; in other words, the incorporeality of the self or the soul is suffered at the expense of having it preserved in a tangible medium. This complexity is established because, in the age of Postmodernism, one cannot comprehend an incorporeal (no)thing without a corporeal representation of it. Furthermore, I will argue that Ashbery uses "Self-Portrait" to accentuate larger issues evolving in art, regarding the tension present between the (no)thing self's

need to exist in some thing such as art, where its significance exists on a continuum by being supported through the mutable perceptions of an audience. Trying to escape inevitable binaries and mortality, Ashbery's "Self-Portrait" reminds its readers that the soul is "captive" in art, and the cost of its existence on a continuum is at the expense of the veracity of the self.

Art is created so that the audience and/or artist can better understand their sense of self. Even the origin of the word "art" archaically denotes the second person present singular form of "to be," suggesting one's self. In "The Mirror State as Formative of the *I* Function, as Revealed in Psychoanalytic Experience," Lacan identifies the *imago* (the "idealized image") and the *cogito* (the mind) during what he coins the "mirror stage," where the the inner self is recognized through an exterior vehicle: a mirror. He asserts that "through self-reflection, he or she gains an idealized unified image" (268) and that, in doing so, "he or she will always misrecognize his or her core being" (269). It is somewhat paradoxical, then, that one's "core being" is never fully realized, considering that the only medium one has available in which to attempt a comprehension of the subjective self is through an object. Lacan further contends that "The imago and the ego may get closer and closer together, but their intersection point is off in infinity: they 'asymptotically approach' one another" (268). This concept is reflected in Ashbery's poem: "The glass chose to reflect only what he saw / Which was enough for his purpose: his image. . . ." (188). Parmigianino's attempt at defining his self through an object fails because the idealized image of his self and his assertive "I" can never "intersect." And although he "'set himself / With great art to copy all that he saw in the glass,' / Chiefly his reflection" (188), therein lies the very problem: it is merely a copy and not the original. Parmigianino's imago is unable to amalgamate with his self because what is reflected in the mirror is an objective image and, more importantly, an *idealization* of his self rather than his genuine self. We see this false, idealized mirroring again further along in the poem: "You could be fooled for a moment / Before you realize the reflection / Isn't yours" (194). The speaker has changed from addressing Parmigianino in the third person to addressing the reader in the second person, so that the poem simultaneously distinguishes not only Ashbery's questioning of Parmigianino's self but also the larger, more general interrogations of the self as it is represented in art. Art's idealization "fool[s]" us in thinking that it is an accurate image of our selves due to the fact that it is our reflection, although the physical image cannot amalgamate with the internal self because, again, as Lacan asserts: "their intersection point is off in infinity" (268). Art, like standing in front of a mirror, reflects the best parts of us that we want to see. That is to say, when we stand in front of a mirror, we manipulate our faces to look their best, turn our bodies to their best angles, and so forth; however, the reflection staring back at us is not our true selves, but a representation of the best or most attractive version of our selves. We are utterly aware of our image staring back at us, thus making it a false reflection of our selves because no one is ever their complete selves when being watched, even if we are the ones doing the watching. In "'A Commission That Never Materialized': Narcissism and Lucidity in Ashbery's 'Self-Portrait in a Convex Mirror,'" Anita Sokolsky says that "We become the image, the painting, the perceiver, as we gaze; the self-portrait in a convex mirror traps us in a closed perceptual system in which signifier and signified circulate endlessly" (240). Indeed, Ashbery's speaker does claim that the "soul is a captive" (188), but our "becoming the image," as Sokolsky remarks, does not equate to a genuine representation of the self.

The very act of trying to define our selves or reality through a visible medium is limiting and flawed because the Real is merely a "horizon," and a horizon, as author Rossiter W. Raymond elegantly describes it, "is nothing save the limit of our sight." Perception exists on a continuum in that it is constantly in flux and cannot be accurately described through an object, although we attempt to do so again and again, as Ashbery writes:

Some day we will try
To do as many things as are possible
. . . . . .
. . . but this will not have anything
To do with what is promised today, our
Landscape sweeping out from us to disappear
On the horizon. (192)

There is a disconnection between the act of creating, the "do[ing] as many things as are possible" and the incorporeality of "what is promised." The words, like the "whispers out of time" (204) have no effect on what "will" (potentially) be done. Thus, even though one may try to preserve one's "promises" through a lasting medium that results from the act of creation because our "landscape[s]" (i.e., that which we have created) will eventually "disappear on the horizon," meaning that even with tangibility, our promises which have been made into landscapes will eventually dissolve into that continuum, that asymptote of our understanding of our selves. Additionally, the speaker's use of the future tense verb "will try" signals that the "we" he addresses is obsessed with planning ahead and preservation rather than living in the moment "with what is promised today." As a result, "things" become meaningless because they end up "disappear[ing] / On the horizon," the horizon, again, representing the continuum of the universe that is beyond our comprehension.

It is, after all, the universe that "Refus[es] to surround us and still [is] the only / Thing we can see" (198). For one thing to "surround" another, it suggests that that which is being surrounded is at the center; and, since the speaker claims that the universe "Refus[es] to surround us," it equates to the fact that we are not at the center of the universe in the literal and figurative sense. Yet, the contradiction or paradox in this line is that even though we are not in the center and the universe is "Refusing to surround us," it is all we can see, suggesting that it is, in fact, surrounding us. Additionally, our eyes—the medium for which we perceive and understand or make connections between the physical world and our incorporeal minds—convince us that it is so. Lacan similarly argues that "The function of the mirror stage thus turns out, in my view, to be a particular case of the function of imagos, which is to establish a relationship between . . . the *Innenwelt* [inner world] and the *Umwelt* [environment]" (271). In this way, the role of the imagos in Ashbery's poem is to attempt to serve as a mediator between the subject (*Innenwelt*) and the object (*Umwelt*).

However, in the introduction to "The Pose of Imposture: Ashbery's 'Self-Portrait in a Convex Mirror,'" Richard J. Lane asserts that it becomes quite "impossible to distinguish between the medium and the message. . . ." (216). Baudrillard's theories of simulacra show us that the Real, which was once an objectified original, does not exist (or, at least, does not liken to truth) because the Real is now a representation of something that has no original. Ashbery plays on this idea with his poem, which is a representation of a representation of a self. His poem identifies that if the self does not exist or have an "original," then it is false. Any kind of intangibilities—such as the mind, the soul, feelings, faith, et cetera—seem to lose their significance in Postmodernism, where the Real has been replaced by simulacra. Considering that these intangible (no)things like love are "shadowed, invisible, / Though mysteriously present, around somewhere" (198), that which is (intangibly) felt loses its existence unless objectified, and the only way the artist knows how to do so is to use art as its vehicle.

"Self-Portrait" distinguishes that the line between the Real and the representation of the Real is blurred by the layers of inevitable distortion that occur during the process of making or creating an object such as Parmigianino's painting: "The forms retain a strong measure of ideal beauty / As they forage in secret on our idea of distortion" (193). In

"Ashbery's 'Self-Portrait," Travis Looper claims that "Without that which is distorted there is simply nothing, nothing to be distorted" (454), suggesting the inevitability of our dependence on binaries to comprehend our selves. Audiences perceive art as beauty because it reminds them of their lives for what they *are* but also for what they are *not*. Their judgements exist on a binary, which is inescapable, finding meaning or relevance in something beautiful because it may represent their selves but also because it could very well not represent their selves. As the speaker in Ashbery's poem highlights in the following passage, the audience tends to project a beautiful, alternate reality onto the art or "forms" which are understood as representations of the Real:

> ". . . The forms retain
> A strong measure of ideal beauty," because
> Fed by our dreams, so inconsequential until one day
> We notice the hole they left. (193)

The "forms" are the artistic forms we create to represent an ideal reality; thus, art leaves us with a "hole" because our "dreams" are able to construct an "ideal beauty" that is not mirrored in our waking lives. Yet, paradoxically, these (tangible) forms can also nourish our (spiritual) dreams. In other words, these artistic forms can be inspired by our dreams just as our dreams can haunt us for not reflecting what we experience—what the Real consists of—in our waking hours, which is why the "'Realism in this portrait / No longer produces an objective truth. . . .'" (193). If truth is considered subjective and universal—existing on a binary—then art cannot equate to veracity because art's meaning exists on the continuum of the audience's fluxing perception.

Art's beauty is such *because* it is mysterious and cannot be pigeonholed, and that mystery is why audiences continue going to art museums: to remind themselves what their lives could be—to give themselves a glimpse of a fraction of a possible "reality." Although, Ashbery's speaker warns, "we must get out of it even as the public / Is pushing through the museum now so as to / Be out by closing time" (199). The audience pushes their way into the museum to indulge in this alternate, idealized reality, but then they also push their way out once they realize that they "can't live there" (199). One can dream up an artistic fantasy, but it is not the Real—and we cannot find any resolution through such a fantasy.

However, Ashbery's speaker realizes that "What is beautiful seems so only in relation to a specific / Life, experienced or not, channeled into some form / Steeped in the nostalgia of a collective past" (197). Interestingly, the use of the article "*a* specific Life" denotes an ideal, a fantasy rather than reality. It is a *type* of life, an existence as opposed to vivacity or as we see slightly earlier in the poem: "the normal way things are done, / Like the concentric growing up of days / Around a life. . . ." (197). Again, the "a" makes the distinction of a *kind* of reality, as Stamelman also notices: "[representation] is fated, like Parmigianino's self-portrait, to reflect images of a life not lied but staged, immobilized, and englobed" (620). Art represents how we see the world, but it also highlights the fact that we cannot comprehend our perceptions of the world without objectifying it somehow. Similarly, in "Art, Mimesis, and John Ashbery's 'Self-Portrait in a Convex Mirror,'" Ross Leckie asserts that "the connection between mind and world. . . . can be erased by our wish-fulfilling fantasies. . . ." (123-124). Our incorporeal minds try to make connections with the world so as to permanentize our place in it, but in doing so, our fantasies (or idealized realities) distort our understanding.

Ashbery's poem is entirely ekphrastic in that it is a detailed commentary on Parmigianino's portrait, but the speaker is also aware of the poem's own artfulness. Stamelman asserts that "Ashbery keeps his poetic expression free from the contamination of art's immobility . . . . mak[ing] ekphrastic immobility impossible; the ekphrastic object is perpetually in movement, swerving in and out of the poet's

consciousness; it never has time to lie still, to settle or harden into a solid object" (615), suggesting that Ashbery's language is more fluid or, at least, less fixed or "embalmed" as Parmigianino's portrait, leaving more room for interpretation. Ashbery's speaker, aware of the painting's fixedness, where the "soul is a captive," having "to stay where it is" (188), makes a distinction later in the poem of Parmigianino's inability to represent the Real (self) in his art:

> Yet the "poetic," straw-colored space
> Of the long corridor that leads back to the painting,
> Its darkening opposite—is this
> Some figment of "art," not to be imagined
> As real, let alone special? (199)

The imagery of the "long corridor" represents a linear, a set path to the painting rather than a continuum. The use of the scare quotes around "art" acknowledges that the portrait has no life of its own and that it cannot therefore accurately describe Parmigianino's self. The words "figment" and "imagined" cement this idea of fantasy, of a failed attempt to accurately represent the incorporeal self through a tangible medium, as Looper similarly writes: "Consequently, the soul (about as immaterial a thing as one can imagine) exists only in the viewer's perceptions and resultant verbalizings" (451). Words, although intangible themselves, at least have the upper hand in what Stamelman refers to as the "infinity of language," whereas Parmigianino's painting suffers from immobility and is therefore "subject to the poet's unlimited speculation" (620). However, Looper points out that "Words are themselves speculative mirrors, inadequate reflections of that toward which the poet and we momentarily aim our attention. In short, neither paint nor words . . . can hope to capture the essence of that portrayed. . . ." (452). The trouble, then, with "mirroring"—through either artistic medium—is that its meaning lies in speculation or interpretation, which is just as fluid as the medium it tries to compartmentalize.

In the age of Postmodernism, we cannot believe in something unless it is tangible; thus, the soul or the mind or the self must have some kind of physical representation in order for us to be convinced of its veracity, as the speaker tells us:

> In the circle of your intentions certain spars
> Remain that perpetuate the enchantment of self with self:
> Eyebeams, muslin, coral. It doesn't matter
> Because these are things as they are today
> Before one's shadow ever grew
> Out of the field into thought of tomorrow. (192)

We adorn our selves (eyebeams) with things (muslin and coral). The "eyebeams" represent not only the intangible self or (no)thing but also and, more specifically, the eyes, the "windows to our soul," while the muslin and coral are the tangible embellishments we ornament our selves with. Noticeably, there are more physical things than spiritual things in this list that the speaker gives us. Ashbery's speaker consistently mentions the eyes' function as a medium between the soul and the outside world and for which the self is able to comprehend itself as subject and as itself reflected in exteriors: "I see in this only the chaos / Of your round mirror which organizes everything / Around the polestar of your eyes. . . ." (191). The eyes are considered the "windows of the soul," but the speaker emphasizes the falsity in this assumption because they "Know nothing, dream but reveal nothing" (191).

The poem begins by calling attention to the distortion of Parmigianino's image, with "the right hand / Bigger than the head. . . ." (188), immediately asserting a tension between the hand, the vehicle for which one can create, and the head, the home of our thoughts, feelings, and being. In Parmigianino's convex mirror, "The soul establishes itself" while it is simultaneously "captive" (188), imprisoned in the painting

where "it is life englobed" (189), suggesting that the body is impermanent but the soul hopes that the self has the possibility to be infinite by creating some thing so that the soul does not remain (no)thing. But, while material things may last longer than the physical body, its significance only exists through perception, which is labyrinthine because a thing's "meaning" must come from a place of (no)thing. Defining the self through a tangible medium is therefore problematic because one's perception must go through layers of distorted vehicles such as, say, mirrors. In this way, if a continuum equates to immortality or permanence, then a binary must liken to impermanence.

Ashbery recognizes that the artist uses art as a corporeal medium to not only define or explain the incorporeal self but to also escape from life's binaries, namely, mortality: "The locking into place is 'death itself'" (197). Art exists on a continuum because its meaning and/or significance is asymptotic in that its interpretation comes from the ever-evolving perceptions of the audience. Further complicating the amalgamation of (no)thing (the subject) and some thing (the object), Ashbery's speaker asserts that this attempt at preserving the self as object *and* subject or object *as* subject cannot be done, especially in a postmodern world where "everything is surface" (190) because:

> . . . just as there are no words for the surface, that is,
> No words to say what it really is, that it is not
> Superficial but a visible core, then there is
> No way out of the problem of pathos vs. experience. (190)

Words cannot correspond to "what really is," what exists on the "surface," and there is tension between that which we see or perceive, the "visible," and that which is material, the "superficial." The way we experience "what really is" and the emotions associated with that experience never connects entirely to what is actually occurring in reality. Additionally, if we try to explain our selves, we fail because our words lack permanence; thus, we need *things*, we need to make or create some thing in order to give our selves not only permanence but also relevance. Considering Parmigianino, who, to better understand his self *and* to "rule out that extraneous forever" (192), paints a representation of his reflection. We don't want to understand our selves, we want to *make* them infinite because the only way we know how to do anything worthwhile is to create something—to have something to show. But, that reflection is distorted, just like our perception and ability to try and escape our binaries. Art tries to represent the Real by attempting to exist on a continuum, but Ashbery's poem exemplifies that we cannot escape these binaries and, therefore, our impermanence. In "The Pose of Imposture: Ashbery's 'Self-Portrait in a Convex Mirror,'" Lee Edelman proclaims: "Thus when the poet undertakes to portray himself—and in so doing to render himself both subject and object at once—he recognizes the impossibility of defining any indivisible identity" (100). Again, tying into Baudrillard's theories of simulacra, the subjective self cannot become the objective thing, especially if the self cannot be contained within a particular, unchanging definition. Ashbery's speaker laments at the end of the poem:

> We have seen the city; it is the gibbous
> Mirrored eye of an insect. All things happen
> On its balcony and are resumed within,
> But the action is the cold, syrupy flow
> Of a pageant. (204)

The city is the convexed image of humankind, which is an "insect" (small, pesky, easily killed, and fragile). The "balcony" alludes back to the previous assertions of the threshold of the universe: "But what is this universe the *porch* of / As it veers in and out, back and forth, / Refusing to surround us and still the only / Thing we can see?" (198, emphasis added). Additionally, the use of "pageant" ties into the inability of art to genuinely represent the Real, since a pageant is a pretentious display

void of anything of *real* significance or representation. We, then, are like insects in this vast, continuous universe; we try to "make" forever and make grand our selves with these things, which are unnatural, and, as a result, we end up taking away rather than adding to the whole, as reflected in the subsequent lines:

> The hand holds no chalk
> And each part of the whole falls off
> And cannot know it knew, except
> Here and there, in cold pockets
> Of remembrance, whispers out of time. (204)

We are "the whispers out of time," echoing T. S. Eliot's assertion that "This is the way the world ends / Not with a bang but a whimper"; our selves, our bodies, are our inevitable vehicles of mortality. It is interesting that the "hand holds no *chalk*," for chalk comes from crushed limestones or fossils of foraminifers (marine protozoans), thus adding to Ashbery's signifying of mankind's layers of impermanence. Chalk, which is essentially dead organisms, is made into a substance that is itself temporary, like the layers of reflections and representations in Parmigianino's portrait. Furthermore, chalk's impermanence adds to the irony because, if an artist has the intention of creating something on a continuum, then the artist surely will not use ephemeral instruments such as chalk or "[lift] the *pencil* to [a] self-portrait" (191, emphasis added). Similarly, Stamelman states: "The anxious scrutiny of a painting, a poem, a representation, a self, a life discloses nothing solid: no chunks, no truths, no final meanings. In the end, one is left only with . . . the infinite *mise en abyme* of critical reflection" (628). And so, the audience is placed along with the artist into the abyss, wanting to escape the self's impermanence by recreating it through a corporeal medium, an artistic continuum, but inevitably unable to do so.

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The Trouble with Monstrosity: Grendel's Mother and the Limitations of Gendering in *Beowulf*

Grendel's mother is an oft-ignored character within *Beowulf* scholarship and translations of the poem[1]. Scholarship concerning her character has focused on her place within the poem but tends to argue that she is either a mother or a monster[2]. While there is some nuance within this discussion that derives her monstrosity from her position as a mother, the central concern about Grendel's mother always seems to revolve around her sex and gender[3]. Moreover, the degree to which Grendel's mother deviates from her performance of gender roles that are associated with her sex and/or position as a mother determines her access to personhood. Although these arguments illuminate Grendel's mother's movement through gender boundaries, they also reinforce a binary structure of gender. Her resistance to solely masculine or feminine performances creates an anxiety within *Beowulf* translations and scholarship. Rather than allowing her character to occupy a space between genders, her gender fluidity is marked as monstrous. Translators and scholars write monstrosity onto her body to reconcile the anxiety she creates within *Beowulf* through her inconsistent performance of gender roles. Grendel's mother is transgressive because she occupies a cross-gendered space where she is neither masculine nor feminine, which creates slippage within performances of gender for herself and other characters in the poem.

Grendel's mother appears in the poem during three major scenes. Each scene highlights her antagonism within the poem to both the community and other character's embodiments of gender, specifically Beowulf and Hrothgar. Both of these characters are consistently set against Grendel's mother as a contrast of gender performances within the text. Their presence juxtaposed with hers unsettles notions of gender performance throughout the poem; however, she is the only character that is bemonstered for her deviation from gender normative behavior. The translation of her character throughout the poem and her treatment within Beowulf scholarship tether her to traditional notions of gender and limit her transgressive capacity as a character. This anxiety is highlighted in the text in our first introduction to her character. Shortly after Grendel's arm is taken, those in Heorot realize that "…his avenger still lived" (Chickering 1256). First, she is framed as an "avenger," but as the text continues she is soon depicted as a "monster woman" because she "kept war-grief deep in her mind…" (Chickering 1258-1260). This progressive bemonstering happens throughout the poem; Grendel's mother's monstrosity is attributed to her through her actions. In her article "The Masculine Queen of Beowulf," Mary Dockray-Miller argues that "gender is determined not by sex or status but by action" (Dockray-Miller 38). Gender is also determined by the relative action of others within the poem. Grendel's mother is perceived as a monster because the genders of the other characters who encounter her are unsettled.

In the hall scene with Grendel's mother, she takes back her son's arm and is described as both a mother and monster in this section: "And now his mother, still greedy for slaughter…[to] avenge her son's death" (Chickering 1276-1278). This line balances her stereotypically gendered position as a mother and her masculine performance as someone who is

seeking revenge for the loss of a kinsman. However, she is gendered later in this scene when the translator writes,"[i]n a rush she came in, and left quite as soon, to save her life, once they discovered her" (Chickering 1292-1293). The description of her character rushing to leave and save her own life seems counter to her description as a "monstrous mother." The poem's translation seems to oscillate between describing her moments of agency as monstrous and then diminishing her agency by describing her as flighty and weak. Conversely, her presence in this portion of the poem unsettles Beowulf's and Hrothgar's masculine positions. Robert Morrey argues: "[Beowulf] is most memorable in his capacity as the masculine warrior and king. Yet Beowulf also fulfills his society's idealized feminine role: that of peace-weaver" (486). Beowulf takes up feminine space when he bridges kingdoms by fighting for Hrothgar, but he later feminizes Hrothgar by seeking revenge in his stead. Rather than seek revenge for Aeschere, Hrothgar chooses to be enveloped in his grief, which more closely resembles the position of Hildeburh who is grieving the loss of her son. Alexander Bruce argues that Grendel's mother occupies a traditionally masculine role by seeking revenge for the death of her son while "Hildeburh is stripped of all right to such revenge for the death of her son, brother, and husband" (Bruce 5). This demonstrates Grendel's mother's transgressive capacity because she resists the traditionally feminine role as grieving mother in favor of masculine agency to seek revenge for her loss. Moreover, her presence has inverted Hrothgar's traditional gender role as king and later compromises Beowulf's masculine position as an avenger.

While Hrothgar's men are hunting for Grendel's mother, readers encounter the gendered anxiety that her character has produced within the poem. She is described by one thane as having "walked in the likeness of a woman" (Chickering 1351), and yet another remarks that "[y]ou still do not know the awful place where you might find the sin-filled creature…" (Chickering 1377-1379). These two thanes highlight the various forms of embodiment that are written onto her character. First she is a woman and then she is a creature. However, her capacity to seek revenge has inspired some thanes to gender her as masculine and refer to her as a male. " …[H]e will find no escape in the depths of the Earth, nor the wooded mountain, nor the bottom of the sea, let him go where he will" (Chickering 1392-1394). This progression of gender anxiety has been described by Jane Nitzsche in her article "The Structural Unity of Beowulf: the Problem of Grendel's Mother." She argues that, "[t]he role of woman in Beowulf primarily depends upon 'peace-making' either biologically through her marital ties with foreign kings…or socially and psychologically as a cup-passing and peace weaving queen within a hall" (289). Grendel's mother differs from this structured stereotype of medieval feminine gender roles because she is choosing to enact her female agency in an active rather than passive manner. Dorothy Carr-Porter argues that both Grendel's mother and Thryth act as "counter-example[s] to hostesses and peaceweavers" and have a "masculine manner," but Grendel's mother specifically exerts a more masculine influence because she is actively powerful rather than passively powerful through marriage (5). In this way, she fights against her traditional gender roles as a female and mother by acting in an active and masculine manner. This gender fluidity not only unsettles the gender in other characters but also changes her role within the poem with regard to community. Since she chooses to seek revenge for the death of her son, rather than passively resisting community, she is actively working to destroy the community and is, therefore, not a peace weaver.

This resistance to community and her ability to unsettle the gender of characters that she opposes continues when she fights Beowulf. In this portion of the poem, she is progressively more bemonstered by the translator. Gwendolyn Morgan argues that "Although Beowulf's final opponent has been viewed invariably as masculine, the symbolism and

language contained in its description suggest that this monster, too, is a manifestation of the feminine archetype" (61). Scholars like Morgan have argued that Grendel's mother represents the archetypical female and the anxiety she creates comes from a masculine need for Beowulf to destroy this ultimate female power. Though this argument is plausible, it ignores that most of Grendel's mother's power comes from resisting a stereotypically feminine position. She is increasingly denied both feminine and human space as she demonstrates physical strength and an active role in the poem.

The fight scene in the mere is the place where she is most referred to as masculine and monstrous. Alexander Bruce argues that "when [Grendel's mother and Beowulf] fight, there is a sense that she and Beowulf are more evenly matched than Grendel and Beowulf, for Beowulf is in real jeopardy during his battle with her" (Bruce 2). Since Beowulf recognizes Grendel's mother as an ultimate female power in this scene, Bruce's argument supports Morgan's assertion that Beowulf is trying to destroy what she represents as an archetype of femininity that endangers his existence. However, she also threatens Beowulf's masculinity because of her ability to occupy masculine physical space.

When Beowulf enters the mere the narration refers to Grendel's mother with a feminine pronoun. However, she is also referred to as a "water-devil" with a masculine capacity to be "war thirsty" (Chickering 1497- 1500). Her masculine traits do not garner her respect. Instead, they serve to distance her from personhood because the gender anxiety she creates in the poem causes scholars and translators to mark her as monstrous through language, thus diminishing her agency. During her fight withBeowulf, she grabs him with her fingers, which are bemonstered in translation as "her horrible claws" (Chickering 1501 - 1502). In this section, claw is first translated from gescōd (grip) and fingrum (finger), which indicates that it may be the translator at this point that is bemonstering her instead of the original text. In this section, she is also referred to as "the witch of the sea floor" and "towering mere-wife" (Chickering 1518-1519). She oscillates between being translated as feminine, masculine, and monstrous in this section, but her agency is consistently diminished through translation.

Grendel's monstrosity and gender are also defined against Beowulf's action. She is not only a masculine female, but an outsider when compared with Beowulf. The fight in the poem begins with Beowulf in power: "he seized her shoulder—welcomed that feud—the man of the War-Geats against Grendel's mother" (Chickering 1537-1538). Grendel's mother continues to unsettle gender boundaries, and she is bemonstered in what seems like an effort to reconcile the anxiety she causes as a character that transgresses gender boundaries and occupies cross-gendered spaces. Conversely, Beowulf's masculinity is only compromised through her ability to overpower him in the fight and, thus, feminize him: "[He] threw his opponent so she fell to the ground" (Chickering 1540). While Beowulf is able to grapple efficiently with Grendel's mother, her attacks only cause him to stumble. She briefly has the upper hand in the fight: "she gave him hand-payment with a terrible crush and grabbed him tight" (Chickering 1541-1542). However, rather than throwing her opponent to the ground, "[Beowulf] stumbled wearily so he fell to the ground" (Chickering 1544). Her agency diminishes as she fights with Beowulf and begins to overpower him. Christine Alfaro argues that monstrosity stems more from the alienation of Grendel's mother's character: "Grendel's mother might possess some attributes of what Gilbert and Gubar define as "monstrosity:" her character and actions defy traditional gender assumptions. This monstrous imagery does not lie in physical claws or in talons but rather in her alienation" (Alfaro 12). In this scene, her alienation is demonstrated through her linguistic bemonstering and her diminished agency within the fight. Despite this alienation, her place

as the villain is quite clear, but she is translated as less of a formidable opponent than she could be. This is because she is set against Beowulf in the fight and compromises his position as the masculine hero. The poem originally leaves room for Grendel's mother to be a formidable opponent who loses in the end because she is the villain. However, the translator chooses to make the character appear weaker in comparison to Beowulf. This treatment of her character reconciles the anxiety created from her transgression of gender boundaries because it allows Beowulf to exist as a masculine hero who is slaying a monster rather than a strong woman, which might be seen as a crueler act. It seems justifiable that "such a woman might be wretched or monstrous because she insists on arrogating the masculine role of the warrior or lord" (Nitzsche 289). Her deviation from gender norms threatens her intelligibility as a female character and unsettles the gendered occupations of the characters that surround her. Bemonstering her reconciles these issues; as a monster she does not threaten Beowulf's masculinity.

The anxiety that Grendel's mother produces for masculine characters is revisited in Beowulf's report to Hrothgar and Hygelac. In the report to Hrothgar, Beowulf gives a near honest retelling of the story and admits that his battle was not easy. Moreover, he admits that it took otherworldly intervention to win the fight: "Not very easily did I save my life in battle under water; performed this work with the greatest trouble; at once the fight was decided against me, except that God saved me" (Chickering 1655-1659). This report reflects the difficulty of his battle with Grendel's mother and gives her more agency because he concedes that he almost lost his life. However, the report to Hygelac is fraught with inconsistencies that illuminate the anxiety that her character produces.

While reporting to Hygelac, Beowulf spends more time talking about his fight with Grendel and minimizes his fight with Grendel's mother. His revision of this story only highlights her ability to unsettle characters. Dana Oswald argues: "Beowulf's revisions of these fights reveal his rhetorical savvy, but they also demonstrate his anxieties about the monstrous woman with whom he wrestles" (Revision 63). Beowulf describes his combat with Grendel's mother very briefly and from a position of power. Though he recounts them fighting "hand to hand," he fails to mention that his life was in jeopardy: "Down there, for long, we fought hand to hand; the mere seethed in blood, and I cut off the head of Grendel's mother in that deep [war]-hall with her own great edge" (Chickering 2137-2140) Beowulf places himself in a position of dominance over her monstrous and feminine being, saying "With no small trouble I returned with my life, not doomed at the time" (Chickering 2140-2141). He minimizes her impact in the fight. Oswald argues "Grendel's mother becomes a phallic and castrating woman—a creature whose danger depends on her status as a female—who takes on a phallic object in order to penetrate her attacker" (Revision 67). However, her ability to unsettle gender constructs does not solely rely on her ability to procreate without a male. It also relies on her ability to cross between and even blur gendered boundaries. Perhaps, as Carolyn Anderson argues, "rather than assimilating gender behavior to a strict hierarchy of biological binarism, I suggest that when seen as a matter of social function" (Anderson 8). If we look at gender performance as a social function, the power still rests within masculine spaces and actions.

Ultimately, if we are to read Grendel's mother as a gender fluid character, we can see that the power of her character rests in her ability to upset gendered spaces and actions. By marking her character as monstrous we are ignoring the imperative to deconstruct gender binaries. Alfaro argues that "it is possible that the feminist criticism of the past fifteen years has perpetuated, legitimized, and even institutionalized the idea of Grendel's mother as monster" (Alfaro 11). However, her linguistic and scholarly bemonstering functions not only to mark her as villainous but

also to re-inscribe her non-normative gender behavior as something that is abject. Renée Trilling argues that "the character of Grendel's mother functions as a critique, not only of the world of Beowulf , but of Anglo-Saxon society more generally; she stands as evidence of the many, many subjects whose positions outside social power structures both maintain and menace the foundations of culture" (Trilling 18). This move to mark her as monstrous may reconcile the anxiety that her character creates, but it also limits her agency within the text and ignores the importance of her occupation of cross-gendered spaces.

Endnotes

[1] Until the 1980's most *Beowulf* scholarship focused on Beowulf and Grendel. See Renée Trilling's article for a recapitulation of this scholarship

[2] See Nietzche, Acker, Hennequin,

[3] See Hennequin

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CERA SMITH

A Practical Panacea: Storytelling and Trauma in Alfredo Véa's *Gods Go Begging*

For hundreds of years, colonial groups in the Americas have used a variety of control tactics to exploit and subjugate individuals of color. This process, which I will refer to as "coloniality," is defined by Walter D. Mignolo in "Coloniality: The Darker Side of Modernity" as a "colonial matrix (or order) of power" (42) that causes the lives of individuals of color to "[become] expendable [for] the benefit of [colonial groups]," as justified by "the naturalisation of the racial ranking of human beings" (41). Consequently, individuals of color influenced by coloniality must deal with the inaccessible trauma of oppression, silencing, racialization, and isolation that are used by colonial groups to disempower them, keeping them at war with their own minds and at war with each other. Alfredo Véa's *Gods Go Begging* explores how the historical assertion of colonial power has traumatic effects on characters of color, and how they attempt to overcome these effects. In Véa's novel, characters use storytelling as a curative and preventative form of medicine to heal from the trauma associated with coloniality. Storytelling allows these individuals to heal through creative expression and community building, while also providing a method for subversively defending themselves against the intended effects of colonialism.

I. Storytelling Provides Healing through Expression

Throughout the novel, storytelling acts as a medium for creative expression that allows characters to give voice to their pasts and heal from the trauma of colonial silencing. Because historically oppressed individuals in the novel are unable to articulate their traumatic pasts (making it impossible for them to recognize the societal causes of that trauma), they become trapped within their own minds by the need to express themselves. To free themselves from this cathectic, debilitating cycle, characters use storytelling as a form of Freud's "talking-cure," where traumatized individuals tell stories as a vocal "type of testimonial" to inadvertently re-access "overwhelming experiences" (Visvis 92). According to William Arce in his essay "Landscapes of Trauma," an individual who has experienced trauma can only access the personal and societal significance of that trauma once "'what happened' [has been] articulated" and "voiced to a person 'designated' as listener" (Arce 111). In *Gods Go Begging*, the creative expression and linguistic freedom found in storytelling provides characters with what Cathy Caruth calls a "psychic meaning" for traumatic events that makes it possible for them to confront, process, and free themselves from the continual hold of colonial silencing (59). Caruth, in her book *Unclaimed Experience: Trauma, Narrative, and History*, claims that this inability to otherwise recognize the "psychic meaning" embedded within the mental maze of trauma happens because the events have been internalized "without any mediation," or without a mediating factor to assist in translating the raw traumatic event into a personally useful memory (59). Storytelling takes the trauma that, in its unarticulated form continues to haunt and disempower the individual, and allows it to be processed verbally and expressed in a way that releases the individual from colonial domination. While Freud's patients dealt with individual trauma, storytelling in the novel serves as societal therapy for oppressed communities to find healing through expression.

As an imaginative storytelling game of what-ifs, the "supposing game" offers characters in *Gods Go Begging* a form of Caruth's mediation that allows them to "talk about a different kind of world" and find a creative outlet for overcoming historical oppression (Véa 99). Although those who have suffered from colonial trauma are often plagued by what Bloom identifies as a "loss of language" and by "sense of 'speechless terror' that so often accompanies overwhelming life events," the storytelling of the supposing game gives participants the voice to comment indirectly on the impact of coloniality on their lives (Bloom 204). By participating, the soldiers are able to access their traumatic pasts indirectly, find the voice to express themselves, and heal from colonial oppression through the imagination of a world where "The Industrial Revolution would have begun in the wide streets of Tenochtitlán…[and] thirty thousand Aztec soldiers would have joined the Irish for an invasion of England" (Véa 118-119). This kind of creative imagining provides characters with the language necessary to comment indirectly on former trauma (in this case, the trauma associated with colonial oppression) and an instantaneous escape from the harshness of their traumatic realities. Storytelling makes it possible for them to "[forget] about the war that rage[s] around [them]" and experience relief through narrative expression (Véa 117). By using the game to re-engage the language of personal expression and creatively discuss alternative histories, the soldiers on the hill are able to express themselves freely and heal from linguistic oppression that they felt under a system of coloniality.

Likewise, Jesse Passadoble's speech to and conversation with Carolina at the end of the novel exemplify Jesse's use of creative expression to process traumatic events and to overcome the oppressed silence that prevents him from healing from that trauma. By verbally expressing himself, Jesse evaluates "in a contemporary setting" the trauma he has inherited, witnessed, and experienced (Arce 103). This provides Jesse

with a "contemporary stage on which the present can be understood" and healing found (Arce 103). Expressive storytelling provides the context that is necessary for Jesse to be able to understand the personal and societal meaning of his trauma. As Jesse tells Carolina about how Biscuit Boy's murder is intricately connected to Mai's and Persphone's murders and to his own time in Vietnam, Carolina encourages his healing from that terrible knowledge by reminding him that "you can't keep forcing your soul to mumble in code" (Véa 316). She recognizes that Jesse's story is filled with "an entire vocabulary taken from some arcane dialect of grief" that needs to be expressed in order for him to conquer the traumatized silence, produced by the legacy of coloniality, that maintains a stronghold over him (Véa 290). She reminds Jesse that the heart "needs to articulate," demonstrating her understanding of the benefits of creative expression in the process of healing from trauma (Véa 316). After listening to Jesse's story, Carolina challenges him to "[s]uppose [to] choose life," encouraging him to use his storytelling (in the same way that he used it in the supposing game) to process an inaccessible, traumatic past and imagine a positive future (Véa 316). Jesse can imagine a life of freedom from his trauma because his storytelling, as a medium of personal expression, allows him to confront his traumatic past. In this way, Jesse's storytelling functions as a "talking cure" and as a form of "representation that ultimately has therapeutic benefits" (Visvis 89). This verbal representation makes it possible for Jesse to re-access and reevaluate the trauma of his past, allowing him to heal from it.

II. Storytelling Provides Healing through Community Building

In addition to providing characters with a voice, storytelling acts as a healing agent by providing a way for characters to find connection through community building. These communities are necessary for those who have experienced trauma to feel safe enough to re-enter their personal or inherited traumatized memories. Within communities, characters are able to recognize that colonial groups have disempowered them and isolated them from one another (under the justification of racialization) to keep them at war with each other and oblivious to colonial control tactics. Storytelling releases characters from this trauma of isolation by encouraging what Svetlana Boym refers to as "diasporic intimacy," where individuals of color are able to come to term with their racialized alienation and "reconcile [themselves] to the uncanniness of the world" by creating communities of shared experience (Boym 501). Because "diasporic intimacy" can only be achieved through "indirection and intimation, through stories and secrets," community building makes it possible for characters to recognize how racialization has separated them and has used their trauma to incapacitate them (Boym 499). After making this realization, characters in the novel use storytelling to re-build communities actively, providing survivors with a network of supportive witnesses, whose presence makes it safe for the survivors to emotionally process and make meaning from their experiences.

The storytelling of the supposing game fosters healing via the creation of a community in that it is structured as a dialectic—where the therapeutic discussion that promotes healing is made possible by a community. The healing powers of storytelling come primarily from sharing those stories with others who have experienced similar historical oppression at the hands of colonial forces. The supposing game causes those affected by trauma to see the similarities between themselves, as they re-imagine history and dream of a different future. While using their storytelling to reevaluate their pasts and their relationships to other traumatized individuals, the soldiers on the hill come to see themselves as a community of people who are "all the same color as the clinging red dust around them," instead of seeing themselves completely in terms of racialized categories (Véa 101). Their stories, as "[c]onversations after

great sorrow," are described as having "a life of their own" that provide the soldiers who have been subjected to the divide-to-conquer politics of coloniality with the opportunity to heal and hypothetically experience, in communion with others, a life beyond their oppressed circumstances (Véa 102).

Additionally, storytelling during the supposing game allows characters, in community with others, to heal from a history of oppression by picturing their ancestors in alternative positions of social and political power. Doing so encourages those participants to see their social positions through new eyes and collectively regain power through the recognition of alternatives. While "supposing," the soldiers recognize that their ancestors could have "learned of the [hypothetical] defeat of Cortez and eventually realized that the bearded people were not god" and "seen the necessity of preparing for future invasions from Europe," which showcases their recognition of alternatives to the social and political circumstances that their ancestors experienced through the story-making of reimagined historical reflection (Véa 118). This reflection provides a method of reconciling with a past characterized by traumatic domination and of healing from that inherited wound through the reevaluation of it. Where colonial trauma isolates, shames, and stigmatizes, the storytelling within a community "creates a sense of belonging," as the community "bears witness [to] and affirms" the indirect reconciliation with the traumatic past (Herman 216). By recognizing alternatives, the group finds healing as they come to see themselves as circumstantially, rather than inherently or permanently, placed in submissive positions.

Through the creation of a community during their ritual storytelling, the defense attorneys at the House of Toast are able to heal from the trauma of the courtroom and their clients' cases. The attorneys draw together for an "act of ritual purification, an act of mending" as they undergo a "precious rite of common healing" by sharing stories of their clients (Véa 29). Storytelling within a community allows the lawyers to purge themselves of the trauma they have encountered. This type of storytelling is described as being "foxhole laughter soaked with *dolor* and with the great relief that remains when hours and days of mental trauma are now only harmless memories, though still very painful ones" (Véa 28). The presence of a community of individuals who can relate to the trauma that each lawyer faces enables them to process that trauma and assert power over what they come to recognize as "harmless memories." During their regular storytelling sessions, the lawyers are able to heal through mutual identification and emotional expression as the group heaves "a sigh of sad familiarity" and emits a "deep groan of pain and frustration" (Véa 41, 43). In this way, the group of attorneys "bears witness to [each] survivor's testimony, giving it social as well as personal meaning," and allows the traumatic past to be dealt with in a way that is beneficial for all participants (Herman 216). The attorneys use their group storytelling and their communal laughter as "rhythmic purging," because the constant pressure caused by trauma "had to be relieved somehow" (Véa 28, 37). The attorneys, in sharing their outlandish stories, are able to commiserate and share the burden of dealing with the extraordinary trauma that their clients face, providing the lawyers with a space to heal from that trauma as a group.

Similarly, the establishment of a community with Carolina is necessary for Jesse to be able to process the emotional and societal impact of the trauma he has witnessed and experienced. It is only after telling her the story of Biscuit Boy's case that Jesse is finally able to sob "endless, unstoppable tears; a long belated deluge for the children on the hill" and find cathartic healing from the trauma of colonial isolation (Véa 308). Without the encouragement and safety of telling his story to another person, Jesse would have been unable to confront the personal and societal significance of his traumatic past. After suffering from the isolation that

colonial groups use as a method of control, Jesse's storytelling allows him to physically and emotionally reconnect with people, namely Biscuit Boy, Persephone, Mai, and Carolina. While explaining the case, Jesse increasingly sees how "[his] own trauma is tied up with the trauma of another," as he verbally recognizes the significance of Biscuit Boy's, Persephone's, and Mai's stories to his own (Caruth 8). This identification of himself as a part of a community of those affected by the trauma of coloniality allows Jesse to understand his own trauma. As he uses storytelling to process this trauma, he gradually feels Carolina's "small hand upon his," highlighting an increasing feeling of connection to her (Véa 288). As he dictates his story, Carolina encourages him to refrain from speaking in code because "[n]o one can ever answer [him]" if he does so, underscoring the importance of a community in the process of using storytelling to heal from colonial isolation (Véa 316). William Arce would argue that, by listening to Jesse's story, Carolina becomes a "'co-owner' of the trauma" (Arce 111). She shares the burden of his trauma, making it safe for Jesse to "retrieve the traumatic event and bring it into consciousness" through articulation (Arce 111). Carolina, as witness, is instrumental in making it possible for Jesse to work through his traumatic past, and see a connected future for himself. At the end of the novel, Jesse is only able to heal from the trauma he has witnessed and see that "[t]here were survivors on the hill" after experiencing an intimate, sexual connection with Carolina, as he gives in to "his own human desire" and is healed by the "living heat of friendliest fire" (Véa 317). This ultimate form of connection is the key to Jesse's being able to confront his past and emotionally process it. His healing effectively disarms the colonial forces that would prefer him to be silenced and isolated by his traumatic past.

III. Communal Storytelling Prevents the Continuation of Colonial Trauma

Aside from just being a method for dealing with the past, storytelling also functions as a method for subversively preventing the long-lasting effects of the trauma caused by coloniality. Arthur Egendorf, in his book *Healing from the War: Trauma and Transformation After Vietnam,* claims that "all human communication provides opportunities for empowerment" (Egendorf 233). Storytelling, as a form of communication, empowers those who participate in it by providing them with the voice to challenge the existing colonial social structure and the community support system to resist colonial control tactics. It awakens a social consciousness in both the storytellers and the witnesses, making it possible for them to see the ways that racialization and the erasure of history have been used to isolate and disempower them. In response, these characters use storytelling to reconnect with each other and with their pasts to defend themselves against such domination.

The supposing game acts as a form of defense because it is a counter-history that defamiliarizes and undermines realist narratives. The supposing game allows characters affected by trauma to discuss critically the effects of racialization as they begin to realize that "[w]hite don't mean any more than black does" (Véa 119). By drawing attention to the arbitrary color lines created to disempower them, those who engage in storytelling are able to better understand their oppressed histories and prevent their isolation in the future. Those participating in the game are able to subversively question why "racism is a sacred thing" in the U.S., effectively reevaluating their places within a racialized system of categorization and separation, while also preventing the continual ignorance that such a system promotes (Véa 114). In doing so, the soldiers are able to imagine a world where "there wouldn't be no slavery in Russo-Aztlán and Kola-Quebec, because there wouldn't be no Spaniards

and no Englishmen," effectively reevaluating how the colonial past could have been different and how the future can be different (Véa 118). By subversively reimagining historical alternatives, the individuals who participate in the supposing game are able to recognize the possibility of an empowered future where they are free from colonial control, preventing their inherited trauma from maintaining an oppressive hold over them.

In addition to showcasing the ways that individuals of color have been systematically disempowered through isolation, the supposing game also prevents the cycle of colonial trauma by exposing the ways that racialization has been used to keep people of color at war with each other. The game allows them to recognize that they had been "drafted to help impose [the] U.S.'s transnational colonial ambitions on Vietnam, while civilian members of their community struggled to resist their own internal colonization in the U.S." (Arce 100). Communal discussion during the game helps the soldiers to see the connections between how colonial forces treated their ancestors and treat them at home, and how they are treating the Vietnamese. Participating in the game helps them to realize that "the horny Spaniards" who took advantage of their indigenous ancestors "posed a supremely logical and valid question" because "[a]fter all, there were so many beautiful women … in the Nam" that the American soldiers were taking advantage of in the same way that the Spaniards took advantage of indigenous populations in the past (Véa 113). The game's storytelling causes those playing to identify with the exploited positions of the Vietnamese, as they come to recognize their role in pushing a colonial power agenda abroad while fighting such an agenda at home. The storytelling highlights how racialization—the justification of the subjugation of people based on the ideology of race hierarchy— has pitted two oppressed groups against each other to keep them at war with each other, and oblivious to colonial control strategies. It causes them to see the irony of being in "Indian country," where the soldiers of color recognize that "[t]he Seminoles were out there, huddling and skulking beyond the berm" in Vietnam (Véa 119). In gaining this knowledge, the soldiers gain social awareness of their complicated positions within a racialized war. Only through this indirect form of storytelling during the supposing game are characters affected by trauma able to subversively discuss how racialization is a product of colonial history, and recognize how the legacy of coloniality continues to affect their lives at war and at home.

In response, the soldiers on the hill use storytelling as an escape from their disempowered social and political statuses, while also discovering pride in their diverse community. This pride allows characters to overcome the racialized borders that separate them, making it possible for them to band together in defense against colonial forces. Jesse invites his companions to participate in the supposing game with a friendly "*[s]upongamos, mis amigos*," using Spanish as a method of personal and cultural identification, and the nosotros form of the verb to highlight the collectivity of the game (Véa 111). Later, one of the soldiers poses the question, "*Mais dîtes-moi, mon frère*, how the hell could Mexicans be in space?" questioning in French how history could have been any different (Véa 112). In both instances, characters highlight their varying cultural backgrounds by using different languages to communicate. Instead of impeding their ability to understand each other, this code switching allows each member to place himself within the community of oppressed re-imaginers, while preventing the loss of his individuation by championing his cultural difference. Theresa Martinez calls this "thinking tribally," and claims that "[working] together in [non-homogenized] community to fight oppression" is a key feature of resistance storytelling (Martinez 41). Using storytelling to band together across racial borders allows the soldiers to collectively reevaluate and prevent the separation

and historical domination associated with coloniality.

The same collective power found through the supposing game is found in the community of defense attorneys at the House of Toast. In addition to being a support system for healing from past trauma, the community created by storytelling empowers the attorneys and prevents them from being subjected to continual colonial isolation. Jesse, while sitting at the House of Toast, recognizes that "[e]very lawyer at the table had suffered for his or her clients," and is able to feel a sense of community because he begins to see the lawyers like "his fellow soldiers in Vietnam" who act as "[g]runts of the law" and "field medics performing triage in the crowded jails and holding cells behind the staid courtrooms" (Véa 37). This identification reconnects Jesse with others who have experienced colonial trauma and shows him how his psychological separation from them has been used as a colonial control tactic against him. One of the other lawyers at the table gains strength in the recognition of community when he states that "[w]e of the defense, we of the single reasonable doubt, we of the long odds and the short end of every stick" gather to share their stories (Véa 37). The use of the term "we" serves as a therapeutic and empowering categorization that effectively prevents the trauma of coloniality from continuing to isolate the lawyers. The reaffirmation of a community empowers the attorneys, preventing them from the trauma of becoming desensitized to their work and to their clients, as colonial forces would prefer.

Jesse's interactions with Carolina at the end of the novel also showcase the way that the establishment of a community prevents the long-lasting effects of trauma. It is only after Jesse is reminded that he can still be in community with Carolina and the troubling stories of Biscuit Boy, Persephone, and Mai that it is possible for him to see the bright future of in the fact that "an Afro-Mexican deep-space probe, launched from a newly supposed world and fitted with sensitive recording devices, was searching the next star system for soundless scat and alien rhythms" (Véa 318). Once Jesse and Carolina have established a community, they are able to see the possibility of "Mexicans in space" more vividly, effectively preventing the internalization of their oppressed social standings. It is only after the reconstruction of storytelling "transforms the traumatic memory" that, in community, it can be "integrated into the survivor's life story" (Herman 175). Storytelling within a community allows Jesse to confront his traumatic past and transform his trauma into a weapon of defense. Storytelling—like an immunization meant to provide the host with a manageable dose of a hazardous element to arm itself against further danger— preemptively exposes Jesse to his subjugated relationship to colonial forces, giving him the knowledge to protect himself from colonial control tactics in the future. Instead of becoming jaded by the trauma of coloniality that he and his clients have experienced, Jesse's storytelling prevents colonial forces from convincing him that his and his clients' situations are inherent and permanent. This recognition allows Jesse to overcome the trauma caused by colonial powers and imagine a brighter future.

IV. Expression Defends Against Colonial Trauma

After recognizing the ways that colonial racialization has separated and silenced oppressed individuals, characters in *Gods Go Begging* prevent the continual trauma of those control tactics by subversively speaking out against them. The storytelling at the House of Toast acts as a preventative form of medicine as those at the table use their newfound voices to connect to each other and keep the history of their clients in constant memory. By continuing to recount the stories of their clients, the attorneys chronicle their clients' lives, creating a history that lives on in the minds of and informs the cases of the attorneys. This repetitive, vocal expression prevents the history of the attorneys' previous clients from being lost, as

colonial powers would like. Although the attorneys had "developed an immunity to the presence of the unbelievable" (Véa 41), their attempts at trading the cases that were too difficult for them to emotionally handle showcases an attempt to retain their humanity (Véa 43). In addition to providing healing from trauma, the lawyers' use of storytelling as a form of expression prevents them from forgetting the trauma of their clients' lives and prevents them from becoming hardened by repeated exposure to such trauma. This expression gives voice to their traumatized experiences and prevents the attorneys from being held captive within their own minds by the colonial trauma of silencing. By using vocal expression, the attorneys arm themselves against colonial domination.

Where the House of Toast patrons use storytelling to defy the traumatic erasure of history and the silencing of their voices, the soldiers playing the supposing game use it as a platform to expose how the erasure of cultural difference has been historically used as a colonial tactic for domination. Through the use of storytelling, the soldiers are able to discuss how the "simple idea of cultural difference as blasphemy is the very foundation of American racism," and recognize their collective disenfranchisement (Véa 114). By coming to this conclusion, the soldiers are able to confront their historical relationships to colonial groups and prevent the continuation of oppression by subversively verbalizing hopeful alternatives. They are able to creatively picture "the garden of Eden… filled with brown people," instead of picturing themselves in oppressed positions (Véa 116). Their expressive storytelling provides them with the language to question, at first in their native tongues (Spanish) and then defiantly in the language of the oppressors (English), why there cannot be "Mexicanos in space" (Vea 109).

The soldiers use their newfound voices to regain power and prevent themselves from being dominated by their colonial trauma. They begin to see themselves as "enthusiastic students around a noisy table in a coffee shop in Berkeley"— as educated, subversive, and revolutionary (Véa 113). It is this recognition of historical and future alternatives to the current social structure that leads one soldier to gain confidence in himself and say "[*a*]*ndale pues!*" when describing the Aztecs in a position of power rather than an oppressed position (Véa 119). In this way, storytelling becomes a "viable form of oppositional culture" as a "[critique] of the powerful" (Martinez 34, 39). The supposing game creates an environment where those who participate in it have the opportunity to creatively consider future alternatives to their social standings and prevent themselves from internalizing their current oppressed positions. This prevents long-lasting trauma by reminding them of how different things could be. Characters in *Gods Go Begging* use storytelling as an "effective means of communication" to process their traumatic pasts, and as a "conduit of compassion and catharsis" that prevents the legacies of coloniality from maintaining power over them (Ciocia 185).

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DEAN TSUYUKI

Through Their Flesh: The Body and Coloniality in Salvador Plascencia's *The People of Paper*

In his chapter on the visual effects of *The People of Paper*, Fabio Chee introduces the argument that Salvador Plascencia and his characters are all trying to save themselves from the omniscient narrator, Saturn, though Chee does not go into detail as to how this happens (118). One of the foundational modes Plascencia uses to write bodies is grotesque realism, which, according to Mikhail Bakhtin, is a means to subvert authority. For Plascencia, this subversion challenges the violence of coloniality depicted in the text. In order to illustrate this, Plascencia's characters violate their own bodies in order to resist different forms of a colonial presence. At the source of all sadness in the story, we find bodily transgressions as a response to the intersection of love and coloniality, such as Federico de la Fe, who burns himself in response to his wife, who abandoned her family for a White missionary. To justify this alignment, we may look no further than Maria Lugones and Gloria Anzaldúa, who emphasize the importance of love as a site of relief from the tensions rooted deep in the histories of coloniality. Plascencia represents in his characters the very essence of Anzaldúa's argument for love: "because change, positive and negative, is always a source of tension, because it has no sense of closure,

of completion, we resist it. We must be motivated by love in order to undertake change" (xxxviii). Anzaldúa sees coloniality through the absence of love, understanding that without it, the conditions for hegemony are supported. Plascencia writes the absence of love around the characters of his debut novel, and insodoing, the characters are motivated by the need to replenish this absence to resist the colonial presence permeating their lives. And it is Saturn, the omniscient narrator in planetary disguise, who not only acts as an oppressor, but also illustrates how the "human and the universe are in a symbiotic relationship, [and] that we live in a state of deep interconnectedness" (Anzaldúa xxxvii). Saturn represents this universe, but he is also represents the interconnected narrative he shares with his characters, all of which are motivated by love.

Saturn is traced in grotesque realism by the very characters he attempts to oppress. At the moment when he is revealed to be the author himself, he is not brought down to sphere of earth. Instead, he is visited by Smiley, who tears open a hole in the papier-mâché sky and pulls himself in (103). What was only understood by the people of El Monte as the planet Saturn extending his gaze onto Federico de la Fe and his people, Smiley reveals that Saturn is not only the narrator of their story in planetary disguise, but, too, a naked, vulnerable man entrenched in sadness after his love, Liz, left him for a white man, whose name is scribbled out in every page mentioned in the text. In this explicit subversion of authority, Saturn becomes material and real, and by not recognizing Smiley, is scraped of his omniscient power. This scene emphasizes a focus on the body at the moment when authority is subverted. Importantly, Saturn's body is not transgressed, a distinction necessarily contingent upon who holds power. Transgressions, therefore, only occur with characters that resist authority at moments of longing for love, not for those who are shed of power. This essay considers bodily transgressions as a simultaneous response to a longing for love and a resistance to coloniality. These transgressions are not made through natural physiological orifices (mouth, nose, ears, anus, genetalia), typical of grotesque realism; but rather, Plascencia writes bodily transgressions in violent ways—burns and cuts—creating new orifices, which reference a resistance to coloniality and its inherent violence addressed in the text.

In one of the foundational texts on carnivalesque theory, *Rabelais and His World,* Mikhail Bakhtin contends that the grotesque image, the form of carnivalesque theory, is an active subversion of authority, grounded and superimposed onto the material body: "The essential principle of grotesque realism is degradation, that is, the lowering of all that is high, spiritual, ideal, abstract; it is a transfer to the material level, to the sphere of earth and body in their indissoluble unity" (19-20). Though the grotesque image is not an inversion in its intent to subvert authority, inversions do exist as manifestations of the grotesque. These inversions are often represented through bodily orifices (nose, ears, anus, breasts, and genitalia). In his application of Bakhtin, Wayne Rebhorn reduces carnivalesque into three features: 1) there is reduction of elitism, 2) the players are socially marginalized people, and 3) the grotesque features become the identifiable characteristics of those people (98).

Plascencia's reference to the concept of coloniality signifies the importance of transgressing carnivalesque bodies as a form of resistance. I use the term, "coloniality," in the same way Lugones modifies its meaning from Anibal Quijano. In "Toward a Decolonial Feminism," Lugones defines it as "the process of active reduction of people, the dehumanization that fits them for the classification, the process of subjectification, the attempt to turn the colonized into less than human beings" (745). This definition is set within the context of gender, racialization and capitalist exploitation, inseparable factors in the process of coloniality. It, nevertheless, signifies how race and capitalist exploitation have (and still) functioned in the relations between the colonized and colonizers,

especially in the context of American colonialism. Plascencia does several things to indicate his reference to coloniality. Less obvious is his inversion of marked racial categories, a reading I borrow from the lens of Sally Robinson, who discusses how the black-white racial binary is skewed because "'white' is a normative category and 'black' a racial one" (29). Plascencia inverts Robinson's claim so that the only stated racial category in the novel is "white," which resists the active process of race-making by inverting what would normally be an unmarked, normative, racial category.

Playing the oppressor role, Plascencia also indicates the capitalist agenda behind the novel: everything in the novel becomes a commodity—even "the commodification of sadness" (218). The reduction of people into commodities and women more so as hyper-sexualized bodies, then, signifies the process of dehumanization within coloniality. Saturn is performing the role of the colonizer, who, in order to write his story—his history—reduces the people of El Monte into subjects, which they, in turn, resist. More explicitly, Plascencia's depiction of highly sexualized women, who abandon their El Montian lovers for white men, are simultaneously aligned with love and coloniality. Of these white men, Plascencia writes, "they colonize everything: the Americas, our stories, our novels, our memories" (117). Saturn's comment, which stems from his heartbreak from Liz, equates white males with colonialism, and in doing so, he draws upon what he thinks Liz wants in a man. At the same time, he is establishing the relationship between love and coloniality, whereby love is always accompanied within the context of coloniality. In doing so, responses to heartbreak become, in turn, responses to cultural hegemonic structures of oppression.

Further, coloniality, which directly references historical moments of violence against marginalized peoples, is also a reference to a documented history being colonized—a story untold by the marginalized. The war between EMF and Saturn is a characterization of this untold history. EMF's fight is one "against a story, against the history that is being written by Saturn" (209); it is a resistance to the oppressor's one-sided historical account. Just before Saturn starts the novel over in Part 3 without Liz, she interjects:

> I was going to stay quiet, let you write your story, let your history as you see it stand . . . In a neat pile of paper you have offered up your hometown, EMF, and Federico de la Fe, but also me, your grandparents and generations beyond them . . . and for what? For fourteen dollars and the vanity of your name on the book cover. (137-8)

Liz's interjection reveals how "Sal" exploited and commodified his people to tell his version of history. Liz's concern is not only that Sal leaves her out of the novel, but, too, that he has left out the voices of his own people. They have been silenced to the margins of the page, and upon realizing this, their strategy to overthrow the author changes. Instead of killing the omniscient author, they silence him to the margins of the page, just as he had done to them.

EMF's strategy provides them the opportunity to write their own history; it gives them space on the page. As a result, Saturn's body of text is inverted from oppressor to marginalized in EMF's subversion of authority. We can consider the basis for EMF going to war as a result of an unreliable author/narrator. That is to say, if Saturn gave his characters a voice, a body of text, war would likely not be on the table. In fact, Saturn's unreliability is even confirmed by Ralph and Elisa Landin, the millionaires funding him, who state, "if we had learned anything from this story it was to be cautious of paper—to be mindful of its fragile construction and sharp edges, but mostly to be cautious of what is written on it" (219). This statement reinforces EMF's effort to write their own history, which ties back to untold histories of violence during

colonialism.

EMF's realization that the war over a voiced history cannot be fought by encasing their homes with metal shells and staying silent, and it points to their new strategy for war. Froggy El Veterano, the veteran member of EMF, expresses this new perspective: "We believed that silence was our best weapon against the intrusion of Saturn, that our silence would in turn silence Saturn. . . history cannot be fought with sealed lips, that the only way to stop Saturn is through our own voice" (209). The emphasis on silence points to what may be the crux of Plascencia's novel: Plascencia is masquerading as an oppressor to probe the coalition-building among peoples whose histories have been silenced—in this case, EMF—in order to give them a voice. If we equate silence with an increased presence of coloniality, an interesting pattern emerges, where the digression of bodily transgressions corresponds to the progression of voice for EMF. By this, I mean that as EMF gains a presence in Part Three of the novel and forces Saturn to margins, scenes of bodily transgressions, especially for Federico de la Fe, go unmentioned in the text.

Yet, the self-inflicted violence against bodies in response to the duality of love and coloniality signifies the underlying commentary Plascencia writes about history, which can be placed alongside grotesque images of the body, as they function similarly: "the grotesque images with their relation to changing time and their ambivalence become the means for the artistic and ideological expression of a mighty awareness of history and historic change" (Bakhtin 25). This reading places grotesque bodies within a conceptual framework of history, so in the attempt to subvert authority, the grotesque image references resistances to historical forms of hegemonic power. Federico de la Fe, the father and veteran of EMF, who immigrated to El Monte with his daughter, Little Merced, uncontrollably urinates during his sleep and burns himself while awake in response to losing his wife:

> The night [he] dreamed of his wife, Merced, he awoke to a soaked mattress and the faint smell of wood rot. A puddle of urine gathered underneath his bed and stained the planks. When awake, Federico de la Fe could dull the sadness and memory of his wife with fire, but he could not control the alignment of planets or the heavy weight of Saturn while he slept. (52)

In an attempt to correct these bodily responses to love, Federico de la Fe would fight sleep, "resort[ing] to a self-imposed insomnia" and drank highly-caffeinated Maté tea, "letting the heat scald his tongue" (ibid). These self-mutilations continue in Part Two of the novel: he "sits at the kitchen table singeing flesh and sadness" while Little Merced slept (85), and a page later he "passed the flame over his stomach, singeing his straggling hairs into knobs and blistering his flesh" (86). In many ways, these mutilations are exaggerations of the body's tolerance for injury, as Federico de la Fe never seems to be seriously injured, despite the continuous physical damage he inflicts upon himself. With the same breath, an interesting paradox is represented in how the boundaries of the body are transgressed at the moment when Federico de la Fe is creating a metal boundary to obstruct Saturn's gaze. As opposed to an image of the body being closed off from the outside world, Plascencia inverts this image by transgressing Federico de la Fe's body with burns and creates a new boundary in order to reduce the authority of Saturn.

Federico de la Fe's bodily transgressions are complicated by a distinction between public and private. His responses to missing his wife, which are inherently linked to her new white lover, are violent acts made upon himself in private spaces of his body—his stomach and tongue—unseen by others. However, the death of his daughter, Little Merced, interrupts this privacy. Transgressions to his body "violated even his own rules of decorum, bringing fire to his neck and to the back of hands where everyone could see the burns" (196). Considering this not

in its binary sense—public-private—but rather as a progression in the intensity of self-mutilations, we find that Little Merced's death marks the climax of Federico de la Fe's conflict. Up until this point, he has engaged in a war over an oppressive author and lost his wife to a white man. Federico de la Fe's bodily transgressions reflect how he confronts these sources of violence that are attributed to coloniality. On the second day following Little Merced's death, he writes his wife a letter in hopes that she will come back, which, unknown to him, means stealing her back from Jonathan Mead, a Protestant missionary from England, whom she has chosen as her new lover. In this sense, Federico de la Fe's grotesque bodily transgressions become more pronounced as he comes closer to facing and thus resisting sources coloniality. He responds to the absence of his wife, inherently linked to the coloniality associated with white male characters in the novel, with inconspicuous inflictions to his body. Though the reader is aware of Merced's new lover, that Federico de la Fe assumes she has simply abandoned her family lends insight into the degree of his inflictions; they are kept private. So when Little Merced's death signifies an explicit act of coloniality by Saturn, who is playing the role of the "colonizer," the leader of EMF's war stops hiding his resistance, so much so that characters writing their history alongside him witness these transgressions.

Though the war against Saturn is one against an oppressive author, it does not factor in the parallel lives of Saturn and Federico de la Fe, who are both responding to a lost love, which are attributed to coloniality. In fact, Smiley's visit to Saturn's home reveals that he is actually "Salvador Plascencia de Gonzales" (102) experiencing the very same heartbreak, and whom Smiley extends his sympathy and spares his life: "While it is said that everything is fair in love and war, the dictum is nullified when both love and war occur simultaneously . . . there is an undeniable sympathy that must be extended when a woman leaves a man" (105).

Smiley's revelation introduces the duality of Saturn's identity: he is both Saturn and Salvador. For Salvador, the non-planetary flesh form of the author, the body, too, becomes a site on which to respond to coloniality. To an extent, Plascencia's body is fully transgressed to the point where he completely decomposes:

> This is what happens, the natural physics of the world. You fuck a white boy and my shingles loosen, the calcium in my bones depletes, my clothes begin to unstitch. Everything weakens. I lose control. The story goes astray. The trajectory of the novel altered because of him. They colonize everything: the Americas, our stories, our novels, our memories. (117)

Salvador's body not only breaks down in response to Liz's new lover, its decay is superimposed onto the town of El Derramadero, a city characterized by its decomposition as a result of white colonization. Kevin Cooney discusses this scene as a "postcolonial model of coming to terms with his nostalgia and sadness" (211). Cooney argues that Plascencia aligns his body with El Derramedero to illustrate the process of coloniality, itself. In addition to the body being broken down, Plascencia also aligns his resistance to colonization with Federico de la Fe; however, "in this version, instead of leaving him for his inveterate bed-wetting, [Liz] leaves him because she is seduced by a white man, Jonathan Smith" (Cooney 211). While Cooney does not acknowledge that these white colonizers share the same first name, Jonathan, it does reinforce this mirroring of two characters. That is to say, Plascencia writes the same story of heartbreak onto Federico de la Fe and Saturn, reserving roles for both the colonized and the colonizer.

Returning to Bakhtin's discussion of the grotesque image, we find that "one of the fundamental tendencies of the grotesque image of the body is to show two bodies in one . . . from one body a new body always emerges in some form or another" (26). Bakhtin posits this

body-doubling to a representation of old and new or birth and death. The body, therefore, is superimposed onto another to characterize this shift. Understanding this doubling is contingent on a strict definition of Plascencia's forms. In essence, Plascencia has three forms: Sal (the author as a fictional character), Saturn (Sal in planetary disguise, playing the role of the oppressor), and Plascencia (the author of the text). When Sal and Federico de la Fe are superimposed onto one another, Sal is in his literal human form, not his pseudo planetary form.

This distinction draws attention to the body as flesh, and thus, the lowering of all that is high—the subversion of authority (Bakhtin 20). To an extent, Plascencia is aligning himself (Sal) in sameness to Federico de la Fe. He is, therefore, no longer a symbol of coloniality, but instead resisting it. In her discussion on the symbolism of bodies in the process of nation building, Maria Zamora argues, "the body is not only symbol, but materiality situated within the contingencies of history" (138). Her argument places the body within the conceptual framework of history and imperialism, a framework Ramón Saldívar attributes to *The People of Paper*, which he calls "postrace." For Saldívar, "post" is a conceptual prefix to refer "to the logic of something having been 'shaped as a consequence of' imperialism and racism" (575). Zamora and Saldívar's frameworks speak to one another, as one conceptualizes the body into history while the other posits race (and racialized bodies) within the context of racism and imperialism. These frameworks inform a reading of Plascencia's superimposed body as *in experience with* Federico de la Fe, for both bodies are transgressed as a result of love's association to coloniality. Importantly, it is not the author's body, but the character's body that is doubled, so that in this overlay of unity through heartache between the two characters, there is an element of death or deconstruction for the author, who is no longer in control of these fictionalized material bodies.

Within the context of coloniality, female bodies are presented in stark contrast to their male counterparts. And we learn early on in the prologue the conditions around which to consider bodies. Visualized in three stages, Merced de Papel is constructed by the first origami surgeon using the index pages of medical journals, leaves cut out of Austin, Cervantes, Leviticus and Judges, and *The Book of Incandescent Light* (14-5). The operating table on which Merced de Papel is created symbolically alludes to the operations on which Plascencia writes bodies and, conversely, implicates how bodies are to be read. Our first image of the paper woman is not one of completeness, but instead, one whose body is influenced and defined by an authoritative outside world (canonized texts) and its relationship to text. Yet, even upon her completeness, walking out of the factory and into a storm, a new image is created: "the print of her arms smeared; her soaked feet tattered as they scrapped against wet pavement and turned her toes to pulp" (15). Not only are the histories that make up her body distorted, but, too, she begins to decompose in a way similar to El Derramadero. Plascencia writes images of construction and decomposition through Merced de Papel's body as an underlying feature of bodies throughout the text.

To add to her carnivalesque quality, authority is immediately subverted when Antonio, Merced de Papel's maker, is written as an allusion to God. Grzegorz Maziarczyk's reading of *The People of Paper* argues that the line between fiction and reality is blurred, allowing the characters to come to life. He discusses the scene of Antonio lying on the floor and considers two perspectives: "On the level of the presented world, it can indicate that Antonio is being punished for usurping God's prerogative [and] on the symbolic level, it can be construed as literalization of another critical metaphor . . . that of the death of the author" (63). Either of Maziarczyk's readings give birth to an uncontrolled life of Merced de Papel. His reference to Barthes' "death of the author" permits Merced de Papel to be uncontrolled in the same way EMF fights to be

uncontrolled to write their history, and likewise how Plascencia's material body as "Sal" supersedes any authorial figure (the author himself) that would resist an alignment with the very people he oppresses. These examples illustrate the diminishing and repositioning of power of the author by the characters that are marginalized, which bring into question the power of the author.

Plascencia writes Merced de Papel in a similar light to Liz and Merced, both of whom are "colonized" by white men. Aside from being constructed by paper, a strong emphasis is placed on Merced de Papel's sexual experiences with other men. She is literally known for how she is sexually penetrated. In this sense, like Liz and Merced, her hyper-sexuality represents her body as a commodity, despite all its humanness. Plascencia's depiction of Merced de Papel places her body at important intersection between coloniality and violence. She represents the many conflicts Plascencia addresses in the novel: she is paradoxically made of paper but undocumented (198), a woman with no concern for nostalgic love histories (168), and she is a superimposition of Liz and Merced and thus a representation of coloniality's presence. Though Merced de Papel is made of paper, we can assume that minimally she represents women of color. That she is sexually available for her many lovers may be Plascencia's commentary for woman of color as victims of coloniality. Importantly, and though she is sexually available to *many* men, Plascencia reverses this victimization by reappropriating her identity and inverting it, which ultimately leaves her male lovers as victims of heartbreak.

The "folding" of Plascencia's narrative into Merced de Papel's body is identified by Maziarczyk who posits, "[her] overwritten body is a paradoxically literalized symbol of the genesis of characters and plotlines" (70). As the oppressive author of the story, Plascencia uses Merced de Papel's body to symbolize the transgression of female bodies by colonizers. We see this intersection in Saturn's identification as a white colonizer: "Four years of war to prove that I too am a colonizer, I too am powerful in those ways. I can stand on my tippy toes, I can curl my tongue and talk that perfect untainted English, I can wipe out whole cultures, whole towns of imaginary flower people. I can do that too" (238). Saturn, justifying his colonialist alter ego to Liz, aligns himself with the very center of coloniality. So when we learn that Merced de Papel once "had to strip the whole of her back where someone had written the name Liz a thousand times over in blue ink" (165) the image of her female body being sexually colonized and superimposed onto Liz's body becomes a pronounced image of female bodies more generally. That is to say, for female characters sharing an intimacy with Plascencia, their body becomes the center of heightened sexual transgression. Thus, Liz, Merced, Merced de Papel, and Cameroon, do not get loved by their lovers, but rather fucked.

Unlike Liz and Merced, Cameroon, Saturn's "cold-weather fuck" (226), resists his sexual violences by numbing herself with beestings. This is not to say that Saturn rapes Cameroon, but like all characters who fall on the receiving end of coloniality's violence, Plascencia writes their bodies in ways that resist oppression. So for Cameroon, beestings become her source for bodily transgression: "she sat alone in her upstate New York apartment holding a jar of honeybees, pressing stingers into her forearms. At night when the poison brought the fever, she peeled off her shirt and pulled down her panties, stretching, her feet pushing Saturn from the bed onto the floor" (121). We might consider these beestings as a drug to numb Cameroon of coloniality. Saturn represents the reduction of people into commodities—dehumanization—so by numbing herself of him, Cameroon is articulating a resistance to the violence he represents. Beestings become equal sources of resistance to the commodification of a sexualized female body. At one point in the novel, even Saturn partakes in the ritual of numbing himself from the

colonialist persona that embodies him:

> He watched as the bee threaded its way through Cameroon's hair, emerging on her stomach. He lifted the bee by its wigs and pressed it into his arm. When the poison entered his body, suddenly swellings his veins and slowing the blood, all these things disappeared from Saturn's mind: 1) The war with Federico de la Fe, 2) Cameroon, 3) Liz. (130)

The image of beestings as a drug to drown out the process of coloniality overtaking Plascencia's character takes place at the scene of intimacy and love between the two characters, yet, at the same time, it signifies the intersection of violence against the body at the moment of resisting this very process of coloniality. For Cameroon, beestings are a more effective source of resistance than sexualizing her body: "she said that when one is sad there is only insects or sex. 'Honeybees or fucking,' she said" (128). In choosing beestings, Cameroon chooses to violently transgress her own body, which, in Bakhtinian terms, subverts Saturn's authority. The juxtaposition of beestings and sexuality are important measurements of bodily transgression. By this, I mean that Plascencia's representations of resistance seem to be dictated by a character's distance to sources of oppression—the closer one is, the more forced and violent these bodily transgressions are.

So for Liz and Merced, who are only depicted by Plascencia as traders for giving in to White colonizers, they become commodities of coloniality. Conversely, Cameroon's body becomes a commodity to Plascencia—who has identified himself with White colonizers—and, too, a site of violent bodily transgressions where new protuberances and orifices are created. Her resistance is dictated by her body's placement within the history being told. In other words, Saturn's manipulation of history, which is also being challenged by EMF, is another factor to which Cameroon responds: "'Fuck Saturn,' she said. 'He's not telling the whole story.' And this was why she left him, because he was a liar" (135). By also challenging the credibility of the author, Cameroon's role in the story is, in turn, compromised. And so Saturn kills her off in an almost casual way:

> Cameroon opened the novel and discovered she had been eaten by sharks . . . This was the fate of women who know too much, women who can upset the pride of Saturn. Because ultimately Saturn was a tyrant, commanding the story where he wants it to go. That is why they [EMF] fight against him, why they hide under lead and try to push him to the margins. But Cameroon was just one, not a gang or an army—easily flicked from an African cliff. (227-8)

This death of Cameroon is, like many deaths in the story, a plot device written by Saturn. That is, it functions to feed Saturn's power, which grants him the authority to continue manipulating the story; however, Cameroon would be unable to open the already published novel and learn of her death, which may be metafiction at work here.

In much the same way, Merced de Papel's death can be read as a Saturn vs. Plascencia dichotomy. It may be Plascencia becoming more accepting of his lost love, Liz, who we learn permanently moves on and whom we see playing we her grandchildren generations later (245). As a representation of Liz, Merced de Papel still lives on despite her body being splattered on the shattered windshield (198). Plascencia reminds the reader that "her history was on the lips of her lovers, the scars that parted their mouths. . . that was the history of Merced de Papel the lover . . . the history of the pain in touching her . . . the legacy she left in scar tissue" (ibid). In this sense, Merced de Papel represents the women in the novel, who, through their intimacies with men associated with coloniality, cannot die. She is a paper manifestation of these female bodies. At the end, when Saturn focuses on Liz's paper finger pointed at

the ringed planet in the book she reads to her granddaughter (245), we can read this as the superimposition of Merced de Papel onto Liz.

If deaths are anything but real in the novel, Little Merced's death is quite possibly the epitome of fiction; Plascencia literally resurrects her body. And if anything is to be equated in her death, it is its cause: "citric poisoning" (195). Little Merced's resistance to Saturn comes in two forms. Plascencia writes grotesque realism on her body by burning her tongue with the acid of limes. Her vice of eating limes is a reflection of Merced, her mother who also had the dangerous habit, and to whom Federico de la Fe is also responding with his body. Her sadness for her long lost mother is represented through physical pain to her tongue. Her burns become a response to Jonathan, the White colonist, taking Merced from her family. Outside of this bodily transgression, she resists Saturn's coloniality by learning to black out sections of text from baby Nostradamus, which is perhaps the reason for her death: she, like Cameroon, disrupts the omniscience of the author through her subversive blacked out shapes. By hiding her text, she is silencing her narrative—symbolized in the burning of her tongue with limes—from Saturn's view and simultaneously supersedes his power.

Returning to where we started, the evidence to Chee's claim can be found in the characters' longing for love—they are all trying to save themselves from this sadness. Anzaldúa characterizes Plascencia's characters and their struggle to deal with heartbreak, whether from a missing wife or mother, a long lost girlfriend, or being in the presence of an oppressor. Change comes in the form of each characters' resistance to coloniality, which Plascencia writes onto their bodies. When Anzaldúa states, "change, positive and negative, is always a source of tension . . . it has no sense of closure, of completion, [so] we resist it. We must be motivated by love in order to undertake change" (xxxviii), she underscores the very plotlines of the *The People of Paper*. Federico de la Fe and Little Merced self-medicate by inflicting violence onto their bodies in response to Merced leaving, but in this process, we see the love between the father and daughter, who, in the end, are written with minimal closure. They walk off the page, "leaving no footprints that Saturn could track" (245), and they seem to have learned to accept the absence of Merced, but the isolated blacked-out circle on the very next page seems to suggest that oppression is still a possibility. Perhaps Plascencia's intent is to suggest that despite there being no sense of closure, we should not resist protesting a colonial presence like Saturn if we are motivated by love.

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