

*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 750-1000 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](mailto:editor@watermarkjournal.com) and address all submissions to:

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## *Watermark 2008*

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# Watermark

Volume Two, 2008

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*Editor's Note*

As this journal goes to press, it represents a milestone for the graduate program in English at California State University, Long Beach. With last year's inaugural volume we began an important journey, and with this second volume we hope that we have set a precedent of publication for years to come. We believe that exposure to—and participation in—the world of academic publishing is critical to the professionalization of graduate students; but more importantly, we believe that students at CSULB and at similar programs elsewhere have innovative and exciting ideas that deserve to be heard. I am very proud to present you some of those voices in *Watermark* 2008.

Within this volume you will encounter a brief testament to the high quality of scholarship currently being produced by students at this campus and at universities across the country in the fields of literary criticism, rhetoric and composition, and critical theory. We have striven and, I think, succeeded in selecting a body of work that represents the broad interests of students in all these fields. Present here are studies of wide ranging works from Kate Chopin and Henry Miller to Charlotte Dacre and Alan Ayckbourn as well as considerations of issues from the Virtual Domain to Affirmative Action. I hope that you will enjoy the journey through these diverse and inspiring topics as much as I have.

This project, of course, would not have been possible without the hard work and dedication of many people. I would like to express my profound thanks to everyone who has helped to bring this journal to fruition. In particular I would like to acknowledge Brookes Little, whose inspiration and diligence first brought *Watermark* into existence last year, and whose mentorship prepared me for this role. I would also like to extend my extreme gratitude to the *Watermark* 2008 staff for all their input and effort; special thanks are due to Dean Tsuyuki for creating a cohesive image for this journal. I wish, as well, to acknowledge my immense indebtedness to Dr. George Hart, our faculty advisor, whose patience, faith, and gentle leadership have been invaluable to the completion of this volume. Equally invaluable has been the support of Dr. Eileen Klink, Lisa Behrendt, and all the faculty and staff of the Department of English at California State University, Long Beach.

This volume was made possible by the Instructionally Related Activities Fund at CSULB.

Aaron M. Carroll  
*Editor*

**From Outlaw to Oracle:  
Opposing Views of the Homosocial Dynamic in *Sula*  
by Shaheera Shamim Ali and Geri Lawson**

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*Shaheera Shamim Ali earned a Bachelor's degree from Karachi University, Pakistan, majoring in English literature, philosophy, and political science, and another from California State University, Long Beach in English. She is currently juggling the multiple personas of wife, new mom, graduate student at CSULB, and research junkie. She believes that with this collaboration she has not only found the way God intended scholarly articles to be written, but also her academic doppelganger in the genius of Geri Lawson.*

*Outlaw women are fascinating—not always for their behavior, but because historically women are seen as naturally disruptive and their status is an illegal one from birth if it is not under the rule of men.*

—Toni Morrison (Foreword to *Sula*)

**GL:** In these lines, Morrison is implying that, socially, female existence outside of patriarchal society is considered dangerous. Of course, no

character is a bigger threat to the community of the Bottom than the eponymous heroine, but hidden behind the town's contempt for Sula is a threat far greater than one 'outlaw woman' can pose—an outlaw female-female relationship. In *Sula*, Morrison depicts homosocial bonds in the African-American community as sites of personal growth and liberation, whereas heteronormative values within the novel establish narratives of domination and suppression of female individuality. Therefore, the relationship between Nel and Sula is a symbol of feminine transcendence over the masculine ideals that demand that these types of relationships between women be silenced.

Before closely exploring the dynamic between Nel and Sula, we must ask from where this dominating masculine narrative comes and how it is a result of racial shaming. From the opening scene of the novel, it becomes clear that the Bottom is founded through principles of "racial shaming" (Bouson 49), where the history of the community begins as a "nigger joke" (4). The origin of the town is traced to a white master who tricks his slave into believing that he will be given a profitable piece of land in return for completing complicated chores, and who ultimately convinces the slave to take an agriculturally barren plot at the top of a hill by persuading him that it is "the bottom of heaven" (5). This moment of historical shame where racial hierarchies of power are established influences the way the community views itself; although the people of the Bottom are able to laugh about their history, they recognize that "laughter was part of the pain" (4). It becomes clear, then, that these principles of masculine domination are inherited—and later internalized—from white patriarchal culture.

The Bottom applies these hierarchies to race by establishing a black male patriarchy that mirrors white male patriarchy, a process that allows the community to internalize masculine dominance in relation to gender. This idea is most aptly embodied in Jude's failure to earn a job building

the New River Road, a job that he idealizes for its masculine energy and community: "He wanted to swing the pick or kneel down with the string or shovel the gravel [. . .]. More than anything, he wanted the camaraderie of the road men" (81-2). It is Jude's rejection from this community of working men, being passed over for "thin-armed white boys," (82) that leads him, out of rage, to seek marriage with Nel. Jude is projecting the white masculine values that rendered him powerless onto his relationship with Nel, seeing marriage as a way to "take on a man's role anyhow" (82). Jude needs Nel to establish a sense of power which will complete him as a man, with "the two of them together mak[ing] one Jude" (83). Of course, missing from this definition of marriage is the autonomy of Nel; she loses any sense of self, even her name, becoming a figure that exists only to make Jude's sense of power and masculinity complete.

If we see Jude and Nel's relationship as an extension of the community's internalization of masculine hierarchies, we must examine how gender is constructed. Judith Gerson and Katherine Peiss claim that when gender is conceptualized, men and women tend to either fall into roles of "domination" or "negotiation"; domination is the process by which "women are oppressed and either accommodate or resist," whereas negotiation allows for "men and women [to] bargain for privileges and resources" (Gerson, Peiss 322). When this theory is applied to the Bottom, we see that this community only allows for roles of domination, where women like Nel and Helene accommodate to the patriarchal, submissive roles of women, or women like Eva, Hannah and Sula, who resist the oppression that these masculine (and, ultimately, white) ideals demand. As far as I can see, there are no examples of heterosexual relationships in the Bottom that allow for negotiation for power between the sexes.

While heterosexuality does not appear to permit negotiation for power in this community, the female-centric bond allows for the black women in the community to negotiate for privileges. I do not claim, as Barbara

Smith does in "Towards a Black Feminist Criticism," that *Sula* is a lesbian text (although I do see erotic elements in Nel and Sula's relationship that I will explore later), but I do believe that if we are to assert that gender is socially constructed, we must also explore the ways in which sexuality is socially constructed, especially in order to define the dynamic relationship between Nel and Sula. I am interested in Adrienne Rich's definition of heterosexuality as a "political institution" that is a site of domination when applied to women (Rich 647) because heterosexuality fails the women in the novel, not allowing them to attain any sort of equality. The fact that Nel and Sula acknowledge at a young age that they are "neither white nor male, and that all freedom and triumph was forbidden to them" forces them to create an identity outside of these gendered, racial, and sexual constructs, so "they set about creating something else to be" (52). These women realize that under masculine heterosexual power they will never be able to form personal identities outside of their male partners, and, as Deborah McDowell has stated, Morrison is "equat[ing] marriage with death of the female self and imagination" (82).

The "something else" that Sula and Nel must create is their homosocial bond, so it is no surprise that directly following this revelation they embark on one of the most enigmatic, imaginative, and sexually charged scenes of the novel: the metaphysical coming-together and transcendence they achieve while playing by the river. If Sula and Nel are replacing heterosexual relationships with their friendship, then this scene is the consummation of their bond. After Sula hears her mother's admission that she loves her but does not like her, it is Nel's call that soothes her, "pulling her away from dark thoughts back into the bright, hot daylight" (57). The comfort that Nel provides for Sula is silent, as both appear to understand that they must find a place of their own, away from their families and the boys playing by the river. The personal space they create is erotically charged, a reflection of the "wildness that

had come upon them" (58). They may not be cognizant of what these impulses are, but they are aware of the changes in their bodies: their "flesh tighten[s]" and "shiver[s]" as they feel their "small breasts" and the "pleasant discomfort" that laying on the ground together creates (58). While the language in this scene is suggestive, the symbolic copulation is confirmed when the girls peel the "thick sticks" to expose their "creamy innocence" and penetrate the ground (58). They "rhythmically and intensely" dig two holes "deeper and wider" (58) until they come together to form one (w)hole. The eroticism of this scene invites the reader to make the connection between the Sula/Nel dynamic and heterosexual relationships, but to read this scene as purely sexual is to ignore the result of the consummation—the metaphysical symbiosis of the two girls. Adrienne Rich calls this female bond the "lesbian continuum," which includes a range of "women identified experiences" that are not necessarily limited to desiring genital sexual experiences with another woman, but include "embrac[ing] many more forms of primary intensity between and among women, including the sharing of a rich inner life, the bonding against male tyranny, the giving and receiving of practical support" (Rich 648-9). I read this "sex scene" as the girls' initiation into the lesbian continuum, where they can unite and support each other in their struggle against masculine domination—that is, if the bond can be sustained. This is the moment that Nel and Sula become one and the same—a moment that is sustainable for Sula, but not for Nel, who is on her way to becoming dominated by the masculine narrative that demands she leave Sula for a heteronormative existence.

Sula rejects the submissive roles that are determined for her by patriarchal standards with the death of Chicken Little. By "coaxing" Chicken Little to climb up and down the tree, then throwing him into the river, Sula is rejecting the masculine narrative that demands that women feel maternal love. With her newly empowered existence in the lesbian

continuum with Nel, Sula realizes that there is a place for her outside of the male tyranny and dominance that the Bottom offers, and so the death of Chicken Little is Sula's moment to "embod[y] the anti-maternal spirit" (Eckard 57). Sula's journey up and down the phallic tree is symbolic of her ability to conquer, and therefore reject, masculine power, a rejection that is solidified with Chicken Little's death. The image of Nel "standing below, squinting up at them" (92) also presents Nel's inability to transcend the way Sula can; Nel is too consumed by the white patriarchal standards to sustain her symbiotic relationship with Sula, and, thus, the rejection of female determinism. The fact that Sula is able to sustain this anti-maternal spirit is confirmed when she returns to the Bottom as an adult and Eva tells her, "You need to have some babies. It will settle you down" (92). Even Eva, who rejects a stable heterosexual relationship, is stuck in the patriarchal structure which assumes that being a stable woman is being a mother. Sula does not submit to these principles, asserting "I want to make myself" (92), choosing instead to develop an identity outside of heteronormative conventions.

Of course, the symbiosis does not last for long and is disrupted when Nel marries Jude, as Nel recognizes that "weddings always meant death" (78)—in this case, the death of Nel and Sula's homosocial connection. But Sula still feels a strong connection to her childhood friend, which may help to explain why she sleeps with Jude. When Sula returns to the Bottom, she still views Nel as "an other and a self" (119), connecting with the strength of their homosocial bond that was confirmed the day at the river. Since Sula sees herself and Nel as essentially the same person, her sexual experience with Jude is an act of monogamy and sharing, just as she and Nel had always "shared the affection of other people" (119). After Nel's hurtful reaction, Sula is genuinely surprised because she must face that fact that "she and Nel were not one and the same thing" and that "marriage, apparently, had changed all that" (119). The possessive

and dominating nature of heterosexual marriage in the novel suppresses the oneness between Sula and Nel, so when Sula sleeps with Jude she "implies that Nel herself has been the traitor" (Stein 148) because Nel's repulsive reaction is a denial of the symbiosis and monogamy that Sula had assumed they had sustained.

**SA:** I agree with your argument that an outlaw female-female relationship is troublesome for a patriarchal society because of its potential threat to masculine control. However, it is important to look at homosocial bonds critically, without falling into the trap of romanticized notions of same-sex relationships. Gender itself does not predicate the success or failure of a relationship; after all, not all women are essentially nurturing and not all men are innately destructive. It would be dangerous to ignore similarities between the two sexes and diversity within one. Morrison is just as suspect of homosocial bonds as heteronormative ones since neither of them is sustainable. The reason that both heteronormative and homosocial relationships are fragmentary and illusive is that they are based on patriarchal principles—the same principles on which the society of the Bottom is based—that equate power with possession, or, as you read it, "domination." In order to form masculine identity, men try to possess/dominate women, the process of which gives them power over women. In the homosocial bond between Sula and Nel, Sula wishes to possess Nel in order to gain power that would be denied her any other way. Their relationship is not inherently one of transcendence, even if it has the potential for it; because of the power dynamics between the two, Nel's individuality once again has limited growth, mirroring her dilemma in the Jude and Nel heterosexual bond.

Jude and Nel's relationship is based on the sexual division of labor. They both inhabit gender roles that are specific to their work, as Jude, the male, must be "ambitious, independent, and self made," whereas Nel, the ideal woman, must be "attentive, compassionate, comforting

and cooperative” (Thompson 559). According to Thompson, this kind of marriage, based on symbolic distinctions between men and women, “constrains [the] possibility of care”, forcing the woman to take on the responsibilities of love, defined by “self-sacrifice, emotional warmth, expressiveness, vulnerability, and sensitivity” (559). The image of the autonomous man is just as restrictive, leaving no room for him to express care and concern for the family or to show vulnerability. Nel is forced into the role of the ideal caretaker who provides support for the husband, while Jude has no choice but to be the man as defined by patriarchal principles. Both Nel and Jude suffer from this kind of marriage because it does not allow for any self-development. Jude, because of the internalization of white patriarchal principles, dominates Nel. His relative control of resources leaves Nel in a subordinate position, motivating her to anticipate his needs, thereby further confirming her submissiveness (Thompson 562). This aspect of their relationship is highlighted in the scene when Jude comes home from work to see Sula and Nel talking together, and “Nel, high-tuned to his moods, ignored her husband’s smile saying, ‘Bad day, honey?’”(103). Nel is ready to fill her role of compassionate wife, and Jude too, is expecting “his story to dovetail into milkwarm commiseration” (103), thereby reinforcing Nel’s submissive role.

The fact that Sula does not allow Nel to fulfill this role for Jude in the dynamic created between Nel, Jude, and Sula is interesting as it can be read two ways. Sula believes that Nel should have some amount of autonomy and that Jude needs to break from the traditional role of the plight of the black man and move on. I believe, though, that this is a moment of jealousy for Sula, because she sees Jude’s demand for sympathy as an intrusion into her friendship with Nel. By taking Nel’s attention away from Sula, Jude is breaking up the women’s monogamous relationship in the same way that Sula breaks up Jude and Nel’s

monogamous relationship when she sleeps with Jude. Sula’s relationship with Nel, then, also becomes one of control and domination, within which Sula becomes the aggressor and Nel remains in her submissive role. According to C. K. Reissman,

For most women, marriage is just one of many close ties. Many wives report that trouble arose when they were needed by family and friends but husbands resented the time wives spent with others. For most men, marriage is exclusive, primary, and private; they want the undivided attention of their wives. (qtd. in Thompson 562)

Nel, like most women, considers her marriage and her friendship with Sula as part of a “web of relationships” (Thompson), but Sula, like most *men*, sees their relationship as exclusive and primary. Unlike Nel, who plays the traditional gender role of caretaker in the marriage, Sula identifies with the masculine role. She rejects the feminine while adopting the masculine, “the result of a female mind completely controlled by male type thinking” (qtd. in Pessoni 443), thereby reproducing the same problems evident in heterosexual relationships. The transcendence you so wish Sula and Nel to achieve through their homosocial bond becomes ephemeral, as the only moment when it is achieved is in the sexualized scene of the creating of the (w)hole. Because of the patriarchal infiltration into Sula’s psyche, the women’s friendship—the site of potential liberation—becomes a site where patriarchy is perpetuated. Nel is unable to negotiate for privileges in her relationship with Sula, though you say she should be able to in a homosocial bond, in the very same way that she is unable to negotiate for privileges in her heterosexual relationship.

To understand the reason why Sula rejects femininity and accepts masculine thought patterns we have to look at her relationship with Eva, her grandmother and the matriarch of Sula’s house. Sula views Eva as “the living embodiment of the Terrible Mother, a destroyer” (Pessoni 443) because she is terrified of what Eva does to Plum, Eva’s son: “All I

know is I'm scared. And there's no place else for me to go. We all that's left, Eva and me. I guess I should have stayed gone. I didn't know what else to do" (101). For Sula, femininity and motherhood are not roles of nurturance and care; instead they are frightful, destructive ideals. She cannot conceive of maternity in any other terms, as she expects that she will be the next one to be burned by Eva, unless she rejects her grandmother and all she stands for and accepts the patriarchal principles that allow her to put Eva into a retirement home without feeling guilty of not fulfilling the traditional feminine role of caretaker. This is also the reason Sula can watch her mother, Hannah, burn and not help her because she fears the feminine mother will take over not only her autonomy, but possibly also her life.

In this context, the scene where the girls dig the holes can be read differently. I agree with your interpretation of it as "the consummation of their bond" but I think that even within this moment of transcendence, there is a foreshadowing of the fact that their homosocial bond will eventually fail: "When the depression was the size of a small dishpan, Nel's twig broke. With a gesture of disgust she threw the pieces into the hole they had made" (58). Subconsciously, Nel is aware that they will not be able to maintain the equality in their relationship, because Sula is the more aggressive and assertive of the two. Even when the two girls confront the bullying Irish boys, it is at Sula's urging; Nel would rather have avoided the boys altogether. The power dynamic between the two, though not quite so pronounced as in later years, is evident even in childhood, with Sula taking the more masculine, confrontational role and with Nel in the subservient position. In this moment of consummation, which you believe is when Sula and Nel become one and the same, is, I believe, a moment when Sula takes over the friendship to dominate Nel; instead of "the two of them together mak[ing] one Jude" (83), the two of them together make one Sula. This is also the reason why this moment is

sustainable for Sula, but not for Nel, because while Sula is able to define herself through this relationship, Nel, as the subjugated one, needs to look elsewhere for self-development, which is what makes her move from the homosocial circle of friendship towards a heteronormative relationship.

With your reading of Sula's rejection of maternity at Chicken Little's death, I think you are absolutely correct, but then we must also consider the fact that Morrison problematizes this situation, as she highlights the fact that in order to escape predetermined feminine roles Sula must kill Chicken Little. In a sense, Sula is replaying what she is running away from, by mirroring Eva's killing of Plum by killing Chicken Little. The only way that Sula can attain power is through destructiveness and domination, by killing a little boy and dominating Nel. I believe that at this point in the text, Morrison is inviting us to judge Sula because in order to retain agency, she has to destroy a life. It is also important to note that in this scene, with the arrival of Chicken Little, Nel tries to assert her dominance over him. She tells him to stop eating snot, and when he tells her to shut up, she can challenge him to come up to her and say it to her face (59) because of the fact that he is a smaller child than she is. At this point, Sula stops Nel, wanting to retain her own position in the dominant role in their relationship and to eliminate the possibility that Nel might challenge her authority in the future." Instead, by "coaxing" Chicken Little to do what she wants and then killing him, Sula is exhibiting the power she has and warning Nel about the repercussions of a possible defection from their relationship, possibly a foreshadowing of her sleeping with Jude.

In a similar manner this pattern of domination and control is continued when Sula imagines breaking down Ajax's body into pieces. While most critics read the Ajax and Sula relationship as one of equality, I think that the interiority of Sula's thoughts during their lovemaking rejects such a reading. The poetic language of the interiority can be misleading,



disguising Sula's wish to break Ajax down in order to dominate him: "And if I take a nail file or even Eva's old pairing knife—that will do—and scrape away at the gold, it will fall away and there will be alabaster. The alabaster is what gives your face its planes, its curves" (130). Sula needs to break Ajax into fragments because he is not easily dominated. Her metaphorical breaking of his body, his layers, is a way for her to penetrate him through the phallic symbol of the knife so that she can perform her masculine role of domination. In order to preserve her power in this relationship, Sula has no other recourse because she cannot dominate Ajax the way she does Nel; hence her wish to break him down.

Ajax provides Sula with the opportunity to engage in what Thompson calls an "interdependent ideal" relationship, in which "both partners are obliged to nurture the other, attend and respond to the other's needs, and encourage and promote the other's" (560) self-development. Sula rejects this opportunity because for the first time she "beg[ins] to discover what possession was" (131) apart from her possession of Nel. She realizes that her successful possession of Ajax would give her more power, because he, as a man, would not be an easy target for domination. However, her bid for power fails as Ajax leaves before Sula can possess him. We must also be cognizant of the fact that when Ajax and Sula's affair occurs, Sula has already jeopardized her relationship with Nel by sleeping with Jude, so she is desperate for an affirmation of her authority.

At the opposite end of Ajax and his offer of equality stands "the terrible Shad" (61) and his offer of a different kind of relationship with Sula. According to Lewis, Shadrack

is Sula's ancestral presence—a representation of an ancestral spirit, a husband, a father, a provider dispensed by the gods to 'always' be there for the displaced Sula. Theirs was a spiritual kinship—metaphorically, a marriage of a traditional West African water spirit/priest to a water priestess, both oracles of a river god. (92)

In the traditional role as father, husband, and provider, Shadrack would effectually take away Sula's control, thereby dispossessing her of power and agency. This explains why Sula is scared when she goes to his cottage, because she is aware of the fact that she would not be able to maintain any autonomy or power in a relationship with him. Vashti Crutcher Lewis argues that Sula is linked to Shadrack ontologically because of the birthmark on her eye, which he is able to identify correctly as a tadpole, a creature of the water (93). Sula wishes to deny this link with Shadrack, as she enacts the meaning of her name in the African Babangi language: "to be afraid, to run away" (Lewis 91). She cannot form this bond with Shadrack because even as it promises her the place of priestess, it also relegates her to a position of submissiveness by stating the fact that Shadrack would "always be there for her." The phrase "always be there" implies a system of support but this is negated by the fact that he would also be her provider, giving the phrase an ominous undertone of suppression.

Now that I have established Sula's need for power through domination, Nel's confrontation with Sula at her deathbed can be better understood. Nel asks Sula: "But what about me? What about me? Why didn't you think about me? Didn't I count? I never hurt you. What did you take him for if you didn't love him and why didn't you think about me? [ . . . ] I was good to you, Sula, why don't that matter?" (144). At this point in the text, Nel is finally demanding an explanation from her best friend about the way she has been treated. I think that it is not just a matter of Sula sleeping with Jude but also about the way she failed to take Nel and her feelings and her liberation into account. Nel keeps repeating "what about me?" because she has been ignored for so long in their homosocial dynamic. Sula's response, though, to her friend's question further reiterates my argument, as she says: "It matters, Nel, but only to you. Not to anybody else" (144). This is a blatant statement of

Sula's wish to dominate and suppress Nel, while completely destroying Nel's self-worth. I think it is apt when you say that Sula transfers blame onto Nel for Jude and Sula sleeping together from Sula's point of view. However, I don't think that this is necessarily the way Morrison wants readers to see it. In the scene when Nel discovers Jude and Sula together, Morrison is tilting the balance in favor of Nel. I believe that Morrison makes a conscious decision to only allow Nel's perspective about the betrayal into the text, thereby making the reader identify with Nel's situation, rather than Sula's. Axel Nissen makes the point that "Morrison uses formal devices to guide our ethical appraisal of the characters" (275); by manipulating shifts in narrative focus, Morrison is able to maneuver the reader's response to different events and characters. In this way, sympathy is gained for Nel through a shift in focus as we hear about the events from Nel herself. This impression is further strengthened by Nel's reflection on the tie Jude has left behind, and "that the monologue that comes closest to Joycean stream of consciousness is placed last makes it the final word in the matter" (Nissen 274). The fact that it is almost like stream of consciousness is important because it involves the reader in the very process of thought-formation. Nissen asserts that "the connotations of the form are sincerity, intimacy, and reliability" (273), ensuring that our response in reading this would be one of sympathy for Nel, rather than Sula.

Continuing with the last conversation between Nel and Sula, Nel says that even though Sula agrees that they were good friends, she "didn't love me enough to leave him alone. To let him love me. You had to take him away." Sula replies: "What you mean take him away? I didn't kill him, I just fucked him. If we were such good friends, how come you couldn't get over it?" (145). Sula's egotism becomes apparent here as she is unable to see Nel's point of view and insists on her own interpretation of the events, that Nel should be able to get over the fact Sula slept with Jude,

even though Sula herself is unable to forgive both Nel and Jude for their relationship. Elizabeth Abel posits that

Sula can offer Jude the freedom to choose her without feeling she is betraying Nel because Nel will either see the experience as Sula does and disdain a marriage bound by obligation rather than choice, or she will see it differently, thereby destroying the foundation of their friendship. Friendship for Sula demands complete identification. (428-9)

This further attests to the fact that Sula is unable to take Nel's individuality into account within their friendship. She refuses to take responsibility for her actions, and instead blames Nel for not identifying with her completely. Despite the fact that it is Sula who takes the action, it is Nel who must save the relationship at her own expense, by denying her anger and confusion, and continuing with her role of subservience. We have reason to ask that if they were such good friends, why couldn't Sula accept that Nel wanted a relationship with someone else, and that perhaps Nel has needs that Sula is unable to fulfill?

**GL:** You claim that Sula desires masculine control which results in possession and domination, but Sula simply states that it was not until she met Ajax that she was able to "discover what possession was" (131). Sula discovers what it means to possess when she involves herself in the masculine culture that values heteronormative constructions. I agree that Sula's interiority when she is with Ajax reveals her wish to dominate, but this wish is only materialized when she is rejected by Nel. The dissolution of what Sula perceives as their transcendent homosocial bond forces Sula to seek the sort of possession that she sees in the heteronormative relationships in the Bottom. The Nel/Sula bond is much more than ephemeral for Sula, who carries the unity of herself with Nel until she returns to the Bottom. This seeking does not last very long, however, and Sula feels a sense of relief when Ajax leaves, afraid of her potential

to destroy when involved in a heterosexual relationship outside of casual sexual contact.

I also feel that you come dangerously close to falling into the same logic that the Bottom is consumed by, that Sula's agency somehow makes her masculine. If anything, Sula's ability to assume a role of domination would disrupt the gender constructions of patriarchal culture that define power as masculine; I believe that Morrison is rejecting the gender constructions that make women like Sula dangerous. I also wonder, if Nel is just as submissive to Sula as she is to Jude, then why does she mourn her rejection of Sula at the end of the novel, chanting her name and painfully acknowledging that "All that time, all that time, I thought I was missing Jude" (174)? Here, Nel realizes that she should have been valuing her homosocial bond over the heterosexual relationship with Jude that was so easily shattered. In other words, why does Nel mourn Sula if Sula has assumed the same role in Nel's life as Jude?

**SA:** The reason why I define Sula's power as masculine is because her power is used as a tool of domination, instead of liberation. Perhaps this is an essentialist reading of power as a masculine trait, since I do think that it is important, and I mention it in my response earlier, that we acknowledge that there is diversity within the sex. That is to say that not all women are nurturing, hence it is entirely possible for Sula to be a dominating force even though she is a woman. However, the fact that her relationship with Nel is based in a patriarchal society that denies her any semblance of power unless she uses the methods used by men to attain it says a lot about her need to take on the masculine role. The need for control and power may have become concrete with Ajax's arrival on the scene, but perhaps with Nel, Sula is acting out a subconscious need that she is unable to identify or articulate. I think that because her relationship with Nel has its beginnings in childhood, that it escapes the kind of adult scrutiny that her later relationships endure.

To answer your question about Nel mourning Sula, I think that in the length of time that Nel has been grieving the death of her heterosexual love, she has given herself the time to come to terms with her loss, whereas she has not been able to mourn for the loss of her friendship with Sula—hence the gray ball of strings hanging over Nel's head that she refuses to acknowledge until the end of the novel. I also think that the reason why Nel needed to turn to Jude in the first place, (because she was unable to find liberation and self-development in her bond with Sula), is also the reason why she is able to get over Jude more easily. While in her marriage Nel has been conforming to the role of the caretaker, without any scope for growth, in her relationship with Sula she has experienced at least a moment of transcendence, even though I still think it is ephemeral for Nel.

**GL:** Okay, I now see how you are defining Sula's place within these social gender constructs, and I agree that Sula's power can allow her to step into the masculine role, but I do think that the idea that the only way to gain power or agency is through dominance is not one that Sula creates on her own, or even willingly adheres to until she assumes a heterosexual role.

From Sula and Nel's very first encounter they know that they are "fortunate" because their friendship "let them use each other to grow" (52). So, if Sula is using Nel as an object to be dominated, Nel is using Sula just as much in her own process towards initiation into adulthood. Perhaps, under your reading of the dominant narrative in the homosocial bond, Nel is using Sula as practice for becoming a "good," submissive wife, but I think that this reading could potentially invalidate the freedom that *both* women gain from their homosocial relationship. When Nel marries Jude, the narrator recognizes that Sula had "seemed always to want Nel to shine" (84). If Sula assumes the same role as Jude in their interactions with Nel, then I could never see Jude wanting to let Nel

“shine”; he seems to want quite the opposite, only seeing himself in Nel, not her potential for greatness. The homosocial bond need not be romanticized in order to offer more for these women than that of which their heterosexual relationships are capable. Perhaps we should be asking why these relationships between women are so threatening to patriarchal culture, threatening enough to be considered outlawed. What does this internalization of white masculine standards mean to the community, and why do these rigid concepts of gender and sexuality need to be enforced on these women?

So, while I do not necessarily agree that Sula assumes the same sort of dominant position over Nel that the masculine narratives demand of heterosexual relationships, I do see how the symbiotic relationship between the two women becomes problematic. Since Nel is only drawn to Jude because he “saw her singly” (84) and not as Sula/Nel, then the homosocial bond does not sustain transcendence; in fact, it may be Nel’s desire to break free of her close (perhaps too close?) relationship with Sula that leads her to marry a man who represents “shame and anger” (84).

**SA:** I understand what you are saying, that perhaps at some point I need to differentiate between Sula and Jude playing the same role. I agree that Sula does want to see Nel shine, and my reading of her character could be erroneous in that I assume that Sula is motivated completely by ideas of domination and power. Her motivations might just be misguided, instead of outright evil, and Nel’s subsequent suppression might be something that she is unable to reconcile because she would not purposely hurt her friend. Of course, when you say that Nel might be using Sula for her own purposes, as practice to become a “better” (read: submissive) wife, we also have to take into consideration whether or not she has the agency for this.

Chikwenye Okonjo Ogunyemi characterizes “the relationship

between Sula and Nel [as] complementary and contrasting. Nel is supposedly reasonable, Sula instinctive” (131). I think that Nel’s more rational response to Chicken Little’s drowning (“Where’s the belt to your dress?”) (63) and Sula’s subsequent terrified silence and breakdown into tears support such a reading of their characters. Perhaps this explains why Sula is able to continue with her domination: because her actions are not thought out or planned, but, instead instinctive, and, hence, she remains unaware of her culpability. It also brings a new perspective to Nel’s character: perhaps she is capable, through rational thought and planning, of using Sula. This is an extreme reading of Nel, though, but it helps us see that she is just as responsible for her own domination, and for continuing to accede to Sula and Jude’s domination. I don’t think that this reading of Nel’s character would necessarily invalidate the freedom that both women think they gain in their relationship, but it does stress that both partners need to be self-aware and perhaps that the transcendence they would achieve through self-awareness would be sustainable.

I think the nature of the relationship undermines patriarchal principles, as Nel and Sula, even with the pitfalls in their relationship, are able to find a moment of transcendence which appears to be completely unavailable in a heterosexual bond. If women are able to find such freedom in same-sex relationships, they would no longer, as you say, be driven into marrying men like Jude. The problem for patriarchal culture then would be rethinking constructs of marriage for more egalitarian roles within it and would play into the masculine anxiety about confusing gender.

**GL:** What we need to do, and what Morrison is implying that black communities such as the Bottom need to do, is merge these opposing views of Nel and Sula and what they represent. I agree with the end of your last statement that what the Bottom fails to do, but needs to do in

order to allow for healthy bonds within *and* outside of heteronormative values, is to develop a more egalitarian construction of marriage. In order to accomplish this society of love and acceptance, I think we can agree that the racial emasculation that the black, male community feels and then distorts into hierarchies of gender where masculine is dominant over feminine needs to be eradicated. This process would involve the recognition and reception of the lesbian continuum, where women are able to bond in a way that they cannot with men, while also valuing the male community.

While this may seem somewhat idealistic, Morrison implies that it is possible when Sula first returns to the Bottom, as Nel, Sula, and Jude are able to laugh and bond together. In this moment, Nel realizes how much she has truly missed Sula and remembers her love for Jude, which had “spun a steady grey web around her heart,” but is rejuvenated into a “bright and easy affection” (95) in the company of Sula. Here, Sula’s presence is not dominant or destructive, but invigorating. She is even able to lighten Jude’s mood with her “odd way of looking at things” (104) because she does not appear (here, at least) to internalize the hurt and shame that is essential to white patriarchal domination in the novel. This is one of the most touching scenes in the novel because it implies a reciprocity between male and female, but not just in a heteronormative sense—the three, together, achieve a happiness that they cannot find on their own anywhere else in the novel. This also underlines the fact that if the Bottom were able to accept women like Sula, women who challenge constructs of gender, race, and sexuality, as more than an outcast or outlaw, they might be able to transcend the internalized shame that typifies their community.

**SA:** Yes! I think that your reading of this crucial scene brings a clearer understanding of why Sula and Nel’s homosocial relationship is so complex and short term, since it is still situated within a patriarchal

culture that excludes relationships like the potential Sula, Nel and Jude relationship of equality. The fact the Morrison does include such a moment of egalitarianism between men and women leads me to think that she is hopeful, as you are, that the possible eradication of gender hierarchies can take place; I agree that there is hope for such a bond to form, but I think that it would be a complex and difficult goal to achieve. After all, at the end of the novel, Nel and Jude are alone and Sula is dead, implying that this might not be attainable in the text. I agree with you, though, that for the black community, in general, it could potentially be a way of combating the internalization of racism from the dominant white, patriarchal community.

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**'That which I appeared to be':  
Emotional Expression as the Unification of Body and Mind  
in Charlotte Dacre's *Zofloya*  
by Sarah Bartlett**

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In her 1806 novel *Zofloya; or, The Moor* Charlotte Dacre uses the stylistic freedoms afforded by Gothic style to explore issues of human consciousness and identity in relation to individual power and personhood. The thematic focus of the novel fluctuates between the physical and the abstract, the author making equal reference to the capacities of the human body and to the powers of the human mind. These references, however, are undeniably inconsistent: Dacre draws attention to the intersections of these two separate spheres of the individual even as she illustrates the impassible distance that exists between them. The effect of this inconsistency is ultimately disorienting, raising questions concerning the power an individual has over both her own body and the bodies of others. Dacre sees bodily power and control as inextricably bound up with

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the powers of the mind. The novel's protagonist, the selfish and willful Victoria, becomes Dacre's illustration of these dual identities: Dacre attempts to position Victoria as the representative example of the extent to which the human mind is able to triumph over its bodily expression. What Dacre's novel fails to account for in this representation, however, is the role of human emotion—namely, the way that sentiment straddles the boundary between rational thought and bodily action in a way that neither mind nor body can. Victoria triumphs over her own body and the bodies of others only when she is sufficiently detached from her emotions. The introduction of Zofloya, who is ultimately revealed as a decidedly non-corporeal presence, not only pushes Victoria towards the too-lately reached concluding emotions of remorse, but also, in fact, dooms her previous triumphs to failure. Additionally, Zofloya's presence and interactions with Victoria solidify the point that emotions are indeed the existence *of* the body *within* the mind, and vice versa. Victoria bends to Zofloya because he ultimately controls her body *for* her; their connection gives her the temporary ability to mentally detach from her own emotions even as it renders her physically incapacitated. The revelation of Zofloya as Satan, then, and the progression of Victoria's downfall and undoing, only strengthen the idea that mind and body cannot be separated in any individual unless it is at the cost of the individual's own sanity, as well as at the cost of nature itself.

Dacre begins her novel without initially expounding upon the working relationship that exists between the seemingly separate spheres of mind and body, and, in fact, seems to concentrate more heavily on the latter of the two early on. For example, her initial descriptions of her characters draw attention to their individual corporeal presences: Victoria "smile[s] with an unchecked vivacity" and her beauty outshines that of all other females (39); her mother Laurina is "in the meridian of beauty" (40); and the seducer Ardolph is "endowed with a form cast in

nature's finest mould" (43). These early character descriptions stand out as body-centric, suggesting that the author is setting the stage for themes of physically-vested power and identity. These individuals are introduced *through* their bodies, or, more specifically, they are characterized by Dacre's explanations of how their bodies, by being regarded as visually pleasing, render them superior, and therefore powerful. Even as an infant, Victoria is classed as superior: "no fair Venetian had presumed to vie with her, either in beauty of person, or splendor of decoration" (39). In this sense, Dacre demonstrates the way physical presence is a means by which to measure social status. Thus, if we are to interpret social status as being a testament to one's level of individual power, then physicality—or, more specifically in this instance, beauty—becomes indicative of Victoria's level of power as well.

This idea of the body as a vehicle of power is further articulated within the context of Ardolph's physical gestures and the way in which Laurina reacts to them:

[Ardolph's] stolen, yet purposely betrayed, ardent glances, directed towards her—his deep sighs, the tumultuousness of his frame, if by accident he touched her hand, or even any part of her dress—all, all failed not to be observed by the Marchesa, and to make its unfortunate impression. (45)

Here, then, Ardolph's power is elevated, restricted not merely to its visible appearance or to Laurina's appreciation of Ardolph's physical form, but instead demonstrating itself by way of bodily action. Laurina reacts to the way that Ardolph's body *moves*. This distinction of power demonstrated in terms of physical mobility and bodily expression is, for the most part, strictly masculine: with the exception of Victoria, Dacre's female characters are empowered only by the effects of their appearances alone. Laurina and Lilla, for example, are described as objects of physical desire only, and Megalena Strozzi's supreme beauty is commented upon

three times in as many paragraphs upon her second textual introduction.<sup>1</sup> Critic James A. Dunn, in his essay “Charlotte Dacre and the Feminization of Violence”, argues that Dacre’s focus on physicality (particularly, it should be specified, on Dacre’s textual use of physical violence) demonstrates her authorial intent to destabilize the binary opposition that exists between masculine and feminine spheres of identity. Dunn uses Lilla, Victoria’s rival in love as well as her complete physical opposite, to strengthen this point. He cites Lilla’s description as an “empty vessel” (in Dunn 314) to demonstrate that Victoria’s loathing of the girl is due not to jealousy, but to the fact of the latter’s “feminine insignificance”: Victoria’s rage, Dunn argues, is “less at Lilla herself than at Henriquez for prizing [Lilla’s] feminine emptiness” (314).<sup>2</sup> Additionally, and more directly in line with the gendered themes at work in Dacre’s novel, Dunn claims that the scene of attack that transpires between Victoria and Lilla “resonates with a symbolic intent to destroy this false feminine ideal,” with Victoria’s repeated stabbing of Lilla symbolizing male penetration (314). Dacre’s other bodies are imbued with power in distinctly gendered terms, but Victoria, as Dunn points out, is able to cross these gendered boundaries; her ability to “leap to the ‘other side’ of gender behaviors [. . .] signals alternative destinies available to women” (Dunn 314). A similar argument is made in George E. Haggerty’s “Mothers and Other Lovers: Gothic Fiction and the Erotics of Loss”, which cites Victoria’s instances of violent behavior as the means by which Dacre is able to address issues of gender, and, consequently, of power imbalance. Haggerty dubs Victoria “transgressive” and, like Dunn, focuses closely on the Victoria-Lilla contrast at work in Dacre’s novel (169). Haggerty suggests that because Lilla’s body is eroticized even in her death, Victoria is thus straddling gender boundaries in a way that Lilla, who represents the “devoted femininity that Victoria has sacrificed to her desire to be *like* her mother”, cannot (Haggerty 168).<sup>3</sup> Victoria, unlike Dacre’s other

women, is a physically agent character, and her actions, rather than her beauty, are what render her powerful.

Victoria’s status as a body of power is a thread that Dacre weaves repeatedly throughout the novel, but one that actually has its roots in the character’s mental and emotional identity. Early on, the novel addresses Victoria’s abstract and internal self, giving descriptions of the character that identify her as an uncommon alternative to the typical female of the period. In terms of Victoria’s cognition, it is noted that “[she] was a girl of no common feelings—her ideas wildly wandered, and to every circumstance and situation she gave rather the vivid coloring of her own heated imagination, than that of truth” (59). Mentally, then, she is vulnerable to the facets of her own imaginative and emotional capacities—capacities which, it is noted, more often than not make themselves visible through Victoria’s body. When Berenza details the couple’s projected future together, for example, “pleasure flushed triumphant [in] her animated cheek, and shone in her wild eyes with an almost painful brilliancy: her heart glowed with the love of enterprise [...] and the enthusiasm which burnt in her bosom, lighted up every feature with lambent and ethereal fire” (60). Her emotion is clearly visible because of its expression through that which encases it—her physical body; the internal manifests itself on the external, and, in this way, mind and body are combined. This union of mind and body, however, is always transient, and often insincere; the truth of Victoria’s bodily expressions, though seemingly accurate representations of otherwise invisible emotions, is indiscernible: while “the heart of Berenza had acquired a *real* passion, [...] that of Victoria was susceptible only of novel and seducing sensations” (60). In other words, though Victoria’s body appears to accurately express her individual (and also, universal) human emotion, there remains the conundrum of bodily artifice and manipulation. Given that Victoria is, as Dacre has made sure to stress,



a character in possession of the uncommon coupling of intellectual superiority and wild imagination, there is in her expression of emotions the possibility of calculated falseness. Dacre here is working on the gothic-popular premise that all human bodies express the products of emotion universally, and is also hinting at the possibility that Victoria, as an especially mind-oriented individual, is mentally capable of feigning that production. Nevertheless, by stressing Victoria's difference from the standard tropes of feminine identity (though, in terms of actual visibility, that difference is seemingly more mental than physical, due to the necessity of the mental or the emotional being expressed *through* the physical), Dacre is able to characterize Victoria as a highly cognitive character, as well as to set the stage for Victoria's later attempts to exercise power over herself—that is, over her own body.

Victoria's efforts to reign in her bodily expression are ultimately undertaken for the purpose of her own self-advancement. This tendency is, in fact, stated in explicit terms during the journey Victoria takes to Il Bosco with Ardolph and Laurina. The latter of the two guardians here weakens in her resolve to banish her daughter on a short-term stay with the Signora di Modena, and it thus "[becomes] the task of Victoria to rally her mother, and to shew, vain girl, how far she could conquer her feelings, and become mistress of herself" (66).<sup>4</sup> Victoria attempts to instruct her mother in the art of self-possession by leading with her own example; the younger Loredani, at least, is in charge of her own emotions. Further evidence of this is seen in later episodes during which Victoria masterfully demonstrates her abilities of both self-containment and emotional deceit. In Venice, for example, Victoria sets out to convince Berenza of her love not *because* she loves him, but, rather, because it will ultimately secure her the personal benefits of shelter and protection. The narration states that Victoria "voluntarily sought his protection, because she knew not whom else to solicit" (97). Additionally, "[s]he

saw only that it would be necessary and politic to answer his sincere and honourable love at least with an *appearance* equally ardent and sincere" (97). In order to attain that which she desires (not so much Berenza as his material spoils), Victoria must convince him of the *idea* of her sincerity. In response to Berenza's accusations that Victoria does not love him enough—that she is "a stranger to the turnings and windings of her *own* heart" (95)<sup>5</sup>—she attempts to mimic the "turnings" and "windings" of his own:

The peculiar cast of Berenza's disposition was in reality melancholy; somber, and reflective, though in society seeming gay and careless; she then must become melancholy, retired, and abstracted. [...] [This] [a]rtifice on her side, and natural self-love on his, would easily make him attribute it to the effects of a violent and concealed love [...]. Her plan arranged, she entered on it gradually: her eyes, no longer full of a wild and beautiful animation, were taught to languish, or to fix for hours with musing air upon the ground; her gait, no longer firm and elevated, became hesitating and despondent. (97-98)

In this instance, Victoria succeeds at mastering her own body and bodily responses in order to achieve her personal goals. Because she is detached from emotion—she does not, in fact, *love* Berenza at all—and because she is, therefore, utilizing only the rational part of her mind to get what she wants, her body complies with her mind's desires. The physical here yields to the mental. Victoria, in essence, has found a sort of metaphysical loophole within the paradox of mind-body relations: she forces fixed bodily signs to stand in for separate emotional states, and, in doing so, successfully (and seemingly accurately) inscribes the lie of a love for Berenza upon her body itself. She uses her powers of rationality to deduce the expected or appropriate emotional behavior and act accordingly, thereby demonstrating—in this sterile, emotionless instance, at least—the momentary power of her mind over what would

otherwise be an involuntarily and emotionally reactive body.

Victoria's ability to control her own emotions—or, rather, to control her body's visible *expression* of those emotions—is most evident, ironically enough, in the opposite instances of that ability, in which her body actually betrays her. For example, while at Il Bosco, Victoria struggles in vain to conceal her dissatisfaction—even, one might argue, her despondency: when summoned by the Signora di Modena after her initial period of isolation, Victoria “regretted only that her pallid cheek and sunken eyes were evidences of suffering beyond her power to conceal” (75). In this sense, the body betrays her emotion, which is a direct effect of her circumstance, and Victoria's regret here is not at the emotion itself, but rather at her inability to control its bodily manifestation, to hide the physical evidence of her suffering. Additionally, in the instances in which Victoria *does* succeed in conquering the natural expression of her emotional state, her body suffers the consequences:

The perpetual ferment of her brain, and, above all, the violent restraint she imposed upon her feelings and natural disposition [...] had began long since to have a visible effect upon her personal appearance: she had become thin and pallid; but still her eyes burnt with an ardent though melancholy lustre, that bespoke the *trammelled unsubdued* ferocity of her soul. (55)

Victoria is physically weakened by her own suppression of her internal feelings, but what is especially interesting here is that though her body suffers, her soul remains intact; the emotions that are produced within the body are still present, as indicated by that “ardent [...] lustre” seen in her eyes. She languishes physically because of the unnaturalness of suppressing emotion, but the text makes clear that the *suppression* of emotion is not equal to its elimination. The fact of the body's emotional betrayal, through the eyes, demonstrates that any attempt to subdue human emotion goes directly against the very nature of human emotion

itself. Furthermore, because emotion is itself an extension of, or at least a parallel to, the human mind, its demand for bodily expression demonstrates that the rational mind, regardless of intention or desire, cannot ever truly triumph over the body that contains it.

As Victoria's relationship with Zofloya progresses, her self-imposed dividing line between rationality and imagination—between mind and body, between sentiment and sensation—becomes more tenuous and blurred. Her dreams of Zofloya result in her own cognitive second-guessing and uncertainty. The first dream, in particular, causes Dacre's protagonist to briefly question her interpretation of her immediate reality:

Often the circumstances were so strong, that the bounds of fancy contained them no longer, and, hastily awaking, scarcely could she assure herself that Zofloya stood not at the side of her bed! At one time the delusion was so strong, that she even fancied, after gazing for a minute at least, that he was a few paces from her bed, and that she saw him turn, and walk slow and majestically towards the door. At this, being no longer able to resist, she started up, and called him by his name; but as she did so, he seemed to vanish through the door, which still remained shut. [...] she beheld no other traces of his figure, and, difficult as was the persuasion, she endeavoured to believe the whole a delusive dream. (151-52)

Here, then, is an instance of the reverse of Victoria's intentions with regard to mental mastery of the physical body. Due to her unnerved emotional state, bodily sensation—although perhaps imagined—triumphs over rational thought. Victoria's eyes deceive her into believing Zofloya is present, so much so that when he seems to disappear, she actually gets out of bed, calls his name, and searches for him in the room. Her body's reaction to an abstract emotional process actually manipulates her perception of reality. A similar reaction occurs when Victoria dreams

about Berenza's body:

[...] in a state of mind baffling description, she had awakened, and the impression made by her dream was so strong, that, although she endeavored to view it only as an insignificant vision, caused by the events of the day, she found it impossible to compose herself; the figure of Berenza, discoloured by the effects of the poison, still swam in her view.

At length, determined to end what she conceived to be her superstitious terrors, she resolved to seek the apartment of the Conte, and to satisfy herself with the conviction that her dream was without foundation, phantoms conjured merely by a diseased imagination. (189)

Once again, Victoria's imagination oversteps the bounds of her cognitive abilities; though rationally she is convinced of the dream's events as fictional, the vividness of its imagery, coupled with the character's emotional "terrors", is strong enough to inspire Victoria to get out of bed and convince herself of reality. In both dream scenes, Victoria's impressions of the actual physical world mingle with her imagination<sup>6</sup>, and result in her inability to re-draw the dividing line she has previously kept so rigidly between the two.

This new inability to hold apart the two spheres of mind and body that she previously had no trouble classing as separate and independent of each other indicates on Victoria's part a development of true emotion. When the Moor creates a bed for Victoria in the "rugged nook" of the bandits' cavern, she is touched by his seeming kindness, and "her high wrought emotion vented itself in a flood of tears! [...] the proud, the inhuman Victoria, conquered and affected by the shew of kindness, wept from feeling, from an emotion of the heart!" (231). Her emotional reaction is honest in this case, because her emotional union with another individual prompts the involuntary bodily response of tears. Tears, as

a bodily production, are less possible to fabricate than are the artifices of sincere appearances and contained emotion in earlier passages. Nevertheless, the emotional union depicted in this tearful penultimate scene is entirely voided by the Moor's later revealed status as Satan. In the same breath as the previous passage, the narrator asks: "but who could withstand the enchanting influence of Zofloya?" (231), implying that the influence here produces such a reaction in Victoria *because* it is more powerful than basic human influence and is, in fact *inhuman*. Ann K. Mellor, in "Interracial Sexual Desire in Charlotte Dacre's *Zofloya*", suggests that Victoria's attraction to Zofloya is the result of her attraction to the things that he can do for her (171), which are, essentially, things that no one else can do. Not only is he able to orchestrate plans of murder and deceit, he can, in a sense, read her mind. Zofloya himself states to the protagonist, "Your very *thoughts* have power to attract me," admitting to being involved directly with her mind (181). Additionally, when Victoria asks the Moor to elucidate this metaphysical attraction, he points to her bodily conditions, the means by which her mental state is entirely visible: "I can read them now, beautiful Victoria! that high-flushed cheek, that wandering eye, are evidences that cannot be mistaken" (181). In Zofloya's presence, Victoria is unable to separate mental process and bodily response: her thoughts and actions are depicted explicitly on her body. No other individuals have caused such a response in Victoria because no other individuals can manipulate her mental strength and identity the way that Zofloya can; Victoria *lets* Zofloya into her mind. Indeed, he notes that if she were to "disdain" and "despise" him, he would "*sink abashed into [him]self and [be rendered] powerless*" (168). The Moor indirectly admits to his dependence upon Victoria's willingness to accept his influence; without her complicity—without her *permission*—he is unable to achieve his ultimate goal—that is, the destruction of her soul. It is Victoria's detachment from her emotions throughout the novel that allows for

her manipulation by Zofloya, that grants the Moor the aforementioned permission. Indeed, Victoria attempts to remain stringently emotionless until it is no longer possible for her to upend Zofloya's intentions and to release herself from the mental and physical hold he has over her: upon her solitary reflection of the events that have transpired, and the evil done by her own hand, "remorse fill[s] [Victoria's] guilty soul, but fill[s] it too late, for it [comes] accompanied by *despair!*" (253). Dacre is demonstrating here that emotion—in this case, remorse—must come of its own accord, rather than be situational or created for selfish reasons (for despair, though an emotion in itself, is still selfish, and indicative of the self-concerned personality that Victoria has displayed throughout the bulk of the novel). Because Victoria's emotional conversation here comes included with her own fear for her ultimate well-being, she is undone, lost to the powers of the devil to which she has been physically and mentally servile all along.

Thus, Dacre's novel is an exercise in both physical and metaphysical relations. The author uses a protagonist who repeatedly attempts to conquer her own corporeality—specifically, its expressions and betrayals—to explore the breadth of the divide that exists between mind and body, ultimately finding that emotion is an undeniable unifying force between the two and that in fact, as emotion itself is universal and undeniable, no real divide exists at all.

#### Notes

1. Laurina is "lovely" and "attractive", and in possession of "glowing charms" (44), and Lilla is "blooming" and has an "angelic countenance" (145); see page 120 for Megalena's first encounter with Leonardo.

2. Relevant here is Adriana Craciun's argument that at work in *Zofloya* is a dialectic between feminine meekness and feminine empowerment (see "Introduction", *Zofloya*, ed. Craciun [Peterborough, Ont.: Broadview, 1997], pp. 9-32). The introduction to Craciun's edition also focuses on themes of "the fluidity of corporeal identity" as evidenced in Dacre's novel.

3. That said, however, the crux of Haggerty's essay has less to do with themes of gender transgression, as was Dunn's focus, and instead concentrates on the intersections of erotic desire and maternal loss. Haggerty pairs Laurina's physical absence and its resulting consequence of Victoria's lack of feminine example with the latter's heightened erotic desire and its often violent physical manifestations in her behavior.

4. Relevant here is the way Dacre manipulates this same phrase at two subsequent instances in the novel, one during the height of Victoria's frenzied outdoor encounter with Lilla, and one immediately following that scene. The first, occurring as Victoria murders Lilla against Zofloya's explicitly-stated direction, points out that Victoria here was "no longer mistress of her actions, nor desir[ed] to be so" (220); the second, though occurring only a few pages later, is more detailed, and indicates Victoria's hesitancy with the way that her relationship with Zofloya is progressing: "Victoria [...] felt a desire to retrace the terrible events that had been crowded into her life. —The attempt was vain, a numbing torpor began to creep over her as before; she essayed to conquer it, though contrary to the direction of Zofloya; and her incapacity to do so conveyed a bitter pang to her heart, while she felt that she was no longer mistress over herself or her faculties. Chill horror took possession of her, and in an agony of mind that words cannot describe, seeming subject as it were to an unknown power, and unable to resist, she hopelessly resigned herself to the arbitrary spell that appeared to be cast over her" (225). The second of the two passages indicates a realization, on Victoria's part, of her own detachment from both body and mind. Zofloya's ability to see through Victoria's bodily manipulations, to conquer that aspect of her physical power, in a way, and as no other man has, is possible because of his metaphysical status; he is more invested in her mental character—in her thoughts, emotions, and desires—than he is in any other part of her, and because the mental is inextricably tied to the physical, Zofloya himself is able to reside in and ultimately conquer both aspects of Victoria's identity.

5. The irony here is that Berenza is a stranger to *his* own heart; until Victoria's near-death experience at the hands of her own brother, Berenza finds in her character numerous flaws and points of her mental identity that he finds distasteful. Additionally, Berenza's new and total devotion to Victoria after the aforementioned near-death experience indicates that he recognizes, on some unconscious level, the inextricability of mind and body—of the mind's position *within* the body; by almost losing Victoria's *body* to death, Berenza realizes that he also almost lost that which he previously attempted to modify: the character, the person, the *self* that is encased within it.

6. One could argue here, however, in sensationist terms, that impressions of the world are indeed imaginative, mental creations. Any idea of a union or an exchange between the physical and the metaphysical has its roots in Lockean philosophy. In his 1690 *Essay Concerning Human Understanding* John Locke introduces the concept of the *tabula rasa*, or the suggestion that the human mind is a blank slate dependent upon sensory experience for the production of new ideas. He notes in the essay that "[t]he objects of sensation

[are] one source of ideas. [ . . . ] [and] [t]he operations of our minds [are] the other source of them" (186). For Locke, sensation, derived from experience, couples with reasoned intellectual reflection to create new ideas (see an excerpt of the essay in question in *The Portable Enlightenment Reader*, ed. Krammick [New York: Penguin, 1995], pp. 185-187).

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## Kate Chopin's Portrait of the (Female) Artist as a "Courageous Soul": Edna's Creation of Art and Self in *The Awakening* by Heather Bowlby

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Edna Pontellier's aspiration to develop her painting into a serious vocation directly correlates with her psychological self-realization throughout Kate Chopin's novel *The Awakening*, and examining Edna's gradual creative maturation as a female artist accordingly offers a constructive perspective on her corresponding development of autonomous identity—and thus, by extension, on the novel's controversial conclusion as well. Most recently, many critics have dealt with the inconsistencies of Edna's character by reading her as a female figure caught in transition between two "contradictory definitions of femininity and creativity" (Showalter 83), with the ideal New Woman heroine on the one side and the realistic, socially-constrained victim on

the other. This perspective asserts that Edna's suicide at the end of the novel—while indeed tragic—most importantly offers the possibility of the *future* realization of the autonomous female artist by indicating her increased awareness of self even within the current restrictions of her society.

This paper will build on this recent critical trend by acknowledging that Edna's final action is ambiguous and indicates the conflict between her desire for individual fulfillment as an artist and the demands of her society. As Edna's aesthetic affinity is linked to the development of her subjectivity, I argue that the novel can best be understood as a female *Künstlerroman* depicting her transformation into a self-creating female artist and the assumption of her art as a vocation. A woman who wishes to become an artist as well as a self-reliant individual faces a double challenge in the historical context of the novel, and Edna is unable to reconcile the conflicting pressures of her need for personal fulfillment through independence and artistic creation with the gendered expectations of the society in which she lives.

Instead of interpreting Edna's final, suicidal swim into the Gulf of Mexico as signifying a "self-annihilating instinct" (Wolkenfeld 220), Carole Stone maintains that this fatal action is one indication of Edna's "regression in the service of progression towards [...] a new concept of self, a definition of herself as an artist" (24). In Stone's perspective, the novel portrays the difficult birth of the female artist, and in it Chopin assails contemporary idealistic views of childbirth in order to contest broader patriarchal structures (23-24). According to Mademoiselle Reisz, a pianist recognized for her skill in Edna's social circle and one of Edna's female mentors, the artist "must possess the courageous soul. [...] that dares and defies" (Chopin *Awakening* 85-86). This ability to renounce the gendered strictures present in society in order to nurture and preserve artistic inspiration is doubly necessary for the *female* artist, who must have

the courage essential to survive as an autonomous innovator separated from the aesthetically-disabling influence of her society. In this sense, I assert that Edna does indeed attain her desire to become this "courageous soul," and her culminating immersion in the ocean and the imaginative return of memories of her girlhood function as her epiphanic experience. Edna's suicide thus signals her transition into a mature artistic and psychic state that she recognizes cannot be achieved within her present world. By refusing to accept the common dilemma facing female artists in *fin de siècle* America—how to strike an equitable balance between the demands of the traditionally gendered female role and the desire to pursue art professionally—Edna establishes the possibility that the future female artist will be able to assume a respected place within her society and to maintain productive relationships that support aesthetic creativity.

*The Awakening* is not isolated in its portrayal of the creative development of a female artist within its historical context. In her significant study of the female *Künstlerroman*, Linda Huf explains that, while most major male writers have traditionally produced an artist novel, women writers have seldom composed works about women who become artists because society condemns female ambition to be a creator of art instead of an object of male creative inspiration as indicative of unwarranted "self-display" (1). However, Huf asserts that the female-artist novels which were composed—whose numbers increased in a small, but significant, trend in the late nineteenth century—share a distinct set of characteristics distinguishing them from male stories of artistic development. While a conflict between the female gender role and the professional art world is frequently a central concern in this small genre, Huf claims that these novels are ultimately radical in that they advocate the transformation of the female artist's conception of her role within her society (11).

As a novel about a budding female artist by a woman writer,

*The Awakening* fits well within the parameters Huf delineates for the characteristics of the female Künstlerroman. All of the elements Huf describes are present in Edna's artistic journey: Edna is faced with a choice between her socially gendered role and her ambition to paint professionally; both a conventional female foil and a discouraging male figure are provided in the characters of Madame Ratignolle and Edna's husband, Leonce; Edna's abilities increase in the absence of a male muse; and her self-inflicted demise is often itself perceived as a final revolt against the society that has refused to provide her an acceptable space within which to pursue her creative inclinations. Edna's struggle to attain her full potential as an individual is thus best perceived as deeply related to her efforts to cultivate her creative abilities, to develop her art, and to discover an affirming place within her world.<sup>1</sup> The journey of "awakening" on which Edna embarks throughout the novel is not merely a dawning realization of sensuality and individuality, as has often been assumed by critics, but also an initiation into creative inspiration and mature artistic identity. For Edna, individuality and artistry are inextricably related.

When we first meet Edna during her summer vacation in Grand Isle at the beginning of the novel, she is still metaphorically slumbering within a pre-awakened state. Edna mindlessly fulfills her conventionally gendered role as wife to her husband, Leonce, and as mother to her two young boys, and within the upper-middle-class Creole society of which she is a part, her identity is perceived only in relation to that of her family. Instead of "Edna," she is "Mrs. Pontellier," the wife whom Leonce—and society—considers "a valuable piece of personal property" (3), the best in his considerable collection of exquisite artwork and curiosities. Like an artistic specimen on display, Edna primarily exists as the largely inanimate object of her husband's gaze, and she suffers his censure when she even slightly diverts from his conventionally-gendered expectations

of her behavior and appearance.

Leonce's disapproving remark to his wife, on her return from the Grand Isle beach, that she is "burnt beyond recognition" (3) illustrates his view of her as property and not a person. In the late nineteenth-century Creole social circles the Pontelliers revolve in, whiteness of skin was associated with female beauty, and any hint of sun was considered undesirable and unattractive.<sup>2</sup> When Leonce perceives the mark of the sun on Edna's body, he translates it as a form of "damage" (3) on the domestic commodity that is his most expensive investment, his wife. The social value of this asset is directly related to the level of her conformity with certain markers of acceptance and aesthetic desirability, and Leonce's reaction to this change in Edna's appearance reveals that his perception of her is based on professional assessment of her economic value within his culture. As the aesthetic object of her husband's gaze, and as the passive Galatea to Leonce's Pygmalion, Edna may only respond to his appraisal of her worth with silence and inspect her hands in acquiescence. Mechanically, she accepts her rings from his care and slips them on as the visible marks of his ownership (3). In her pre-awakened state, Edna is portrayed as the representative "American woman" (5), a woman who exists only in relation to her husband, family, and society and is a created object rather than a creator.

A thoroughly American woman raised on a blue-grass Kentucky farm, Edna has been transplanted out of her natural habitat into Louisiana French Creole society and is highly conscious of her alien status. The experience of being an outsider—or onlooker in another culture—helps stimulate Edna out of her long stupor within conventional female roles. Carole Stone identifies Madame Ratignolle and Robert Lebrun as two early awakening influences on Edna. Madame Ratignolle, Edna's friend Adèle, befriends her on Grand Isle and encourages Edna to accept her latent sensuality as well as to open up her inner life (25). The "entire

absence of prudery” and “freedom of expression” about personal and sexual matters that characterize Creole women such as Adèle greatly impresses Edna and provides a “shock” (12) that helps to prepare her mind for her awakening. Likewise, Adèle’s supportive attitude enables Edna to share her inner thoughts and thus to begin to reflect on, and close, the distance between her external and internal being. With Adèle, she feels comfortable enough to voice her true feelings and break her traditional reserve in the confidence that Adèle will be sympathetic.

Edna’s social status as a domestic commodity and the limitations of her socially gendered role cause her to split psychologically into two distinct beings leading a “dual life—that outward existence which conforms, the inward life which questions” (18). Given the resistance of her outer environment, first a harsh Presbyterian father in her girlhood and then an exacting husband, Edna has learned the art of self-concealment well and lives “her own small life all within herself” (18). The chasm separating the inner and outer worlds of Edna’s experience and the limited opportunities for creative expression in her external environment cause her to retreat within herself and to live most intensely within this enclosed mental space. She can undergo emotional turmoil without “any outward show or manifestation on her part” (22). Because of this psychological split, Edna’s ability to experience imaginative sensation is greatly refined by years of practice, and she is able to generate the raw imaginative material necessary for artistic inspiration and creation.

Discussing Edna’s role as a female artist in the novel, Deborah Barker states that a trend in late-nineteenth-century art was to value the “artist’s mental image over the natural object [of the study]” (67) as the artistic imagination became the driving force of creativity and art. In this sense, Barker sees Edna as naturally talented in art because she has an intense inner world that consists of vivid mental images (68). When Edna shares a part of this world—an imaginative resource partially developed

through her memory—with Adèle, she is forced to bring her outer and inner worlds into contact with each other. Relating her memory to Adèle of her voyage as a girl through a seemingly eternal “meadow that seemed as big as the ocean” (21) provides the catalyst Edna needs to incorporate the imaginative potential of this memory within her current life and thus to begin to unite her outer and inner selves. As she states to Adèle, “sometimes I feel this summer as if I were walking through the green meadow again; idly, aimlessly, unthinking and unguided” (22).

The raw artistic talent and creative potential lie latent within Edna, and she requires inspiration in order to activate them. Stone claims that Robert is Edna’s creative inspiration, as she progressively achieves control over her body, environment, and imagination (26-27). He plays a significant role in nurturing the romance—both in his sexuality and the prospect of a freer, more romantic life he represents—that Edna draws on later while painting (28). Edna’s relationship with Robert helps cause the “light” of personal and artistic inspiration “to dawn dimly within her,” which, in the early stages of her creative growth, manifests itself in “dreams” (Chopin *Awakening* 17), much like the sacred visions in which Medieval women received their artistic calling. Through the retreats into her unconscious represented by these dreams, and the increasingly conscious comprehension of the value of her inner self, Edna “was beginning to realize her potential in the universe as a human being, and to recognize her relations as an individual to the world within and about her” (17).

Along with the commencement of this intensely psychological awakening, Edna experiences a growing awareness of her artistic potential as a painter. As it focuses on the visual objectification of women, Barker claims that “painting serves as a metaphor for the psychological and economic subjugation of women” and functions as an economic exchange system that supports gendered ideologies (62). Previously, Edna



had enjoyed painting as a pastime that she intermittently “dabbled with in an unprofessional way” and “felt in it a satisfaction of a kind which no other employment afforded her” (Chopin *Awakening* 15). Now that she experiences the stirrings of an inner transformation of self through the awakening of her individuality, Edna becomes more dissatisfied with her half-hearted, casual dabbings and begins to examine her work through more critical eyes. Edna feels compelled to paint a portrait of Adèle due to Adèle’s symbolic aesthetic quality as “sensuous Madonna” (15), creating a sketch that she then destroys after deciding that it does not fit her standard of quality (15).<sup>3</sup> Notably, Edna did not have this artistic standard when she perceived painting merely as a casual hobby, and her portrait of Adèle marks the beginning of her transformation into a professional artist.

The turning point for Edna occurs on the night that Mademoiselle Reisz agrees to play Chopin for the assembled vacationers. While listening to Mlle. Reisz skillfully play this music on the piano, Edna experiences an intense sensation unlike any she has ever had before, because her mind has been prepared to receive the emotion engendered by Mlle. Reisz’s music, and “her being was tempered to take an impress of the abiding truth” (34). This music has the effect of uniting her inner and outer beings, as “the very passions themselves were aroused within her soul, swaying it, lashing it, as the waves daily beat upon her splendid body” (35). The deepest feelings of her spirit now arise from their long repression and overtake her, just as the physical ocean waves do when she swims. Brought forcibly to life, Edna cannot help but perceive the relationship between the physical world and the spiritual world—and the two aspects of her life—in this overwhelming union of sensation.

The emotional side of the powerful sensation engendered by Mlle. Reisz’s musical performance is soon joined by the physical side when Edna subsequently learns to swim. As a “little tottering, stumbling,

clutching child, who all of a sudden realizes its powers” (37), Edna feels new-born after her potent awakening and revels in the unknown feeling of self-control and agency she experiences over both her “body and soul” (37). Thrilled with her newfound sense of autonomy, Edna desires to “swim far out, where no woman had swum before,” and the action of physical swimming fuses in her mind with a more spiritual sense of the ocean as an “unlimited” space “in which to lose herself” (37). Edna first comprehends the danger involved in her new sense of independence when she swims too far into the Gulf and is confronted with what she views as the possibility of death and irrevocable separation from others. Just as the expanse of water between her and the people near the shore appears to be “a barrier which her unaided strength would never be able to overcome” (37), a space could develop between herself and others in her society caused by her dawning realization of autonomy, and cut off from any human contact, total independence could kill her.

Edna’s sudden awareness of what she terms “a thousand emotions” (38) overwhelms her faculties and causes her to drift, “following whatever impulse moved her” (43). Adèle astutely recognizes that Edna is little more than a child at this stage of psychological and creative development and is living entirely within her present experience (130) and, as in Edna’s tale of the Baratarian lovers, “drifting into the unknown” (95). Edna’s first, clear instinct during this awakening is to protect the inner sanctum of her private life from violation by others, innocent or well-meaning though they may be. She explains to a shocked Adèle, “I would give up the unessential; I would give up my money, I would give my life for my children; but I wouldn’t give myself” (64). Edna’s inner being—what she defines as herself—is her most precious quality and the source of her emotional life and creative stimulation (64). After visiting the Ratignolles and perceiving their example of marital bliss, Edna muses on the futility of Adèle’s “blind contentment” and pities her for never having the

opportunity to feel “life’s delirium” (76). The idea of “life’s delirium” passed through her mind like “some unsought, extraneous impression” (76) rising from the depths of her consciousness, and in this context, this phrase can be interpreted as a subconscious reference to an artistic ecstasy of experience, a type of Dionysian quest for clarity of sensation and for inspiration.

Taken as a metaphor for artistic inspiration, the Gulf spirit which Robert describes as rising annually on the twenty-eighth of August does find a being worthy of its company in Edna on that summer night, and Edna’s artistic ambitions are stirred just as deeply by her profound experience as her passion is. As Edna purposefully endeavors to fulfill her need for creative expression through the development of her painting, both Adèle and Mlle. Reisz influence her growth as two competing models of the female artist from whom she learns: Adèle as the wife and mother who sacrifices personal artistic ambition in favor of the female domestic role, and Mlle. Reisz as the artist who forfeits this domesticity in order to pursue her art. Barker views Mlle. Reisz and Mme. Ratignolle as illustrating the conflict between the mother- and artist-figures in Chopin’s novel (72), and I see these two female influences on Edna’s development as illustrating what Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar portray as the bipolar characteristic of texts by nineteenth-century female authors. Gilbert and Gubar claim that women were compelled before the end of the nineteenth century either to assume the mantle of self-deprecating, submissive femininity (the angel image) or to revolt by imitating manly qualities and asserting their equality with men (the monster image): either choice involved a certain relinquishment of self-identity (63-64). While agreeing that both women in Edna’s life represent opposite ends of the spectrum of female representation, Kathryn Lee Seidel claims that each woman corresponds to a different point in Edna’s creative development, which occurs in three stages: “her early mimetic

work that reinforces the paternalistic values of her culture; her rebellious portraits; and her daring, original drawings that she creates after moving into her own house” (229).

Adèle certainly represents the conventional angel figure sketched in Gilbert and Gubar’s groundbreaking theory. She is what Chopin terms a “mother-woman,” a representative of a race of “women who idolized their children, worshiped their husbands, and esteemed it a holy privilege to efface themselves as individuals and grow wings as ministering angels” (10). Adèle does have some musical ability on the piano, but while she continues to practice her music to keep up her skills, she does so only as a way of enriching her family’s home environment and not as a means of personal fulfillment. Before Edna begins painting in earnest, she visits Adèle and shows her some sketches for validation, even though Edna has already made her decision to pursue her art. Edna’s motive is to find “words of praise and encouragement” from Adèle “that would help her to put her heart into venture” (74). As Seidel points out, Adèle views female artistry merely as “domestic decoration” (230), while Edna comes to equate her creative activity with individual agency and desires “to possess her art, not give it to her husband to possess and display, just as she wishes to regard her body as her own” (230). When she gives Adèle some of her sketches, Edna is indicating that she will not view her art as a “domestic commodity” (231) and moves on to the next stage in her artistic development.

In contrast, Mlle. Reisz displays the characteristics of Gilbert and Gubar’s monster figure—a woman who defies social convention in order to devote herself to her art entirely. Achieving individuality both as a woman and as an artist is doubly problematic within *fin de siècle* American culture and involves a certain alienation, and Mlle. Reisz knows that survival within a hostile social environment for all artists—but especially for *female* artists—requires what she conceptualizes as the “courageous”

soul that “dares and defies” (86). Mlle. Reisz expresses concern for Edna out of her own experience as a serious female artist, stating, “[t]he bird that would soar above the level plain of tradition and prejudice must have strong wings. It is a sad spectacle to see the weaklings bruised, exhausted, fluttering back to earth” (112). Accordingly, Seidel views Mlle. Reisz as Edna’s creative role model because Mlle. Reisz takes her own art seriously and encourages Edna in her artistic development (231). Mlle. Reisz can only guide Edna up to a point, however, because Mlle. Reisz accepts the predominant patriarchal valuations of art and does not agree with Edna’s perception of her own painting as “self-expression and as a way of understanding herself and her close relationships” (232). Unlike Edna, Mlle. Reisz views the artist as an individualistic, iconoclastic “courageous” soul, whose conflict with conventional society provides the impetus for creative activity.

Nonetheless, the art Mlle. Reisz creates resonates deeply in Edna and corresponds with the growth of her passion and desire for self-fulfillment. This music “penetrated her [Edna’s] whole being like an effulgence, warming and brightening the dark places of her soul. It prepared her for joy and exultation” (109). Mlle. Reisz functions as a type of muse for Edna who initiates Edna’s own creative process and, “by her divine art, seemed to reach Edna’s spirit and set it free” (106). Some critics, such as Lynda S. Boren, see the Mademoiselle Reisz’s “divine art” as sinister and manipulative. Boren argues that descriptions of sounds in the novel reflects the characters’ psychological atmosphere (185), and perceives Mlle. Reisz as a “thinly disguised witch, who seduces Edna with heavy doses of Frederic Chopin’s most evocative music” (186-87). Claiming that Mlle. Reisz wishes to possess Edna’s being, Boren proposes that the pianist “violates Edna’s very soul with her musical machinations” and is “decidedly demonic” (190).

While Mlle. Reisz does have a great deal of influence in Edna’s life,

Boren’s approach seems to mischaracterize that influence, and Boren thus fails to provide Edna with much agency of her own in her creative process. Although the text does not support assertions to the effect that she is a type of witch wielding occult powers over Edna, Mlle. Reisz is extremely antisocial, even “venom[ous]” (66), and personally irritates Edna with “a personality that was offensive to her” (106). Mlle. Reisz is clearly alienated from her society, preferring to brew her hot chocolate in her “cheerless and dingy” (106) little apartments in the company of only her scowling Beethoven bust. It is this sense of isolation, associated with Mlle. Reisz, or of being a “madwoman in the attic,” that Edna is repulsed by. Seidel notes that female artists faced limited opportunities for creativity and much criticism and discouragement from their social circles in the nineteenth century, and “the woman artist who rejected the paternalistic patterns chose isolation in doing so” (228-29), as demonstrated by Chopin’s portrayal of Mlle. Reisz.

The dividing line between Edna and Mlle. Reisz as artists is their different perceptions of the function of art and their own individual relationships as practitioners to this function. K. J. Weatherford contends that “Edna uses her painting as a way of discovering and expressing herself; for her, art is a way of manifesting the change that is occurring within her” (104). Weatherford views Mlle. Reisz as a discouraging and negative influence on Edna’s artistic development, since Mlle. Reisz lives according to her idea of the solitary artist, and this desire to be accepted into the circles of high art destroys her as a woman artist (106). Within this historical context, Weatherford argues, female support was necessary for female artists (108). While Mlle. Reisz does not view Edna’s art as genuine, all Edna desires through her painting is control over her life, not to be accepted as a practitioner of high art (109). Weatherford thereby argues that “Edna’s painting is a serious attempt to manifest her new-found self in the world” (109).

Edna's inner passion—her sensual and as well as spiritual awakening—is complexly related to the development of her artistry: to her, they are inseparable. Her inspiration for her later paintings derives from memories of her romantic outings with Robert on Grand Isle, and she sings the song Robert often hummed, “*Ab! si tu savais!*” (77), to herself as she works. She can only work on bright, sunny days when she is “happy to be alive and breathing” and is unable to paint on days when “life appeared to her like a grotesque pandemonium and humanity like worms struggling blindly towards inevitable annihilation” (78). In this sense, Edna's art *is* a creative release that does assist her in expressing her metamorphosing individuality. That point being acknowledged, Edna's desire to paint, like the internal workings of her psychology, is highly complex and should not be too hastily oversimplified as *merely* a method of self-expression. Some degree of acceptance into the circles of the established art world forms part of Edna's ambition to paint, and her efforts to professionalize herself as an artist and perfect the craft of her painting reveal her motivation to achieve a greater level of socio-economic control over her life as well as personal self-expression. Edna's success as an artist, along some inherited funds and money won on the races, enables her to move out of her husband's home and set up a modest establishment of her own. Without the income provided by her paintings and the promise of future revenue, this significant step toward what Edna terms as “freedom and independence” (107) would have been much more difficult.

Chopin's portrayal of a female artist who desires to be recognized professionally for her art reflects a national trend in women's perceptions of themselves as artists. In her study analyzing the work of nineteenth-century American female authors and their relationship to respected literary circles, Anne Boyd claims that female authors who wrote after the Civil War—such as Constance Fenimore Woolson, Elizabeth Stuart

Phelps, Louisa May Alcott, and Elizabeth Stoddard, all of whom form the basis of Boyd's study—began to perceive artistic ambitions as central to their individual lives and not as peripheral to conventional expectations of women (2).<sup>4</sup> This new wave of female writers saw themselves as artists in the service of “America's emerging high literary culture” (2), and writers such as Alcott, Phelps, Stoddard, and Woolson were aware of themselves as members of a new generation of female artists struggling to break into the field after the 1860s (5). Many women artists, while not attempting to overcome the issue of gender entirely, did attempt to be admitted into the circles of high literature and culture (9).

While certainly underdeveloped due to the untimely conclusion of her story, Edna's efforts to break into the art field exhibit this changing cultural mindset towards the role of women artists within established professions. After her awakening experience on Grand Isle, Edna's restlessness and dissatisfaction with her life in the Pontellier mansion on Esplanade Street in New Orleans increases, reaching a peak when she demonstrates her pent-up anger and frustration with her life by removing her wedding ring and symbolically (but unsuccessfully) attempting to crush it with her boot heel. Following this episode, she begins “to do as she liked and to feel as she liked” (76), abandoning her Tuesday afternoon receptions for visitors and devoting her attention to her art in a concentrated effort to improve its quality. She sets up a makeshift studio in her atelier and paints “with great energy and interest,” but “without accomplishing anything . . . which satisfied her even in the smallest degree” (77). Edna has begun to think like a professional and to critique her work seriously and realistically, carving out the time necessary for improvement and allowing herself to progress gradually. She enlists the entire household as subjects for her work, painting her maids, her children, and even, later on, her father. As Edna announces to Mlle. Reisz, she is engaged in the process of “*becoming an artist*” [my emphasis]

(85) and takes all the steps necessary to develop her abilities and provide opportunities for success. By stating that she is “becoming” an artist, Edna stresses the learning process she is engaged in as a fledgling artist and does not claim to already possess all the skills of an accomplished master, as Mlle. Reisz mistakenly understands when she tells Edna that she has “pretensions” (85). On account of Edna’s efforts to improve her work, her paintings begin to sell, and Laidpore, an art dealer, becomes “more and more pleased” since he believes her art “grows in force and individuality” (107).

After Edna moves into the pigeon house, her work reaches another level as she feels her “strength and expansion as an individual” (127) resulting from her relief from constricting social responsibilities. In this environment—a space Virginia Woolf would call “a room of one’s own”—Edna is free to create, and her artistic talents consequently mature. Accordingly, she does meet with considerable success for a new artist, even negotiating with an interested art dealer for a set of Parisian paintings to be completed after her rumored summer trip to Europe (141). This particular encounter, of course, legitimates Edna’s artistic aspirations and validates her professional worth. Seidel maintains that the paintings that sell at this stage in Edna’s artistic development, unlike the earlier ones that she gives to Adele, are “personal and unconventional signs of her growing mastery of her environment and her art” (233). By means of her art, Seidel asserts Edna “resists seeing herself as a work of art and thus a commodity” and uses her painting as “a way of creating herself” (233). In the pigeon house, Edna has successfully transformed herself into a self-generating, legitimate female artist.

Even after she has achieved a measure of independence and individuality, Edna remains ambivalent, caught in a state of being which is characterized neither by “hope” nor “despondency” (141). Becoming “the regal woman,” Edna is transformed into a woman who “rules” and

“looks on” but also “stands alone” (120). Edna wishes to reconcile her love for Robert and her children with the individual independence she knows within the pigeon house and thus achieve a union between the two sides of her character, but is unable to do so. She relates her newfound individuality to Robert in her pigeon house during their long-awaited mutual declarations of love, matter-of-factly stating that “I am no longer one of Mr. Pontellier’s possessions to dispose of or not. I give myself where I choose” (146). Robert responds to this announcement, however, with shock and gradually comprehending horror. He perceives the radical nature of Edna’s statement: she has stepped out of the gendered space delineated by her society, and now she declares that she has effectively recreated her own identity.<sup>5</sup> Edna has become a creator, an *artist*, and is no longer a piece of domestic decorative artwork to be gazed at and admired. In Huf’s formulation of the female *Künstlerroman*, Edna—as a maturing artist—shatters, in this moment, “the man-forged manacles of her sex” (10).

Despite the triumph involved in Edna’s assumption of an individual identity apart from the gendered constrictions enforced by her society, Edna cannot exist as “a solitary soul”<sup>6</sup> and desires to maintain both her new individuality and her relationships with her children and with others she cares about within her society. Edna enjoys her private, unconstrained life in her pigeon house and also takes pleasure in her children, in “gathering and filling herself with their young existence” (128). But Edna, as she comes to realize, cannot have it all. Within the current ideological conditions of her society, Edna is compelled to make a choice between relationships within her society, as represented by her children and Robert, or her desire for professional self-fulfillment through her art. After assisting at “the scene of torture” (149) that is Adele’s harrowing childbirth, Edna arrives at an impasse. On the one hand, she will not relinquish her art and her new independent identity

that has come to represent her life. On the other, she cannot “trample upon the little lives” (151) of her children in pursuing her dreams.

Edna, then, finds a third way out of her dilemma: she refuses to make a choice at all. As Huf asserts, “[s]he goes to her death in order not to have to renounce—for the sake of her children—her newly awakened self, including the newly awakened sensuality that has become an important part of her and without which she would be but a fragment of a complete human being” (78). The messages that Mlle. Reisz and Adele give Edna, encouraging her either to maintain a defiant artistic identity or to conform to the domestic female ideal, set up an irresolvable conflict between individual ambition and the domestic responsibility represented by the home and one’s children, and Huf asserts that she will not reject either one aspect of her life or the other (78-79).

Edna’s refusal to renounce either her new identity as a self-generating artist or the relational bonds to her society represented by her children leads her back to the Grand Isle beach, as the novel completes a full cycle. At the beginning of the novel, Edna is surrounded by Robert, her husband, her children, and other friends and acquaintances of her Creole society. At the end of Chopin’s *Künstlerroman*, Edna is quite alone, and she has grown into an individual identity as a self-creating artist. Edna has been hunted, captured, and imprisoned by her society, and, like the bird with the broken wing she sees on the Grand Isle beach, “beating the air above, reeling, fluttering, circling disabled down, down to the water” (156), Edna, too, falls wounded back into the ocean and into the confines of her own mind through her final thoughts and memories. But, as Gilbert and Gubar maintain, even this suffocating enclosure within female gender roles can be empowering for female artists. By retreating into the female space of her own mind, her true place of origin, the female artist is able to recover and reconstruct her matrilineal heritage and give birth to her own art distinct from masculine tradition (96-99). Edna’s

development as an artist has been guided by two female mentors, Mlle. Reisz and Mme. Ratignolle, both providing her with different versions of the identities the female artist can assume. This matrilineal legacy enabled Edna to decide her own unique identity as an artist, which is an ideal hybrid of her two role models. Yet, as Edna realizes, this hybrid identity cannot successfully exist within her society, and she will be forced to compromise in order to survive.

And thus Edna’s final swim into the “abysses of solitude” (155) represented by the waters of the Gulf of Mexico is not so much a suicide—a choice to *terminate* life—as a decision to preserve one’s self in the face of irreconcilable conflict. As Gilbert suggestively remarks, “[*and how, after all, do we know that she ever dies?*” (58). Edna’s end, whether in the context of the novel’s ambiguous conclusion or by drowning in the Gulf, does enact a return to her childhood and imaginative recreation of her life through the function of memory. Referring to Edna’s dying memories of her childhood in Kentucky, Gilbert asserts that “Edna swims . . . not into death but back into her own life, back into her own vision, back into the imaginative openness of her childhood” (57). Though she herself may be defeated for her present time, Edna extends hope for the future realization of a New Woman artist-heroine successfully reconciling her individuality and art with the socially-gendered female role, a role that would be transformed as a result. Accordingly, Mary E. Papke remarks that “Edna’s death is an unspeakable tragedy, yet one does hear in her story the constant murmur, whisper, clamor of another vision of life” (87). Paradoxically, Edna herself *does* achieve a coherent self-portrait as a female artist within the novel, and even her choice to return to the waters of the Gulf itself helps create a new paradigm for conceptualizing the emerging female identity of the New Woman and extends hope for a better future. Edna’s awakening, the act of female self-creation, is remarkable in itself, and like she remarks to Dr. Mandelet, “perhaps it is

better to wake up after all, even to suffer, rather than to remain a dupe to illusions all one's life" (151).

Like her heroine, Chopin, like most female writers in late nineteenth-century America, also struggled with reconciling the demands of the female gender role with individual artistic ambition, and she received censure for the publication of a novel many considered dangerously subversive. Many contemporary reviews of *The Awakening*, although ambivalent about its subject matter, did focus on Chopin's artistic virtuosity, praising its "consummate art" (Deyo 165) and claiming that Chopin "has shown herself an artist" (Monroe). Of these early critics, even a young Willa Cather—who would write her own female Künstlerroman in 1915, *The Song of the Lark*—famously claimed in her 1899 review of the novel that the "overwhelming passion" of intelligent women like Edna causes them to stake "everything on one hand, and they lose" (171). This criticism, coming from another woman writer with her own artistic ambitions, vividly demonstrates the depth of this struggle between social convention and individual artistic fulfillment that women artists had to deal with at the particular historical moment in which Chopin wrote.<sup>7</sup>

In her discussion of the issues affecting women writers in late nineteenth-century America, Elizabeth Ammons argues that, as a whole, nearly all women writers at the turn of the century desired to achieve recognition as legitimate literary artists separate from their domestic role in a more radical way than before. Because of this ambition, these women were liberated from constricting definitions that had hindered previous women writers, but they also became "stranded between two worlds" and "floated between a past they wished to leave (sometimes ambivalently, sometimes defiantly) and a future that they had not yet gained" (10). Edna is just such an example of a "stranded" woman, and in her struggle, we can see the representative conflict of women writers

of this time period.<sup>8</sup> In her contemporary review of *The Awakening*, Frances Porcher states that the novel weaves a "spell" over the reader and "is something to be 'dreamed upon'" (Culley 162). Perceived as a vision offering the possibility of the future successful reconciliation of artistic ambition with the socially-gendered female role for the New-Woman artist, this is one dream that we do not want to awaken from.

#### Notes

1. In this sense, as Huf notes, the internal conflicts Chopin portrays within her female protagonist sheds light on her own conflicts as a woman writer and, more broadly, the conflicts within most female artists generally (69).

2. The emphasis on whiteness of skin as related to beauty and aversion to any form of darkening certainly has racial implications within Creole society—and, more broadly, within all Southern society—that suggests an intriguing area of analysis within this novel. For the purposes of my argument, however, I am focusing on the aesthetically gendered aspects of Leonce's reaction only as I am not able to develop the racial aspects adequately within the scope of this paper.

3. Edna's choice of Adèle as her first model is significant, as Barker proposes. The religious language used to describe Adèle foreground the lack of individuality permitted her (64). As a Madonna, Adèle has assumed iconic symbolism and is the eternally maternal, and the maternal body in the novel is connected to the scene of artistic inspiration and "jouissance" (65). In the novel as a whole, Barker claims that Chopin seeks to rectify the devaluation of women inherent in the traditional gendered ideologies reflected in male painting of women as subjects, and Edna's painting of Adèle as model demonstrates her struggle to move beyond objectification of the female (63).

4. Boyd elaborates that the artist was increasingly viewed as independent and autonomous, and as this identity clashed with the cultural prerogative of self-sacrifice placed on women in the nineteenth century, women did not begin to self-consciously present themselves as artists until the final decades of the century (3).

5. Discussing the implications of Edna's realization of self in regards to spatial representations of gender, Varghese John argues that Edna's historical society is one that is constrained by gendered definitions, and because Edna transgresses the space assigned to her gender role, she fails in her ambition. Nonetheless, John acknowledges that although Edna pays a high cost for the preservation of her individuality, Chopin herself succeeds in creating an innovative female definition in this novel (58).

6. "A Solitary Soul" was Chopin's first title for this novel (Culley 2).

7. In response to her critics, Chopin claimed limited responsibility in creating Edna to be the character she is, stating, "I never dreamed of Mrs. Pontellier making such a mess

of things and working out her own damnation as she did" (178). Chopin professed to be in the power of forces stronger than herself in the writing of this book and the creation of Edna, arguing "when I found out what she was up to, the play was half over and it was too late" ("Aims" 178). Boren argues that Chopin's light approach to the serious subject of her novel reveals her understanding of the boundary separating "art and real life" (183). I suggest, however, that this humorous tone functioned as Chopin's way of diffusing criticism and negotiating acceptance within her society as a female artist in her own right, which would have been difficult to achieve if she had been perceived as being purposefully subversive.

8. Earlier in the nineteenth century Elizabeth Stuart Phelps published a novel that portrayed the doomed struggle of a woman artist to balance personal ambition with domestic life. *The Story of Avis* features a gifted female artist, Avis, who initially plans not to marry in order to pursue her art as a vocation. Avis states:

Success—for a woman—means absolute surrender, in whatever direction. Whether she paints a picture, or loves a man, there is no division of labor possible in her economy. To the attainment of any end worth living for, a symmetrical sacrifice of her nature is compulsory upon her. (126)

Avis eventually changes her mind and marries, and her resulting domestic responsibilities entirely destroy her creative genius. However, Phelps does extend some hope for the future in Avis's daughter, Wait, as a woman who might just be able to accomplish what generations of women before her could not and fuse the "sacred individuality of her life" with "her supreme capacity of love" (246).

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**The Vital Grasp:  
Sausage, Structuralism, and a Computational Universe  
by Michael Buckley**

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*The text could well take as its motto: "My name is Legion, for we are many."*

— Roland Barthes ("From Work to Text")

*Be not as a sausage, full of useless things.*

—Attributed to Silvanus

Recent assaults on the image have left us with a well-developed way of talking about what we see. But the image has counter-assaulted. Stretching beyond our ability to actively de-code them, images have been assumed by author-less systems. These systems, corporations or Althusserian Ideological State Apparatuses, present a new edifice incomprehensible to structuralist critical modes. The most compelling element of these systems—what makes them more like living things than static pictures—is their reactivity.

Facility with defusing a system's reactivity is almost wholly lacking  
60 | Buckley

in structuralist methodology because this methodology is focused on tracing a subject's reactivity to static images. In *The Responsibility of Forms*, Barthes writes, "The filmic cannot be grasped in the projected film... but only, as yet, in that major artifact which is the still" (60). (It is quite useful to compare commercial structures, which employ various image schemes, to film.) Concerning still images no theorist was more successful than Roland Barthes in revealing the ligature of narrative within the "true." His examples, such as examining the sensation of cleanliness and motility in reference to soap bubbles in commercial images, allow us to experience at a glance a machine working upon us. The important note of this critical mode, though, is that it illuminates our complicity in this process. While this complicity is an important element of image criticism, it is not useful toward understanding corporate systems so reactive towards us, so filmic, that they can be described as textual "difference machines." Complicity is implicit here: you aren't just watching TV, it is *creating* you.

Because Barthes' critical modes are so effective, they can act as a basis for an augmented approach towards a sophisticated criticism of commercial images and the complex systems from which they spring. The landscape outside literary theory (as applied solely to literature) offers rich pastures for this sort of cross-disciplinary view, which can be seen as a mixture of structuralist image criticism and metaphors central to quantum physics. The end result, after all, should be a metaphor better suited to descriptions of predatory sales strategies, which currently remain largely unexamined in their totality.

Seth Lloyd, in his recent work *Programming the Universe*, posits a computational model of reality, attempting to replace the old mechanistic view which he claims is no longer comprehensive enough to describe physical laws. Because Lloyd elegantly describes ways to both quantify and systematize information, marrying his notions of the universe's quantum behavior to Barthes' pre-existing modes of image criticism makes for

a greater potential depth of understanding. To illustrate the potential of this system I will treat a textual phenomenon both localized and corporate: Jody Maroni's Sausage Kingdom,<sup>1</sup> located on the California State University Long Beach campus. By de-coding Maroni's kingdom of sausage and text, I will show both the complexity of this kingdom—the heft of which lies *within* us—and the role that it, and others like it, take in our lives.

*Uttering each time a 'subtle vision of the world,' the artist composes what is alleged.*

—Barthes (*Forms*)

*Sausage (sos ij), n.: from Latin salsus, "salted" or "preserved."*

*In Ireland, as elsewhere, the spheres of education are becoming increasingly dependent on the ready availability of a bewildering variety of information.*

—Sean Cooney (*George Boole: A Miscellany*)

In *The Responsibility of Forms*, Barthes flays the image. His specimen is the newspaper photo, expressed in three parts: 1) *emission*, the newspaper staff, 2) *medium*, the public, and 3) *channel*, the newspaper itself. He also elucidates a dialogue present between the photos and the text. Examined in this context, however, this dialogue does not address the interconnectivity of related photos and text.

Text acts in a prismatic set of congruencies functioning as both an "anchoring" and "relaying" of images.<sup>2</sup> "On the level of the literal message, language answers, more or less directly, more or less partially the question *what is it?*" Barthes notes (*Forms* 35). Language identifies the elements of the scene itself, Barthes argues, answering contextual questions about images. For images, while reactionary, are not transformations: It is important that a photo of a destructive scene, for instance, can be geographically identified. Is this a picture of Thailand or New Orleans, a viewer may ask, looking at the disorder of a washed-out city, and the answer will inform any one of their variety of reactions to

the image. At some level, Barthes argues, most viewers feel that images transmit truths, while words help translate these truths.

Barthes examines the interaction between the image and its cultural ramifications in *Mythologies*, a work based on two years' worth of monthly articles for *The French Daily Life*, sprung from a unique intersection: a recent reading of Saussure and a discomfort with the "naturalness" with which media sources dress up reality. Any attempt to dress something up is, of course, an attempt to place it in a narrative. (This is true in daily life. Witness Jody Maroni in his butcher's apron: He is an artisan. Witness a doctored image of his face on Toulouse La Trec's body: This is a commercialized masque, he connotes and cartoonizes.) "Myth is a language," Barthes famously said (*Mythologies*, 2). In *Mythologies*, he attempts to understand this language. The "great solar spectacles" of all-in wrestling, conjuring both bullfights and ancient Greek drama, is an "immediate pantomime," it speaks in absolutes: The overt suffering of the downed man, the glorious posturing of the victor. Wrestling speaks in certainties that transcend language, as does the solar spectacle of Jody Maroni's itself. Jody Maroni's visually courts the sun. Its bright colors promote a restless eye while misters create and cool crowds on hot days. An iconographic image to Jody Maroni's—understandably, given its origin on Venice Beach—is the sun glistening off of its sausages. These certainties are rooted in both our biological realities (such as hunger) and our understanding of our cultural text as it relates to both visual connotations (which I will address later) and the vagaries of language that addresses it.

Barthes explores the emerging primacy of the image in *The Responsibility of Forms*. "In other words, and this is an important historical reversal, the image no longer *illustrates* the words" (*Forms* 168). Instead the words "sublimate, patheticize, or rationalize" the image. With the realization of the image actively promoted by the text, the words

themselves become parasitic to the image.

This is the structural paradigm we find when examining Jody Maroni's. It is sweetly utilitarian: If one were to list the objects one sees in an image on the wall of Jody Maroni's, one would be ordering food.

*The universe computes [...]. What is the universe computing? Everything we see and everything we don't see.*

—Seth Lloyd (*Programming*)

*Where it is that the ultimate laws of logic are mathematical in their form [...].*

—George Boole (*Collected Logical Works*)

*Computing.*

—Majel Barret as “the computer” in *Star Trek*

Western thought is built on a mechanistic view of the universe. Or more accurately, Western thought is a machine meant to represent what we feel is the underlying nature of the universe: mechanics. For mathematician and determinist Pierre La Place,<sup>3</sup> who posited position, vector, and momentum for both planets and people, to the heart as a “ticker,” to a cliché like “the circle of life,” our lives and our selves are understood to be machine-like (*Programming* 36).

This understanding of the universe and its laws has given birth, in science, to binary thinking. Something is either hot or cold, black or white, 0 or 1. This is all perfectly true until one looks into the atom.

The atom is, to quote Paul De Man as he references the odd bedfellows of Jaques Derrida and Archie Bunker in *Semiology and Rhetoric*, the “arch de-bunker” (*Norton* 1514). Binary thinking is destroyed when considering atomic laws. Because electrons cannot be measured for both speed and location, quantum theory is based on probability. Electrons are never *here* or *there*, just *more likely* to be here or there. Extending this theory calls into question the nature of certainty itself—something arch de-bunkers like De Man had been doing also—and we, as storms of atoms, are not only of uncertain placement but of uncertain individuality.<sup>4</sup> Atomic laws

engender other states that feel impossible from our vantage point also. An electron can, for instance, spin in two directions at once.<sup>5</sup>

Seth Lloyd, one of the inventors of the quantum computer, has tried to force a shift in our understanding of reality. The universe can be understood as a quantum computer, he claims; that is, a computer based on the counter intuitive laws of quantum mechanics, in which one “qubit” (quantum bit) can register four states rather than two. Computers like this would be smaller and more powerful. The “universe as a computer” isn't a new idea.<sup>6</sup> Lloyd traces the notion back to George Boole, the English mathematician.<sup>7</sup> Boole's Laws of Thought, and the numerical notation for which they are famous, were fashioned to deal with large problems of logic. Later researchers sought to similarly reduce the complexity of the universe by comparing it to an analog computer. Ultimately, the universe is too complex to be represented by such systems, which is why Lloyd chose the much more powerful (and theoretical) quantum computer.

An interesting element of Lloyd's argument is that he feels computers are any things that handle information. “The first computers were rocks,” he notes. Stonehenge may have been the supercomputer of its day, a stone structure created to predict the movements of the stars. “Calculus” is the Latin word for pebble, in fact, and this small rock was central to the abacus and other simple counting machines.

This recognition of reality as computational<sup>8</sup> rather than mechanical is the most interesting aspect of Lloyd's thinking. In this model computers surround us, seeking to understand us, enacting authorless systems based on de-coding our behavior. With this new definition, it is possible to view Jody Maroni's as a computer. But what is it computing? To answer that question the concept of authorless systems must be further addressed.

Jody Maroni's is part and parcel of a series of systems, ranging from language to corporations. By “authorless” I mean collaborative to the degree that individual agency is gulped into an informational

maelstrom—an elaboration on Barthes' idea of Text, we must move forward without *emission*.<sup>9</sup> We can recognize that even Jody Maroni himself cannot drastically alter his sausage kingdom, its employees are acculturated, its subjects (us) are used to the product. The Jody Maroni name that appears on the sign, then, over the words "Sausage Kingdom" may be a titular king, but is not a single man. It is a name removed from legitimate individuality; in the realm of the marketplace it connotes individuality and denotes nothing. Because Jody Maroni's is an authorless system, and can be understood as a computer that can both transmit and absorb incredible amounts of information, it is a worthwhile question to ask what such a system does.

The answer is that it computes us. It computes our desires and strives to constellate our identities with these desires.

That is to say, when you order a sausage at Jody Maroni's, it is also ordering you.

*Space diverse, systems manifold to see,  
Revealed by thought alone [...].*

—George Boole (*Collected Logical Works*)

*Pluralitas non est ponenda sin necessitate. (Plurality should not be posited without necessity).*

—William of Occam (quoted from Lloyd, *Programming*)

First let's try to quantify the amount of information that Jody Maroni's is able to project. A high quality digital image can register about one thousand bits of information (or pixels) per linear inch; that's one million bits per square inch. This is about the resolution that the human eye is capable of perceiving. An eight-by-six image at this resolution would contain forty eight million bits of information. Color must be considered also: The human eye can distinguish about sixteen million colors, and digital cameras use twenty four bits to produce this same number. The same eight-by-six in color will register one trillion, one hundred and fifty two million bits of information (Lloyd 41). Because

Jody Maroni's surface could contain one hundred and thirty eight eight-by-six photos, it is able to project one hundred and fifty eight trillion, nine hundred and seventy six billion bits.

Information can appeal to senses other than our vision as well. Three types of information *reach out* of Jody Maroni's to interact with passers-by. One is sound: An employee is often calling out the availability of samples.<sup>10</sup> Another is scent: At a given time, the scent of food stretches into the seating area. (This medium of information hints at legitimacy: We can recognize levels of bacteria within Jody Maroni's kitchen to be informational as well. One could smell these bacteria if they were present in large numbers, as one can smell foot odor.) The last, and most unique, are the water misters. Fifteen of them line the roof of Jody Maroni's, and on hot days, draw people close to the edifice (the range of the mister is less than six feet). Interestingly, the misters have a pressure of one hundred and sixty pounds per square inch and use about one and a half gallons per hour. Walkers can lose a liter of water an hour. Accordingly, Jody Maroni's has created a desirable space around itself, a visceral thirst of balance between *outer* and *inner*, drawing people as if in an embrace closer to the advertising images.

Of course most of these bits of information are easy to consume. Unlike that of computers, our nature is to deal with patterns. But our pattern recognition tends to blind us to the amount of information we are consuming.

*The unbounded warmth of red has not the irresponsible appeal of yellow, but rings inwardly with a determined and powerful intensity. It glows in itself maturely and does not distribute its vigor aimlessly [...].*

—Wassily Kandinsky (*Concerning the Spiritual in Art*)

*Color is a kind of bliss.*

—Barthes (*Forms*)

Text, as Barthes conceives of it in "The Death of the Author," consists of all things written or spoken. The author is an anthology of

this system, unoriginal and constructed. If we expand this notion of Text to include visual and physical elements we are faced with a great deal of information. Using color theory to address stylistic choices, we can understand elements of the text that are usually unmentioned.

Jody Maroni's is a visual clangor. Much of the background edifice is black and white tile. These two achromatic colors have the strongest contrast and when placed near one another create the effect of simultaneous expansion and containment. A frozen, anatomized inhalation of form, at once rigid and free, is what catches our eye. Cultural associations are never absent from color usage, and the balance is present here as well. In this case, white connotes purity and black impenetrability: White is the totality of color (reflecting the world) and black the absence of color (absorbing the world). This creates a perfect static/active space of balanced "weight" (weight values of the two colors average out), the perfect place to display text.

The text on display at Jody Maroni's is the menu. Certain colors, when contrasted together in proximity, produce the illusion of movement. The black and white tile has already given the viewer's eye momentum, and we proceed to the most brilliant display: the images of the food. Because weak chroma encourage the eye to travel to stronger, and the images are constructed of varying chroma, we can understand these images to be sentences constructed in color. In each picture (there are three kinds: sausage/hot dog pictures, chili fry pictures, and chicken sandwich pictures) there are food, a beverage and a background. The background is the weakest chroma, a white, worn picnic table (connoting also leisure and authenticity), the beverage is mid-chroma, contrasting the glisten of the dark cola with the white cup, and the food is the strongest chroma.<sup>11</sup> Many of the food items are also nestled in a bright strip of fabric, calling to mind the presentation of an infant.

These images as "sentences in color" are repetitive. (The only

violation is in the image I call The Vital Grasp, which I will address later.) "Color sentences" like this can be better described as rebuses, pictorial representations of words or phrases. The presence of rebuses reinforces Barthes' notion that the image has eclipsed the text (Forms 79). The text (anchorage) helps viewers to verbalize the image here; the image, its walk of chroma, its glisten, creates the "meaning" of desire. The text shows the viewer how to get what he/she wants.

Bright images are able to reproduce themselves. Bright red or yellow, when placed against a calmer, contrasting background tires certain areas of the eye (Albers 47). When the eye looks away from the brighter color, an after-image appears. (It is usually bluish and rarely so obvious as to be blinding.) Jody Maroni's has large white panels over its menus. The first after-image appears here.<sup>12</sup> A contrast will exist with the after-image also, the hint of bluish against white, a reproduction of Jody Maroni's most treasured text, the menu.

It is also true that conditions that may not have been created by Jody Maroni's are easily assumed into its working system. The main dining area, for instance, is covered with a sun-break made of white slats. At noon (the peak of the lunch rush) this sun-break casts a chiaroscuro over the diners, producing motility similar to that promoted by the imagery of Jody Maroni's itself. White plastic tables resemble the picnic tables in the images and the contrasting colors serve as a thematic extension of the black and white tile. The stripes, perfectly proportioned, heighten the mood and promote movement of the diners, allowing Jody Maroni's to serve more customers. That is: an integral part of Jody Maroni's imagery extends into its dining court, where it defines the diners' experience.

### The Vital Grasp

*The intestinal reptile is an enormous phallus.*

—Barthes (*Forms*)

*The Full Maroni—Get a Good Look at Our Stuff.*

—Sausage Quarterly

A striking part of Jody Maroni's aesthetic is the unspoken presence of sex. Because sausage is so suggestive of the phallus, any in-depth presentation of the imagery will need to address this topic. It is a historical conflict. Constantine the Great banned sausage once he became a Christian; it was associated with the festival of Lupercalian, a possible predecessor to Valentine's Day. Today sausage is still aligned with sin. Jody Maroni's courts this association by using highly suggestive images without overtly addressing their connotations.<sup>13</sup>

One example of sexual connotation in the imagery of Jody Maroni's is the curvature of the sausages. In the two kinds of sausage images, sausage and hot dog, the sausage is always depicted as *bent*, even when partially hidden by a bun. (It is worth noting that when one orders a sausage, its presentation is far less suggestive: it is largely concealed by condiments and bread.) This bend connotes both artisan inexactness and the angle of a penis. The bend is also characteristic to a little sausage character that appears fourteen times across the lower half of the front of Jody Maroni's. It wears a crown also, and in conjunction with the cartoonized bend, connotes a puckish ruler.

Unlike in reality, the images of Jody Maroni's depict sausages and hot dogs as *longer* than their bun. The softness of the artisan roll or the traditional hot dog bun is contrasted by the very alive meat: It is grilled, shines, and sports cross-hatching that distinguishes it. Because in every case the sausage outstrips the bread, it is clearly the featured element of the sandwich. It can be argued then, that the bun, pierced by the sausage, is itself a highly suggestive foregrounding of the phallic image.

Jody Maroni's most compelling image is also one of the most common. It depicts a disembodied hand holding the signature sandwich

of Jody Maroni's. The bakery style roll ruptures to spill forth grilled onions, peppers, and the sausage itself. I have named this image The Vital Grasp. It differs from other images in that it isn't back-grounded by any realistic treatment, such as a picnic table. The hand is alone. (On the sidewall of Jody Maroni's there is a hanging of The Vital Grasp with an electric red design behind it; one of the red lines appears to be extending from the sausage, the climax of sexual imagery.) The hand connotes a necessary strength, as if the sausage had a power of its own. The sausage stretches so far out of its roll that if it were an actual Jody Maroni's sausage, it would be in danger of falling out. The peppers and onions, nestling the base of the sausage, resemble pubic hair. This image is one of the few without "anchorage;" it has no need to explain itself or to grant the viewer a way of vocalizing it.

The Vital Grasp is meant to conjure pre-sexual moments. Frames like it are popular in pornography, highlighting the vitality of a male participant, and the superimposition of a hand onto a sausage—which contrasts with the roll to connote life and vitality, and angles to suggest sexual intention—makes The Vital Grasp a masterpiece of sausage propaganda.

*These goat sausages sizzling here in the fire,  
We packed them with fat and blood to have with supper.  
Now, whoever wins this bout and proves the stronger,  
Let that man step forward and take his pick of the lot!*

—Homer (*Odyssey*)

*Flies, dogs, and mimics are the first to rush to the dish.*

—Latin Proverb

The biggest question about this approach is perhaps the question, why use something difficult to understand something difficult? Quantum computational theories aren't very approachable and it can be argued that Barthes' theories don't need augmentation. And is it really that important to look closely at corporate structures like Jody Maroni's? They are, after

all, largely harmless.<sup>14</sup>

My concern in this paper isn't the inherently *harmful* nature of systems like this. I certainly have no negative feelings towards Jody Maroni's. What I am trying to do is recognize an accelerating sophistication in corporate systems that has surpassed not only our ability to de-code them (symbols have never been easy to understand) but our ability to recognize their identity and bias. We have seen that a relatively small system such as Jody Maroni's operates on many different levels, addressing elements of our cultural text, and even our physiology, of which we are unaware. A synthesis of is a valid approach if it serves to awaken us to two things: The profusion of information inherent in cultural systems, and their ability to both shape and react to our desire.

*An offering of casual proof: The British Meat and Livestock Commission has recently added a seventh category to its list of occasions in which sausage is enjoyed by the British: "Satisfyingly Sophisticated." This fun, open-ended alliteration appears on a list of other events such as "birthday party" and "barbeque" but describes a new sausage experience. The meat itself has been rescued from the blue-collar ubiquity by the very forces that put it there in the first place. Let us count Jody Maroni among the saviors.*

#### Notes

1. Jody Maroni's was founded on the Venice Beach pier in the 1970's. Jody himself is the son of a butcher and has a keen eye for both artisan sausage and promotion: he and a Jody Maroni's cart have appeared in numerous films.
2. "Anchorage" usually refers to the line of text across the bottom of an image.
3. La Place was a celebrity mathematician of his time. Appointed to a governmental post by Napoleon, he was fired after only a few weeks. Napoleon felt his mathematical idea of the "infinitely small" had no place in government.
4. The famous example is boxers. They are indistinguishable at an atomic level, remarkable only in the similarity of their constituents: The boxer fights himself.
5. Language is analogous to a quantum computer: meaning abounds to the point that certainty disappears.

6. It should be noted that what Lloyd has done—and what I am trying to do with Jody Maroni's—is purely metaphorical. The universe is not a computer, nor is it a clock. These things are only ways of understanding complex systems.

7. And disturbing poet: think the bizarre inter-disciplinary skills of William Slatner.

8. "Computational" can be understood to mean able to absorb, reflect, and react to information.

9. Emission, the creator(s) of a given system, should be removed from this discussion. Creation, here, is collaboration.

10. On a given day of observation an employee called out: "Try sausage here," "Get your sausage here," and "This is good sausage".

11. Manufactured chromas, like Styrofoam or paint, tend to appear muted in relation to the shine and variety of the food.

12. The viewer, on a hot day, looks towards the misters, which foreground the white panels mentioned above.

13. "Myth is on the Right, garrulous, well-fed," Barthes said. As revolutionary as a system attempts to convince you it is, myth cannot express what does not yet exist. Jody Maroni's expresses a new view on an old subject (sausage).

14. I had the opportunity to tour Jody Maroni's (CSULB) and interview some of its staff members. The premises are immaculate and the employees professional.

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**Pantyline as Borderline:  
The Gendered Geography of Taylor Figueroa  
by Melissa Elston**

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“What a woman,” DBC Pierre’s titular character enthuses in *Vernon God Little*, as he eyeballs a longtime interest. “I watch her neat little buttocks stretch the fabric of her skirt, left, right, left [...] I’m so fucken in love with her I can’t even picture her panties” (Pierre 160). Yet a page earlier, Vernon had done just that, envisioning Taylor Figueroa in the seductive undergarments of a “real” woman, “probably silk, full cut, with lace panels and all. Maybe in a blue half-tone, or a kind of flesh tone. I’m slain by her” (Pierre 159). The crass, contradictory nature of Vernon’s narration is not surprising, given that he is just weeks shy of his sixteenth birthday—hardly a vantage point for mature adult reflection.



Nor is his comic fascination with Taylor's underwear surprising, given his relative sexual inexperience. In Vernon's bordered, juvenile imagination, her pantyline serves as "The Final Frontier," a mysterious, gendered boundary he seems at once eager and anxious about transgressing (Pierre 194).

This border is not simply one of Pierre's making; feminist writers have repeatedly observed a cultural tendency to physically sequester and manage sexualized regions of the female anatomy, arguably to a far greater degree than the male body is managed. Feminist author Susan Brownmiller puts it succinctly: "Femininity in all respects is a matter of containment" (142). While hardly a feminist (or even a *likeable*) figure by any stretch of the imagination, Taylor's behavior nevertheless flies in the face of such containment. She appropriates the patriarchally approved outer trappings of femininity (skirts, makeup, Victoria's Secret lingerie) but uses them to further her own agenda, hence sliding into the familiar *femme fatale* archetype: a woman considered by men to be especially treacherous, because her perceived sexual availability offers the *illusion* of male power while her actions paradoxically erode it. The woman behind Taylor Figueroa's panties is not an easily manipulated beach-house fantasy, but as Vernon rather alarmingly discovers, a flesh-and-blood actor with her own priorities and sense of agency. By examining Vernon's fantasies—and ultimate encounter—with the racial and sexual border that Taylor's pantyline represents in Pierre's satire, we can better ascertain the threat that sexually attractive females *still* represent in the collective twenty-first century male imagination when cast as the Other.

To be sure, Taylor's erotic zones are nebulously tantalizing to Vernon at first—representing what Brownmiller would call "the ultimate secret" in the male consciousness (155). Pierre plays to this construct (vagina and related reproductive organs as shrouded enigma), by similarly shrouding Taylor and her sexual organs in Vernon's mind. His sexual

daydreams are obsessive, no doubt—yet never anatomically explicit. "I never got a finger to her panties," he grouses from his jail cell, after first being taken into police custody, "even though I was close enough to catch the lick-your-own-skin-and-sniff-it disease that wastes me today; fucken hauntings of hollows between elastic and thigh" (Pierre 48). Of course, Vernon is confronted with far more serious issues than managing his adolescent love life; he is, after all, accused as an accessory to mass murder in the wake of a friend's shooting spree at school. Yet instead of figuring out how to prove his innocence (which would ultimately be a fairly easy task, the novel's end demonstrates) he continues to fantasize about Taylor—and her undergarments: "Every stroke of my boy brings her cotton closer, burrows vents for her fruit-air to escape and waste me" (48). Appropriately, when he actually locates Taylor in Houston while on the lam after skipping town, she tells him she is on her way to go underwear shopping ("I can't believe I just invited you," she gushes awkwardly into the phone) ... and at Victoria's *Secret*, no less (Pierre 156). The store Pierre selects is apropos; the chain itself takes its name from the idea that Queen Victoria, emblematic of an age in which female sexuality was muted and repressed, might have actually had a hidden carnal side. Likewise, part of what makes Taylor titillating to Vernon is her mystique, the "clefted heaven," concealed behind gray cotton tangas, that had haunted him earlier as he masturbated in his jail cell alone (Pierre 48). When Vernon finally ventures into this physical area to perform oral sex, he views the act as a demystification of femalehood, "the stinking wet truth behind panties, money, justice, and slime ... Pink Fucken Speed." Taylor now exists "without a secret left in the animal world" (Pierre 194).

Similarly, William Shakespeare's bawdy references to pubic hair illustrate that this view of a woman's groin as something geographically bordered—a thicket behind which a great, protected mystery resides—is

nothing new within Western male thought. One example can be found in Venus' invitation to Adonis:

I'll be a park, and thou shalt be my deer;  
Feed where thou wilt, on mountain or in dale:  
Graze on my lips; and if those hills be dry,  
Stray lower, where the pleasant fountains lie.  
Within this limit is relief enough,  
Sweet bottom-grass and high delightful plain,  
Round rising hillocks, brakes obscure and rough,  
To shelter thee from tempest and from rain  
Then be my deer, since I am such a park. (231-239)

Venus' identification of herself as a landscape with clearly defined landmarks ("sweet thicket grass" serving as a euphemism for pubic hair in this instance), as well as her subtle suggestion that male intrusion upon the pelvic region's "limit" is a sort of boundary transgression ("stray lower, where the pleasant fountains lie"—emphasis mine), reinforces the association of a woman's genitals with geography. This echoes Annette Kolodny's theoretical linkage of male fantasies about landscape and female bodyscape, both of which are commonly idealized as "enclosing the individual in an environment of receptivity, repose, and painless and integral satisfaction" (Kolodny 4). Despite the playfully transgressive connotation of the verb "stray," however, Venus is simultaneously condoning and encouraging male entry. By comparing herself to a park—a closely managed (read: controlled) and defined outdoor space set aside for human (read: male) use and enjoyment—she reinforces the idea of the female body as territory, a metaphor in which masculine border transgressions are not only allowed, but frequently amount to conquest and ownership.

Sex as border-crossing is a concept Vernon likewise echoes in his twenty-first century encounter with Taylor, as he describes his experience

breaching the "topography of her panty line":

We melt into each other's mouths, my hand finds the round of her ass, surfs it, a finger charts an edge of panty—doesn't pick, or lift—just teases and glides, moving higher, feeling the climate change [...] I pull aside her weeping panty to face a delta writhing with meats, glistening with sweat carrying spicy coded silts from her ass; olives, cinnamon dust and chili blood. (194)

Like Shakespeare, Pierre uses terrestrial features ("topography," "climate," "delta" "silts") to describe aspects of female anatomy, while at the same time shaping it in the reader's mind as a gratifying landscape, a territory to be conquered, "all for Vern," in much the same manner as one imagines a European explorer claiming land for France or Spain (Pierre 194). Despite the fact that he has achieved a degree of physical fluidity by kissing Taylor ("We melt into each other's mouths"), Vernon's initial hesitance to transgress the edge of her panties suggests that he, too, understands that this line of demarcation represents a separate psychological as well as physical border. Certainly, Vernon has no problem crossing other borders in the text. After all, he is an international fugitive, on the run from authorities in Texas. Repeatedly, he has defied adults in power—his mother, law-enforcement personnel, a court-appointed psychologist—and with apparently good reason; they seldom act in his best interest. Yet when he finds himself unsupervised in a hotel room in Mexico with Taylor, he nevertheless pauses before venturing onto the geography of her naked groin area—instead flattening his hand against the fabric first, as he narratively enthuses, "Panties—The Final Frontier" (194).

Why the need for a clearly delineated sexual borderline? As Gloria Anzaldúa notes, borders serve the interests of those in power. "Borders are set up to define the places that are safe and unsafe, to distinguish us from them. [...] Do not enter, trespassers will be raped, maimed,

strangled, gassed, shot. The only 'legitimate' inhabitants are those in power" (Anzaldua 25). While Anzaldua was describing the effects of sociopolitically constructed boundary lines, one can make a similar argument about boundaries which have been symbolically mapped onto the female body by contemporary American culture. Brownmiller suggests that modern bathing suits and trimmed pubic hairlines are a way of imprinting male borders (and hence male control) upon female genitalia—and, by extension, female sexuality itself. Covering "private parts" keeps women from becoming a threat to phallogocentric power structures, like the legendary race of beautiful, wild women who walked the Trobriand Islands "in nakedness and did not shave their pubic hair. Fierce with insatiable desires, they imperiled any sailor who was stranded on their shores" (Brownmiller 155). The implication in such a legend is clear: Independent, unconcealed female sexuality is dangerous. It is only by the establishment of culturally sanctioned borders such as panties, bras, and bathing suits that it is contained and managed, thereby reducing its threat to patriarchal systems of sexual exchange. Tampering with a woman's pelvic region "is more than a matter of cultural esthetics," Brownmiller observes, noting that other alterations from the mild (depilation) to the brutal (clitoridectomy) stand as cosmetic reinforcers of collective male power "to tame female sexuality and keep it in line" (Brownmiller 155).

In a similar vein, Vernon seems to wish for a degree of control over Taylor's affections, becoming extremely jealous when he discovers that another male classmate has had ongoing contact with her after graduation and later as he imagines her having sex with her "doctor" boyfriend: "As I picture it, her grown-up panties become skimpy just to finish me off" (Pierre 164). His constant visualization and revision of her underwear—which shifts in his mind from blue synthetic skivvies to "adult" laced panties to a racy bikini cut—hints at a possible excursion into fetishism,

which can be understood in Freudian terms as an anxiety-laced reaction to her gender difference (Bhabha 74). It *also* signifies his need to project definition and thus psychological ownership to the region the panties cover. It is no accident that when he actually encounters her panties (and pubis) in real life, Vernon's narration of the incident incorporates the language of conquest: "She tries to close back her legs, wriggles hard, but she's lost," he reports in triumph. "She gives up, beaten ... Her knees bend up and she takes in my tongue, my finger, and my face" (Pierre 194). When their interlude is subsequently cut short and Vernon is arrested, he takes on a comically dolorous tone, evoking not just the frustration of a sexually denied teenage boy, but the anguish of a captive being pulled away from his homeland into exile: "I'm led away from her crouching ass, an ass barely dry with my spit and my dreams" (195). His earlier characterization of her nether regions as "Pink Fucken Speed" takes on an entirely new dimension; like an addict, his illusion of power has melted. Now, he perceives *himself* as the figure under control by Taylor—a reversal that ultimately leads to anger and resentment. After all, she was knowingly part of the sting operation. She has exercised her sexual power to tantalize and then deny. Moments later, she is seen giggling in the lobby, as Vernon is led away, bitterly observing: "Her careless laugh follows me down the lobby" (195).

Interestingly, Vernon's boyish idealization of Taylor's pelvis as Promised Land occurs in tandem with his idealization of Mexico as Paradise. He repeatedly envisions himself living by the ocean: "Remember that ole movie, with the beach-house? Plenty of folks must do that, for real" (Pierre 147). What's more, he integrates the two fantasies, imagining that his longtime crush might agree to join him in this new setting: "I look out over the garden of this place, onto the beach, and see Taylor there running around in her panties, brown like a native" (188). It is significant that Vernon envisions Taylor again in her underwear, with the added

aesthetic of darker skin tone “like a native” to reinforce the fact that she belongs in this scenario. The teens’ ethnic identities should not escape the reader’s notice. Vernon is playing to a familiar borderland archetype: The pairing of an Anglo cowboy/outlaw male with an acquiescent *senorita*. Referencing Marty Robbins’ 1959 ballad “El Paso,” Jose E. Limon notes that in the Southwest, the idealized Hispanic female has long served as a fetishized Other, an iconographic receptacle for Anglo male desire—particularly when such men have experienced rejection by “real” (and therefore presumably more complicated) white women (Limon 599). Under this paradigm, Taylor Figueroa’s ethnicity serves as a fetish as much as her panties do, something Vernon hints at in describing her “Mexican fruit-air” as he fantasizes about having once had her “on a plate” as she lay inebriated outside a party in high school (47-48). In drawing on a such a familiar racialized sexual dynamic, Pierre at once strengthens and lends further complexity to the idea of the breaching of Taylor’s pantyline as a border crossing. Beneath her panties, Taylor’s anatomy does not simply offer a female landscape ripe for exploitation; it offers a specific ethnic landscape that has historically been exoticized and linked to the Anglo conquest and quasi-colonization of Mexico itself. Taylor’s perceived sexual availability, coupled with Vernon’s adversarial relationship with Taylor’s duplicitous, non-Anglo mentor, the journalist Eulalio Ledesma, only further echoes this pattern:

[White male] attributes contrast with a fat, slovenly, dark, mustachioed and often drunken, deceitful and treacherous Mexican male with whom our Anglo cowboy is usually at personal and political odds [...]. Casting Mexican women, in particular, as sexually promiscuous made them morally available within a code of racism ratifying and extending the right of Anglo conquest to the realm of the sexual. By taking ‘his’ woman, the Anglo colonizer further diminished the already desexualized Mexican male even as the Anglo ... was sexually

affirmed. (599-601)

Because of this lingering colonial image, Taylor’s covert partnering with “Lally” can be viewed by readers sympathizing with the conventional white male mindset as doubly treacherous, a betrayal of her colonizer and the accompanying “imperialist nostalgia” that is linked to their sexual union (Limon 604).

It is no surprise that when Vernon’s Mexico dream dissolves into nightmare, his depiction of Taylor likewise takes a nosedive. As she withdraws from him in the hotel room, the welcoming pubic climate he had described just paragraphs before changes from a pleasant Mexican fruit-breeze “to raw shrimp and metal-butter,” in a misogynistic, yet colorful turn of phrase (Pierre 195). Later, Vernon mocks her apparently vacuous mannerisms, jesting about her “mouth” which “flaps emptily” in court, then snidely narrating, “Watch out Taylor, like—oh my *God!*” as she receives her comeuppance for betraying him, toward the book’s end (Pierre 220, 272). Certainly, Taylor’s behavior is not laudable by any standard; Pierre has constructed her as an opportunistic, ladder-climbing predator. “Oh Tay,” Vernon muses sarcastically in his prison cell as he awaits execution, “She’s tight with all these media types now, reporters and all, with helicopters and stuff ... What she really wants is a big new story to launch her career” (Pierre 264).

Yet by simply excusing Taylor’s conduct as comic villainy befitting a caricature—one can almost imagine her pleading for the reader’s sympathy, Jessica Rabbit-style, “I’m not bad, I’m just drawn that way”—we bypass the problematically misogynistic and racist undertones of Pierre’s text. Likewise, by giving Vernon a mulligan for *his* self-gratifying teenage quest to possess her sexually, we ignore the precedent it establishes for adult male attitudes and behavior patterns outside the boundaries of satirical fiction. Particularly troubling is the “revenge” scenario that plays out on Vernon’s execution day, in which a fusillade of bullets pierces Lally’s

torso indiscriminately, but targets Taylor's body in an exclusively sexual manner:

Lally's face is a mask I fucken adore, suspended in time forever as slugs whistle and pierce the evening sky. He dances mid-air as chunks of his body pelt down like rain, before the bulk of him thuds twitching to the ground. [...] [Taylor will be] fine. Just maybe not filling out her panties the way she used to. Maybe they can implant a silicon butt-cheek or something, who knows? (272, 275)

Once again, Vernon calls attention to Taylor's underwear, as well as the fact she will not be able to inhabit it in quite the same way, post-injury. The attack has impaired her sexual attractiveness, and therefore her perceived locus of power. The implication is that this act has righted all that is wrong in Vernon's world. The threat Taylor represents (i.e., perceived loss of male control due to overwhelming sexual desire) has been removed, and he can metaphorically "ride off into the sunset" with a pretty—but not *overpoweringly* attractive—Anglo partner, Ella, who returns to the narrative with a new sense of containment and modesty, "tugging down the hem of her skirt" as she enters the execution chamber (Pierre 269). If, like Brownmiller, we view female fashion and covering of sexual areas as submission to male aesthetic values (and hence authority), then this new pairing is notably "safer" by patriarchal standards. Ella's new pattern of dress (wool sweaters, loose cotton) signifies that she is willing to sacrifice her previous sexually unbridled behavior for the sake of containment by and confinement to masculocentrically defined social norms—something Vernon ultimately finds to be reassuring. The substitution of Ella for Taylor also follows another important ethnic pattern in Limon's criticism:

Robbins' cowboy-narrator, Gary Cooper's Will Kane and McCarthy's John Grady Cole may be attracted to, have sex with, and even fall in love with such a [Mexican female] figure, but usually these

relationships are not culturally meant to last. [...] More often than not, our cowboy must take up romantic permanency with his own racial-cultural kind. (Limon 599)

With this precedent in play, Vernon's retreat from *el otro lado* of Taylor's panties to his "own" side of the ethnic border is reinforced in the Anglo reader's mind as natural and proper, even as it holds to dated stereotypes about men, women, and colonial/cultural order. It is interesting to note that Ella's panties previously did not hold the same exoticized allure as Taylor's. When she approached Vernon earlier in the novel, "ole straw hair blowing around her face," he had pulled back in revulsion at the sight of her cotton underwear, declaring her "too young" to exploit, despite her professed sexual experience (Pierre 129). Yet now that Ella has matured into a viable partner, Vernon describes her sexual appeal in strikingly different terms than Taylor's: "a tall, beautiful young woman in a pale blue suit squeezes along the back row to her seat, kindling my groin out of retirement. [...] Bluebonnet eyes call to me through the glass" (269). Ella's "bluebonnet" eyes (which stand in contrast with Taylor's previously noted "vixen" eyes), followed by her later appearance on Vernon's street, waiting by the willows in a "loose cotton dress that swishes full of honey breeze" align Ella with nostalgic historical images of Anglo farmwives and schoolmarms—as well as the welcoming air of the prairie itself (276). She represents settlement, successful colonization. What's more, she represents safety. Her subdued persona (complete with a transformed, timid sexuality) becomes, in Limon's words, "the ultimate [imperialistically nostalgic] pairing for our cowboy, once he is done with his transgressive experimentation at the border" (608).

*Vernon God Little's* rollicking, satirical saga may end on a seemingly idyllic note. "Everything's back to normal ..." Vernon concludes at the book's close. Yet the problematic dynamics of Vernon's pursuit—and then punishment—of Taylor Figueroa beg the question: Is "normal"

really a picture of what is best? By maintaining the status quo—which includes the iconographic sequestration of Taylor Figueroa as dangerously exotic “Other,” at once desirable and deplorable—Pierre perpetuates social inequities and stereotyping, the very phenomena that caused Vernon to be wrongfully accused in the first place. In doing so, DBC Pierre firmly redraws and reaffirms the borders around female sexuality in Western thought (“good” girls cover their bodies and help men achieve their goals; “bad” girls exercise sexual power and pursue their *own* goals, often betraying men in the process) as well as Chicana marginality, even as he releases Vernon, with “just a dream and the wind to carry me/And soon I will be free [...]” (Pierre 272). Taylor’s pantyline may have been narratively breached for a few brief moments, but as the book concludes, it is strikingly apparent that it ideologically persists: as border, as boundary, as bondage.

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### Fallen Angels with Plucked Wings: “Mystery” and the Rankian Aesthetics of the Real in Henry Miller’s *Tropic of Cancer* by Thomas S. Johnson

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*“The only thing we are missing is angels. In this vast world there is no place for them. And anyway, would our eyes recognize them? Perhaps we are surrounded by angels without knowing it.”*

—Henry Miller (qtd. in Fielding 11)

*History, Stephen said, is a nightmare from which I am trying to awake.*

—James Joyce’s *Ulysses* (28)

Otto Rank, after he had conducted a historically long-ranging study of art and the artists who produced it, concluded that early art—art produced before the Renaissance in Western Europe—was primarily

religious art. The seemingly simple yet psychologically complex reason behind this link between religion and art, so Rank writes, is that “religious art portrayed the idea of the soul in concrete form for the men of the time, in the shape of gods, and so, psychologically speaking, proved their existence” (13). Rank goes on to explain that “[i]t is precisely the concreteness of art as compared with the ideas of the soul that makes it convincing; for it creates something visible and permanent in contrast to something which was merely thought or felt” (13). Art, then, according to Rank, had as its aim for much of recorded history the physical representation of the soul, the non-material. Art, put simply, was a translation tool. It made God or the gods and the entire idea of something beyond the physical realm a tangible reality via representation. This relationship between art and religion worked out well so long as the audience for which art was produced had faith in what that art was representing. At around the time of the Renaissance in the Western world, however, a scientific revolution began that would send the faith of the masses into a downward spiral. Consequently, art and religion soon found themselves on divergent paths.

Henry Miller, twentieth-century author of *Tropic of Cancer*, steps into this scene relatively late; nonetheless, he steps into it with a timely answer to some of the problems created by waning faith and putrescent art. One unfortunate byproduct of Western civilization’s scientific revolution and the social milieu in which it occurred was the divorce of the material world from the spiritual. The material world, as science increasingly came to explain it, began to appear more deterministic, with each object in it, whether animal, plant or mineral, acting in its cog-like way as a part of the perfectly logical machine. The spiritual, on the other hand, became more and more the realm of superstition and of *extra-material* belief, something no longer directly connected to the realm of the material. Into this disintegrating world is born Henry Miller. Miller—the man about whom

Anais Nin has written that “[h]e is a man whom life intoxicates, who has no need of wine, who is floating in a self-created euphoria”—makes it the mission of his art to heal the fissure between the mundane and the mysterious (8). He does so in *Tropic of Cancer* by denying both extremes, as they exist by the beginning of the twentieth century, of science and religion—the one holding the world away from faith, and the other keeping faith a safe arm’s length away from the world—and by asserting the material world’s necessary possession of a very real “mystery.”

By the time Miller began writing, the practitioners of science had a long history of human innovation and intellect explaining and still-better-explaining the physical world to support their chosen faith—for, no matter how much science takes as subject and proof the empirical, strict adherence requires just as much faith as does religious belief. These believers in science were slowly canonizing their own sacred texts and *a priori* ideological assumptions. As L. Lamar Nisly has it,

[d]rawing on the work of Copernicus and Galileo, [...] Isaac Newton’s revolutionary concepts in physics led scientists to begin to see the material world as completely comprehensible through objective observation, thus explaining much of existence that had earlier seemed mysterious. The mechanistic functioning of the universe allowed scientists to determine the natural laws governing matter. Because the universe has a logical certainty, they argued, any observed anomalies are simply evidence that the current theory needs to be corrected through better observation and reason, not that the material world is illogical. (10)

Science and scientific observation, in their purest sense, were meant to be perfect tools for understanding the world, should human reason be but patient enough to work out the kinks. This, however, would not suffice for Miller. At one point in *Tropic of Cancer*, Miller is posing for his friend Swift to paint his portrait. Another friend, “Kruger[,] got in the habit of

dropping in too about this time; he maintained that Swift knew nothing about painting. It exasperated him to see things out of proportion. He believed in Nature's laws, implicitly. Swift didn't give a fuck about Nature; he wanted to paint what was inside his head" (221). Between his two friends, Miller has set up a clear divide, a divide between the ultra-scientific and the something-not-yet-defined. "Anyway," Miller continues, "there was Swift's portrait of me stuck on the easel now, and though everything was out of proportion, even a cabinet minister could see that it was a human head, a man with a beard" (221). Miller now attaches different values to his two friends' ways of looking at the world. Kruger's way, the way of "Nature's law," is fine for getting just the surface picture, for even someone who adheres strictly to the law—a cabinet minister, as it were—could see what the real thing represented in Swift's painting is. But creating by law, implies Miller, is not creating at all. Kruger does not understand this and is frustrated by Swift's art. Miller, though, does not set up a distinct right and wrong dualism. Swift's art is valuable not only because it is a representation of what is "inside his head," but also because it does still bear some relation to the real world; it still looks in some way like "a man with a beard."

Miller, in an interview later in his life, further explicates the barren nature of the strictly scientific approach to life. He claims that "[n]o matter what you touch and you wish to know about, you end up in a sea of mystery. [...] This is the greatest damn thing about the universe. That we can know so much, recognize so much, dissect, do everything, and we can't grasp it" (qtd. in Fielding 63). This idea of "mystery" and the relation that mystery has to reality is extremely important to Miller's art. A strictly scientific approach to reality, by virtue of how science had come to define itself by the early twentieth century, denied that mystery and sought rational explanations for all of reality. In an attempt to counterbalance such a one-sided view of the world, Miller says that it

is the place at which "we can't grasp it [...] where our reverence should come in. Before everything, the littlest thing as well as the greatest. The tiniest, the horseshit, as well as the angels, do y'know what I mean. It's all mystery. All impenetrable, as it were, right?" (qtd. in Fielding 63). Positive that Kruger's strong view on natural law, as well as Swift's opposite view on a kind of Impressionism are equally wrong precisely because of the extremity of their strength, that they are, in fact, killing views, Miller maintains that the smallest bits of physical reality, the most insignificant pieces of what lies before us and also the most grandiose ideas in our brains are shot through with a "mystery" that makes them always valuable and inexplicable.

Miller's sense of "mystery," though, lies no longer within the jurisdiction of religion. Giles Gunn, in a passage that reads like Miller's ideas translated into academic-speak, claims that religion should be seen as the "hermeneutical rather than the apologetic, the anthropological rather than the theological, the broadly humanistic rather than the narrowly doctrinal" (qtd. in Nisly 4). From this critique, then, can be inferred the mistake Western (Christian) religion made when it diverged from science and scientific inquiry. Instead of focusing on making some sense of the physical world (the hermeneutical), religion focused on defending its own existence and rectitude (the apologetic). Rather than connect to humanity (the anthropological), religion allied itself more and more strictly with the divine (the theological). And ignoring the facts of the "what is" (the humanistic), religion chose to pay more attention to the "what ought to be" (the doctrinal). In all of these decisions, religion placed itself, according to a Rankian worldview, in a place before art, before the physical manifestation of the soul, the divine, and all other things abstract. From this position, religion must have necessarily found few followers who actually lived out their lives in the physical world. Religion had become alien, a foreign language to real human beings.



Miller's sense of "mystery" comes from some place more human than from an alienated religion. During one of the multi-page digressions into his own thoughts that are typical of *Tropic of Cancer*, Miller advises that

[i]deas have to be wedded to action, if there is no sex, no vitality in them, there is no action. Ideas cannot exist alone in the vacuum of the mind. Ideas are related to living: liver ideas, kidney ideas, interstitial ideas, etc. If it were only for the sake of an idea Copernicus would have smashed the existent macrocosm and Columbus would have foundered in the Sargasso Sea. The aesthetics of the idea breeds flowerpots and flowerpots you put on the window sill. But if there be no rain or sun of what use putting flowerpots outside the window? (242)

Miller's "flowerpots" are all the ideas ever born in the human brain, from the religious ideas of gods and a soul, to the more practically innovative ideas of the steam engine and the printing press. With the latter class of ideas, it seems obvious that some material realization is necessary for them to mean anything—talk of mechanized printing does not produce books. Perhaps, though, it is even more obvious that the ideas of the former class, those of religion and religiosity, need material translation to a greater degree. Without making material manifestations of those ideas—something akin to a tangible objective correlative—the ideas are simply stuck inside the head of the person who has them, with no way of ever being brought into existence, shared, or built upon. This non-material void is where religion has positioned itself. And it is the loss of depth that the physical world has suffered for that removal which is the second of the faults Henry Miller seeks to correct in *Tropic of Cancer*.

The problem facing Miller, the problem he chooses to take on, is how to bring together such disparate ideas as faith and the physical have become by the twentieth century. At least one of Miller's contemporaries

has made telling commentary on Miller, his art, and how the two relate to this pulling-together process. Michael Fraenkel writes that

[t]here are those who would take a book like the *Tropic of Cancer* and draw an imaginary line, like the line of the equator in geography books, between what they consider dirty in it and what they consider not. It's like drawing an imaginary line in Henry Miller himself, and saying: 'This part of him is clean, this part is dirty.' A man is clean or he is not. The *Tropic of Cancer* is a dirty book or it is not. No one part of it can be said to be clean and another part unclean. You accept the whole thing, or you reject it. (67)

What makes *Tropic of Cancer* clean, what brings the book together across that imaginary line Fraenkel accuses some readers of laying down is the sense of mystery which Miller re-invests in the world. The mystery behind the "horseshit" and the "angels" is what brings the two things together and puts them on a level playing field, the clean playing field of real life. And it is that same mystery which Miller uses to steal back away from science and religion their best traits and to reunite them in his art.

Rank tells of another union that is equally instructive in explaining Miller's aesthetics. In a culminating passage in *Art and Artist*, Rank affirms that "*Religion springs from the collective belief in immortality; art from the personal consciousness of the individual*" (17, Rank's emphasis). The two things, collective immortality and personal consciousness, work together to give meaning to the art any artist produces. Miller is faced with a world in which the first term has become obsolete, and so he must somehow re-affirm the belief in immortality before he can have a space in which to assert his consciousness. On the very first page of *Tropic of Cancer*, Miller writes that "[a] year ago, six months ago, I thought that I was an artist. I no longer think about it, I *am*" (1, Miller's emphasis). It is significant that Miller ends the second sentence where he does. Miller does not say "I am an artist," but chooses to stop at the pronouncement

of the Old Testament God: I AM. At the very outset of his book, then, Miller meaningfully allies himself with a once-powerful deity—one gone impotent from lack of human belief—and fashions himself the creator of a world which, according to the ordered pages of the book, is to come. Miller makes himself a creator and a savior all in a couple of strokes on, presumably, Anaïs Nin's typewriter. Instead of working within what notions of divinity and soul are left lingering in religion, Miller forces his hand to say that, if his book is to be accepted, he will be the new creator, he will provide the new soul that the world so desperately needs.

This impulse towards god-making fits all too well with Rank's ideas concerning the artist and artistic development. Rank writes that "[w]hile aesthetic pleasure, whether in the creator or in the contemplator, is ultimately a renunciation of self, the essence of the creative impulse is the exactly opposite tendency towards assertion of self" (23). Miller certainly asserts himself throughout *Tropic of Cancer*, but he does so within the milieu of the aesthetic creation; he does so only to teach his audience that each of them can and should do the same in order to combat the killing removal of mystery from the physical world. Miller had a great faith in himself, but that faith could be extended to others who might discover what Miller had: that they are worth something intrinsically and that all the world, because of the mystery behind it, is worth something intrinsically. This is why Miller once wrote that "[a]utobiography is the purest romance" (qtd. in Brassai 144). It was not only his own autobiography about which he was writing. Any autobiography makes for good romance, in part because of the ideas around Swift's portrait of Henry discussed above. Swift's portrait, while representing something completely original and born in his own mind, also bears some relation to the physical world, thus adding depth to that world. The surest way to add depth to any one person's world, Miller is saying, is for that person to realize the romance, the imaginative powers, the "mystery" of his/her

own life. Miller is trying to teach us how to do this in *Tropic of Cancer*.

Miller teaches his readers by using the materials at hand to reunite the physical world with the mystery which has been lost from it. Those materials, for Miller, are words and his own life. Rank writes that "the artist, as a definite creative individual, uses the art-form that he finds ready to his hand in order to express a something personal" (6). Rank further explains that "this personal must therefore be somehow connected with the prevailing artistic or cultural ideology, since otherwise [the artist] could not make use of them, but it must also differ, since otherwise he would not need to use them in order to produce something of his own" (6-7). This is a fairly accurate description of Miller working between the poles of science and religion. To do so, Miller must invent a self and a world which incorporate something of what his audience already knows of scientific fact and religious mystery. Miller accomplishes this neither by explaining away reality, as science would do, nor by going beyond it, as religion would; instead, Miller places himself more deeply in reality by shaping what materials that reality provides into something that tells a greater truth. As Brassai has it, "Miller never believed the truth to derive from a precise notation of facts and events, but instead from the flood of images that are unleashed in his imagination by these facts, from what he finds within, from what he wants to give of himself" (145). And give of himself, Miller does. Some of the proof of his aspirations for that gift comes in a later comment Miller made regarding art in general. "Once art is really accepted," writes Miller, "it will cease to be. It is only a substitute, a symbol-language, for something which can be seized directly. But for that to become possible man must become thoroughly religious, not a believer, but a prime mover, a god in fact and deed" (qtd. in Fielding 41). Each individual having become his/her own god and the creator of his/her own world, the process of creation will then have come full circle. Miller, via the means described by Otto Rank, has made his art an arbiter

language and made himself his own god, his own "I AM," but only in an attempt to show his audience that they, too, can and should do the same. He has pointed out the path to rediscovering mystery; now all he can do is wait for others to take that path.

Late in *Tropic of Cancer*, Miller writes a near-perfect explication of Rank's ideas. Miller and Fillmore have entered a Catholic church during Mass. Miller paints the scene, describing a priest who "mumbles to [the parishioners] in a language which, even if it were comprehensible, no longer contains a shred of meaning. Blessing them, most likely. Blessing the country, blessing the ruler, blessing the firearms and the battleships and the ammunition and the hand grenades" (261). Partly because the Latin of the Church has become incomprehensible, but in large part because the Church itself has pulled away from relevance to the real world, the Mass is meaningless to Miller, as he argues it must be equally meaningless, save as empty ritual, to those celebrants in attendance. The final blow is that Miller imagines the blessings of the priest falling on "country," "ruler," "firearms," and "ammunition." The blessings are disconnected from humanity and serve only to reaffirm a blind adherence to the doctrines of the Church, allied with whatever state will condone, support and defend that Church. Those blessings and that kind of allegiance are not relevant to the real lives of the people Miller knows. Those people, if they are in need of blessing at all, need blessings which relate to them personally, not those which affirm false connections to an abstract state.

This scene ends in a symbolic reawakening out of the disconnected Church and into the material reality which so much more deserves the investment of religious mystery. When approached by a priest in the church, Miller and Fillmore ask where they might find the exit. Miller tells readers that the priest "took us firmly by the arm and, opening the door, a side door it was, he gave us a push and out we tumbled into the

blinding light of day. It happened so suddenly and unexpectedly that when we hit the sidewalk we were in a daze" (262). With definite imagery of a fall mixed in with his description of this scene, Miller manages to make that fall look very fortunate, indeed. From the detached and ultimately meaningless Church, Miller and Fillmore have fallen into the "light of day," which, while "blinding" at first, does sound healthier than the "huge, dismal tomb" (260) of the church building they were just inside. The entire incident reminds Miller of a past experience he had with church officials in Florida, first with a priest and then a rabbi. Both denied Miller aid he very much needed at the time: the priest implied that Miller should get a job, though the job market was non-existent at the time; and the rabbi came off as affronted that a non-Jew would approach him for help, while also implying, like the priest, that Miller should find gainful employment and take care of himself. At the end of the recollection, Miller launches into one of his classic diatribes:

The same story everywhere. If you want bread you've got to get in harness, get in lock step. Over all the earth a gray desert, a carpet of steel and cement. Production! More nuts and bolts, more barbed wire, more dog biscuits, more lawn mowers, more ball bearings, more high explosives, more tanks, more poison gas, more soap, more toothpaste, more newspapers, more education, more churches, more libraries, more museums. *Forward!* Time presses. (266, Miller's emphasis)

What Miller is explicitly doing here at the end of *Tropic of Cancer* is allying religion with the killing mechanization of science. If religion will not engage with the actual, will not make itself relevant to the material world, then it has no chance of saving anyone in that world. By remaining aloof and keeping the mystery of religion detached from reality, the religious leaders and keepers of the gates of religion are only aiding science and its practitioners in their mission of mechanizing and explaining away all

the world.

Miller fights against this tendency toward mechanization by pointing out all the mystery that there still is in life throughout *Tropic of Cancer*. Even this falls in line with Rank's ideas about art: Rank claims that "[a]ll art, whether primarily naturalistic or primarily abstract, unites both elements within itself, and indeed itself arises[...] from a conflict between the two tendencies" (xlvi). Placing science in the realm of the perfectly "naturalistic" and religion in that of the "abstract," we can see how Miller exemplifies this tension more explicitly than most other writers before or after him have. Miller's aesthetic is not one that "primarily," to use Rank's word, attempts to pull the abstract into the "naturalistic," nor is it one that "primarily" attempts to draw from the "naturalistic" the abstract. Miller's aesthetic is one that rides a thin line of creation placing each back in each, reaffirming the mystery of the real and the reality of that mystery.

Kate Millett does not believe Miller is successful in his aesthetic mission. She writes that "Miller has succeeded in isolating sexuality from the rest of life to an appalling degree. Its participants take on the idiot kinetics of machinery—piston and valve" (150). I believe that Ms. Millett has missed much of the intent of *Tropic of Cancer*. The "idiot kinetics of machinery" is what Miller has been left as his material after religion became irrelevant to life and science made it an arithmetic problem. This is the material Miller presents because this is the material he has been given, the material he has lived. The art of what he does, however, is to express something beyond that material, some mystery which still undergirds the whole of existence. It is that mystery, a mystery as much applicable to a man's portrait as it is to sex, which Kate Millett, in her rush to accuse Miller of misogyny, completely overlooks.

One of Millett's specific accusations is that Miller has disembodied the female genitalia by celebrating that as the whole of any woman's

being. For an example, Millett discusses the differentiation Miller makes between the two prostitutes, Germaine and Claude. Because Miller portrays Germaine as the "good" prostitute, for placing all of her being into her work, which is to say placing all of her being between her legs, and Claude as the "bad" prostitute, for being, at best, ambivalent about her profession, Millett claims that Miller dehumanizes women. On the contrary, Miller is simply observing that Germaine is doing precisely what suits her, and that is good. What is "bad" about Claude is not that she is a bad prostitute, but that she is not doing something else, something more akin to her "vocation," a something that would allow her to express her own personal mystery. And if there are circumstances at play—like the mechanization of life foisted on people by a dispassionate science and a disengaged religion—that force Claude to be a prostitute instead of pursuing some other line of work, then it is those circumstances which are to blame, not Miller's portrayal of the reality they produce.

Millett makes a second target of Miller's descriptions, at various points throughout *Tropic of Cancer*, of female genitalia. She claims that these descriptions are needlessly violent and that they only serve to reinforce the metonymy of replacing for the whole human being just the genitalia. Again, I would argue that Miller does not create this metonymy, but only records it. Further, Miller is entering into a certain tradition in the way in which he describes the female genitalia. In a scene late in *Tropic of Cancer*, Miller describes what he envisions as he hovers over a passed out prostitute in his bed: "When I look down into this fucked-out cunt of a whore I feel the whole world beneath me, a world tottering and crumbling, a world used up and polished like a leper's skull" (248). Granted, the terminology Miller uses is not the most pleasant, but then Miller's purpose has not once so far in the novel been to be pleasant. Miller here enters a kind of parallel course with another great Modernist writer, James Joyce. Joyce gives to his protagonist, Leopold Bloom, in

*Ulysses*, while Bloom is contemplating either the Dead Sea or an old Irish milkwoman or Jewish history and tradition or all of these things (and one would be hard-pressed to find textual evidence for defending distinctions), the following thought: "Dead: an old woman's: the grey sunken cunt of the world" (50). Joyce chooses this image not because of any misogynistic streak in his character, but because of his position as creative artist. The reason that Ireland (for Joyce) or Judaism (for Bloom) has become the "grey sunken cunt of the world" is that creation has ceased, and that is an artist's worst fear. Miller, I argue, is using his imagery in a similar way. Because of the commodification of sex and of the female genitalia by a world no longer invested with mystery, a world "used up" and no longer creative, Miller has as his material only the supposedly dirty and deprecatory. In this reading, Millett's disgusted and powerful reaction to the picture Miller paints might be correct, but she has aimed her criticism in the wrong direction. What Millett ought to criticize are the conditions and beliefs which have created such a world as the one Miller depicts; instead, Millett attacks the messenger.

Finally, Millett compares Miller to another writer in whose company Miller often finds himself: D. H. Lawrence. Millett claims that Lawrence was the far better artist because Lawrence maintained a sense of ritual or socially prescribed courtship dance around the sex act, while, "[j]ust 'fucking,' the Miller hero is merely a huckster and a con man, unimpeded by pretension, with no priestly role to uphold" (147). Millett is both right and wrong, here. Miller would never want a "priestly role to uphold"—though he got one—but his idea of himself is more than "merely a huckster and a con man." Miller (and his aesthetic—the philosophized version of his unintentional "priestly role") works to undermine and prove false the impotent and killing priests of his day: unfeeling science and disconnected religion. Both of these are impotent because they bear no relation to *real life*—science failing to connect with *life*, and religion

failing to connect with what is *real*. They are killing because those unfortunate masses who invest their faith, their souls, their selves into one or the other are destined for the death-in-life against which Miller so fervently railed. If Miller is any kind of a priest, he is a priest of a middle path, but a path set between such extreme opposite poles that it, too, appears extreme.

When Stephen Dedalus, in Joyce's *Ulysses*, invokes history as the "nightmare from which I am trying to awake," I believe he is saying something very much in line with what Henry Miller attempts in *Tropic of Cancer*. It is history, the forward thrust of something we humans are meant to believe we can do nothing about, that brought the world to a place where the physical can be explained and ordered away and the mysterious no longer bears any relation to that material world. Miller once asked, if we were confronted with angels in our world, "would our eyes recognize them?" He answers himself in *Tropic of Cancer* by implying that we might all be fallen angels with plucked wings. The only way to see as much, the way to see the mystery that still exists in an ostensibly gray and gritty world, is to re-create ourselves as artists, each of us the creator of his/her own world, just as Otto Rank describes in his theories of artistic development. The answer to how we might recognize angels, in other words, is to redefine the angelic. Should it ever come to pass that we have all followed Miller's advice, the world would no longer fall under the divisive explanations of science and religion, but would totalize itself into one unified vision, a vision invested with mystery and one in which the "horseshit" and the "angels" coexist quite comfortably.

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**The Morelli Method  
and the Conjectural Paradigm as Narrative Semiotic  
by Patrick Lawrence**

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In *The Sign of Three: Dupin, Holmes, Pierce*, Carlo Ginzburg claims that "the art connoisseur and the detective may well be compared, each discovering, from clues unnoticed by others, the author in one case of a crime, in the other of a painting" (82). He is writing about the Morelli Method, a model of art authentication based on trifling details, as opposed to central elements of composition. Morelli's theory, later explored in its broad-ranging implications by Ginzburg, is that these details are less subject to conscious control and are therefore more particular to the specific artist. Further, they are less likely to be copied by a pupil or imitator, and thus are more reliable as a means of attributing artwork.

From the start of his research, Ginzburg saw the Morelli Method

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not only as connoisseurship, but as a way of reading, of *deciphering* both paintings and crimes. The clues of an author's individuality are left behind in unconscious traces, be it a particular flourish in the drafting of an ear, or in the fingerprints at a crime scene, and can be used to attribute the act of either creation or transgression. In a classically Morellian analysis of various paintings by Giovanni Bellini, George Martin Richter writes "These subconscious elements are, in fact, more or less uncontrolled emanations of the true psychological character of the artist" (Richter 288). This view, while perhaps encouraged by Morelli, may be untenable in a contemporary context where the "true psychological character of the artist" has been problematized. However, it demonstrates the fundamental principle of Morelli's method: that the identity of the creator of an artwork is expressed most reliably in those aspects of the artwork least attended to by the artist. Ginzburg sees this method spanning both forwards and backwards, as the root of a conjectural paradigm beginning with hunters and diviners, and succeeded by doctors, psychoanalysts and detectives, all focusing on the specific case rather than the general principle, and all putting together tiny clues (or symptoms) to construct an objective truth otherwise unavailable.

Yet, what may be important to remember is that when the truth to be discovered is inscrutable, or as in the case of fiction, where "truth" is a product of the text, the matter becomes less one of *discovering* the truth, and rather one of *establishing* it. In implementing Morelli's Method (or its principles), one is not simply utilizing a new tool to access a truth that lay inaccessible (or indecipherable); but he is also creating a new discourse of truth, a new way to establish the authorship of a crime or painting with all its corollary responsibilities and accolades. One could argue that at its very inception, the Morelli Method was always-already a discourse rather than a tool, a linguistic system rather than an objective device. Ginzburg himself paves the way for such a reading, especially in

his early research, where he calls the paradigm "semiotic," though he will later call it "conjectural".<sup>1</sup> Whatever its past, one can say that the Morelli Method—and the inductive paradigm that underlies it – has reached that state now. With its mass dissemination as the subject of art and its subsequent transformation into an object of representation open to manipulation and internal critique, it has accrued the potential to both reveal truth and to obscure it.

Ginzburg traces the origins of the conjectural paradigm back into a mythic past of trackers and mystics before locating its heritage in Medicine, Psychoanalysis, Anthropology, and other disciplines concerned with reading past events through their traces in the present. The conjectural paradigm, he notes, inevitably also becomes the province of the police, and is used to significant ends during the period of European history when an interest in fixing the identity of the criminal starts to develop within the state to prevent recidivism (104). This process, pioneered by Bertillon and others, whereby the individual identity was measured, codified, and written down on cards to be placed in an archive, became more than a highly systematic tool for figuring out if an arrested person had been arrested before. It also conventionalized the markers that defined physical identity. It forcibly individualized people according to these markers, and thus became a method for deciding, as much as discovering, what constituted identity. There is a striking parallel here, as Ginzburg notes, between Morelli's analysis of body parts in isolation: ears, noses, etc., and Bertillon's system in the French police apparatus, which measured these same characteristics. In art connoisseurship, one may simply be attributing works, but in reading clues in a criminal case, one is creating the identity of the criminal from them. This second practice casts its shadow on the first and introduces the appropriate ambiguity into the practice of connoisseurship, which is, itself, a discourse of power like any other, wherein the determination of authorship is never a neutral act.

While the Morelli Method was first used to analyze artwork, its underlying paradigm soon became the *subject* of artwork, especially when it became the preferred technique of the master crime-solvers of the detective story. Rather than functioning solely as a way for connoisseurs or detectives to put a name to a painting or crime, it is also a way for a novel, television show, or other form of narrative to convey meaning. In these mediums, identification is necessarily indissociable from troping and archetypal networks of signification. As a result, when an investigator begins to collect clues, he creates an image of an individual *qua* criminal, even more than he identifies that individual as the perpetrator of a specific crime. This process, relying on metonymy, involves the reading of trifling markers to reach *fixed types*. By doing so, it becomes the underlying concept behind characterization, as well as foreshadowing and other narrative devices, in which small signs become significant through their relation to later events.<sup>2</sup> When the paradigm enters popular conception through a narrative medium, the process of detection or identification is merged with the processes of plot development and characterization to such an extent that their purposes become ambiguously mixed. It is also important that in its imbrications with tropological processes, the operation of the conjectural paradigm begins to develop the conventionalized usages that allow it to control, rather than simply discover, meaning.

This transition is facilitated in part by the ubiquity of the paradigm's manifestation within works of art.<sup>3</sup> Like other models of detection and policing, the conjectural paradigm has long since been assimilated into popular culture and is so widely disseminated that it is subject to parody (as in the case of *The Naked Gun* or *Get Smart*). However, it is also subject, in and through these modes, to a certain process of conventionalizing where the practice of picking out the irrepressible clues of a suspect's identity has lost its role as a radical or novel form of detection. In fact, it could not have become the subject of parody if it had not been calcified

through usage and entered popular knowledge. Any paradigm thus reified no longer enjoys the authority that allows it to remain invisible. Thus, it is made into a thing—an object of representation—one paradigm among many paradigms.

Even beyond this, the *manipulation* of the convention of the paradigm has become common in its representations. The new breed of master criminal eludes capture by planting false evidence, thereby hijacking the paradigm's meaning-making machine in such a way that he becomes the author of an alternate explanation of the crime: the frame-up. His counterpart, the new master detective, is distinguished by his ability to see through the ruse, usually because it is “too perfect.” The “too-perfect” crime narrative is pivotal in a genre in which the forms have become so ossified as to necessitate the transformation of the trope of the detective who, like the reader or viewer, can now see through the artifice.

Nowhere is it clearer that the conjectural paradigm fixes or determines—rather than discovers or reveals—identities, than when one analyzes a work of detective fiction. While the plot and exposition of a crime narrative rely on the illusion that the criminal is pre-existent and that he leaves behind the clues of his identity, in the material reality of the text, the criminal emerges *as the product* of his clues. It has become conventional in some stories to reveal the identity of the culprit before the detective begins solving the crime (as in *Columbo*); yet, it is more common, as in the Sherlock Holmes tradition, to discover the criminal (and the narrative of the crime) only after his identity has been aggregated by the signs he left behind. While the crime is supposed to be chronologically anterior to the solving of it, in the material text, the details of the crime are described only in the last few minutes of the show, as is the criminal's full identity. The detective uses the traces left in the present to lay out which criminal will appear (in handcuffs) in the future, and what explanatory reconstruction of the crime will also occur there (ala *Murder She Wrote*).



Here, it is made clearer through the inverted chronology of the genre that, at least in art, the process is one of determining something that will follow, rather than discovering something that has already taken place.

There are, however, more significant ramifications to this process than who will be led out in handcuffs. There is a symbolic exchange going on, as well. The generative crisis in the detective story is that the crime has been insufficiently signified; it is an indecipherable event that suggests a realm of secrets, impermissible in a police paradigm of total surveillance. A sufficiently astute reader is needed to assign meanings to the crime's detritus. In the extra-artistic world, one can reasonably assert that he is in fact "deciphering" latent meanings; yet, in the realm of a drama, one is *creating* the meanings for an event that does not have them—meanings, such as, who committed the crime and why. All of these things take form only as they are constructed through time and movements of the text, and as the clues are revealed and interpreted. When the detective or the viewer arrives at an explanation for the crime, these signs become simultaneously invested with meaning.

To put it bluntly, the conjectural paradigm not only represents a method of reading symptoms or clues to discover an obscured truth, but of creating new subjective and discursive truths. As such, it has no fixed allegiance to a particular event, phenomenon, truth, or fact; rather, it can be used by any sufficiently skilled individual or group to create facts and manufacture truths. Its very presence in fiction, which has no relation to specific facts or events, belies this. In order to better understand the workings of this, I will turn next to an institution of pop culture: The *Law and Order* television series. It is tempting to examine the broad characteristics of the *Law and Order* franchise as a whole, to trace the development and standardizations of its formulas, as well as its deviations, and to dissect the way that such a standardization amounts to an ideological language unique to the show.<sup>4</sup> But for my purposes,

*Law and Order* is only a filter through which to view the operation of the conjectural paradigm.

*Law and Order* participates in and contributes to the conjectural tradition with a slight variation from the norm, as the role usually inhabited by a single detective is shared among various parties associated with either the executive or juridical apparatus. The police and the district attorney's office are jointly in search of the clues that will give up the criminal and then mark him so indelibly that a jury of his peers will convict him. While the conjectural paradigm is at work throughout both halves of the episodes, it is substantially more prevalent in the first half, where location and identification of the suspect is paramount. While it is arguable that the second phase of the program's format, which features legal wrangling, continues this work, it does so to a diminished degree because the suspect has usually by this time been sufficiently marked or identified to the audience. The focus then shifts towards making that mark known to other characters, such as judges and juries. However, as if to correct this deviance, the original series gave rise to spin-offs, such as *Law and Order: Special Victims Unit*. Apart from being more salacious, it tends to lose its strict delineation between the policing and prosecuting halves.<sup>5</sup> In many episodes, the process of identifying the criminal takes precedence over prosecuting him or her, and the typically juridical characters take part in the hunt.

The series' next spin-off, *Law and Order: Criminal Intent*, also returns to a more conventional narrative of revelation, and returns more completely to the Holmes/Dupin tradition. *Criminal Intent* originally proposed to depict the crime from the criminal's perspective, and then follow the detectives' attempts to solve it. Over time, however, the format became more conventional as the series began to focus on the eccentric and erudite protagonist Robert Goren. Goren is, himself, a Holmes or Dupin figure, well-versed in a variety of subjects that allow him to spot

the inaccuracies or deceptions in the testimony of suspects or witnesses.<sup>6</sup> Goren is often the one who “discovers” the identity of the criminal before anyone else and he is always the one who discerns that the criminal is manipulating the clues to mislead the police. He has a special knack for detecting a frame-up, for knowing when the conjectural paradigm is being manipulated. This is a major element of the significance of the series to the life of the conjectural paradigm.

Often, *Criminal Intent* seems to allude to the fact that it is indebted to Morelli. In certain episodes, more explicitly than elsewhere, the process of attributing artwork is merged with the attribution of criminal responsibility. In an episode entitled simply “Art” (2001), a forger is identified by the unique way her reproductions deviate from their sources. For example, a crescent flourish added to the copy of a painting recalls the forger’s last name: “Moon.” Similarly, in “The Posthumous Collection” (2004), broken marbles arranged in artistically staged photographs of murder victims turn up in the possession of the murderer/photographer, who has been located based on a psychological profile constructed from a reading of his photos. In both cases, a Morellian analysis of their work creates an indisputable image of the artist, and in both cases, through the design of the plot, this leads to the attribution of guilt.

In an attempt to highlight some of its effects on conjectural thought operating at the narrative level, I will look at a specific episode of *Criminal Intent* entitled “Albatross” (episode 13 of season 6, director Frank Prinzi). The episode opens with a stylized montage juxtaposing shots of two scenes to the score of “Under Pressure” by David Bowie. The first scene is the staging of a recreational reenactment of the Hamilton/Burr duel by two members of the New York City political establishment, observed by the performers’ gathered friends and families. The second is more obscure. The camera shots do not include the face of the solitary actor. Instead, they show the assembly of a high-powered sniper rifle. Through

the rifle’s scope, we see that the gun is aimed at the participants in the duel. As the men playing Hamilton and Burr raise their pistols and fire, so does the sniper, and the scenes converge as the bullet, racing in from a distant location, finds its target and kills the man playing Hamilton. The soundtrack begins to fade, and we come out of the haze of stylization and emerge onto the scene of a murder.

From here, the episode gets down to the brass tacks of fixing the culprit’s identity. Detectives Goren and Eames arrive on the scene and are taken through the particulars by the crime scene investigators. Immediately, the conjectural paradigm comes into play as the police construct the narrative of the crime from the tiny effects they find. The bullet is located and from it, the model of the rifle is determined. Next, by examining the trajectory of the bullet, the location of the shooter is identified. At the sniper’s “nest” Goren and Eames find etches in the paint where the support bipod of the rifle was rested and scorched marks on the turf where the hot shell casing ejected. The story is nearly complete.

The only information missing is the name of the shooter; therefore, their next job is pinning the crime on someone, and this predictably takes up the bulk of the episode. Following a lead, the detectives speak to the duel-master, who reveals that there was a last-minute costume change. Judge Layton (the murdered man) was wearing the grey jacket that George Pagolis (the other participant in the reconstruction) should have worn to the duel. Assuming that the judge was the target of the hit, and that the only person who could have warned the sniper of the last minute switch (so that he would be sure to target the man now wearing grey, rather than blue) was George Pagolis. The detectives begin to put the heat on him. In the mean time, the sniper is identified, and found strangled in his apartment. Through conversations with his driver, as well as other clues, Goren and Eames learn enough to suspect Pagolis of both

murders and arrest him. While passing through the metal-detector at One Police Plaza, it is discovered that Pagolis has, in his coat pocket, the very strand of piano wire used to strangle the sniper and it is disguised as a retractable chalk snap-line of the variety he habitually carries.

Suddenly, Goren begins to suspect the too-tidy nature of the case against Mr. Pagolis. When the captain says that they have enough to hold Pagolis, pending further investigation, Goren remarks that it might be "a little too much." More detective work, and a re-reading of the clues, reveals that Pagolis's driver, Dave Oldren, has contracted the hit on Mr. Pagolis out of sympathy for Pagolis's wife over the way her husband routinely undermined her career. Unfortunately, the sniper, who had been told to shoot the man in grey, and was not warned of the costume change (because Dave-O was himself unaware of it), shoots the judge in error. Dave-O's backup plan, hastily conceived, is to frame Pagolis for the murder so that he will be dispatched to prison, at the very least. This leads him to fabricate the evidence leading to Pagolis's arrest.

The import of this episode lies in its doubling of crime narratives. Instead of utilizing a single, obscured narrative that the astute detective must tease out of a set of clues, there instead exist two sets of clues leading to two plausible narratives. In the first (constructed by Dave-O), George Pagolis is guilty; in the second (constructed ostensibly by "reality"), Dave-O is guilty. This contradictory doubling reveals the way that the conjectural paradigm—the process of using clues to construct a narrative of past events—can be manipulated. It is used in this episode to construct both a narrative of falsehood and a narrative of truth. The possibility of the first casts a shadow on the second. This dual (duel) functioning takes the conjectural paradigm out of its status as an invisible function of truth, and puts it into the mix as merely a thing, a discourse among many, with no special claims to "truth."

At work in the construction of these two narratives is the issue of

identity and its construction. At different points in the episode, the same clues serve first to flesh out the elements of George Pagolis's persona that will place him socially and fix him as a type, and later identify him as the person who killed the sniper. The article in question is the chalk snap-line, a tool used to lay straight lines for construction work. Early in the episode, Mr. Pagolis is seen absent-mindedly playing with one while he waits for his wife. This gesture is polyvalent: it marks him as someone who works in construction, which has social ramifications. It also renders him distinct from his patrician wife, thereby highlighting aspects of their relationship, and in the context of the criminal drama and the mob mystique, it marks him as someone with possible ties to organized crime. Later, the presence of the snap-line in Mr. Pagolis' pocket provides a link to the death of the sniper, and falsely identifies him as the murderer. Early on, the snap-line was a nexus point for significations based on the social class in which it found its most common use. Later, it becomes the signifier of a particularity. No longer just any snap-line, it is the specific snap-line rigged with piano wire used to garrote the sniper. It becomes evident that the mobility of signification of a particular sign is not restricted by its actual purpose or use, but rather by its deployment within the artwork. The "clue" (or trace or trifle) (or sign or symptom) becomes the gathering point of systems of signification, such as mobster, blue-collar worker, or murderer. These need not be significations of facts, but can equally be significations of connotation, of characterization, and, in certain hands, of slander, misidentification, etc.

In "Albatross," we have a complex functioning of the conjectural paradigm as an object, not only of artistic representation, but of manipulation by the characters within the artwork. Momentarily setting aside a more textual analysis, it is significant that the characters themselves are able to assign meaning to create false meaning. They create fictions within the fiction of the episode. Further, the episode, the "text" itself,

plays with these modes as well, allowing the two conflicting conjectural narratives to develop without contradiction. In this new status as object, the conjectural paradigm takes on a role that has no privileged relation to truth. Rather, it simply works in the hands of various characters or subjects to their ends. It is a set of rules for organizing signs in the interest of manipulating their interpretation. They use it to create stories, and through stories, meanings.

The transformation of the conjectural paradigm from an inductive system to a system of creating meaning does not involve that great a leap. In the realm of fiction, characterization is a notable hinge point, as it operates in the mode of symptoms and signs, and ends by establishing names, identities and meanings. Even in Ginzburg's hypothesized origins of the conjectural paradigm, narrative—itsself a meaning-making system—had its place. The Morelli Method and the conjectural paradigm are no longer only the progenitors of an inductive practice, but of a language based on that practice. It is a language organized metonymically and operating through the interplay of signs. Its birthing place is the detective story, but it is certainly not restricted to that zone. However, it is through this genre that we can begin to see it step self-consciously out of its role in reading clues to find the criminal, and begin to inhabit its role in arranging clues to create meanings.

#### Notes

1. Ginzburg calls medicine the marquis sciences in the conjectural family because it uses the symptoms (semes, signs) of pathology to construct a larger picture or narrative in the form of a diagnosis that has its conclusion and denouement in treatment and recovery. In *The Sign of Three*, Ginzburg notes the etymological similarity of "symptom" and "semiotics," and discusses to a certain extent the implications of this connection. In a precursive paper published in 1979, he referred to the "conjectural paradigm" as the "semiotic paradigm," and focused much on this connection, though he would nuance it considerably in later work. However, Ginzburg delves primarily into the practice of divination and prognostication from existing signs, and does not transfer this analysis

into the realm of literature, where the same model, with minor variation, can be seen to mimic the divination of meaning when it is actually creating it. His concern is primarily the dissemination of an inductive model and he does not carry its reading into the production of meaning.

2. Ginzburg imagines that early hunters were, in fact, the first storytellers, because of what he speculates was their practice of developing narratives from clues, relying heavily on metonymy (89).

3. Certainly, nothing can remain outside the world of artistic representation for very long, even if we imagine its inception as extra-artistic. The conjectural paradigm is no different. In fact, if one wants to step outside Ginzburg's hypothesized chronology for the paradigm and read only the timeline of its dissemination, it began with Morelli in artistic representation (connoisseurship) and was later worked backwards in time speculatively by Ginzburg into pre-history.

4. These formulaic structures acquire the status of tropes within the genre. I would argue that unlike less-broadly disseminated, less well-known, and less long-standing artistic forms, *Law and Order* is capable of creating or instituting tropes, rather than simply deploying them. As character types, relations, or metaphors become calcified and begin to recur frequently, they also take on meaning in their variations, rather than in their presence. But that is an ambitious claim to be argued at greater length in some other forum.

5. Other, less successful spinoffs, like *Trial by Jury* and the more recent *Conviction*, skew the other way. With *Law and Order* having generated a lack by creating the dual arrest/trial model, then drifting back towards to arrest in later series, the new spin-offs reestablish the balance by concentrating on the juridical apparatus. As their titles imply, these two series concentrate on the trial. They also take part less in the conjectural paradigm, as they focus more on interpersonal conflict.

6. The series' writers and producers seem to delight in showing off the extent of Detective Goren's learning. In addition to his apparent knowledge of criminal profiling, psychology, and biometrics (physiognomy), in several episodes, including the one which will be analyzed in this paper, his ability to speak American Sign Language figures prominently, even where it seems superfluous. It is also interesting to note that the actor who plays Goren, Vincent D'Onofrio, also acted in a 2002 television program called *Sherlock*, based on an adaptation of Doyle's character. D'Onofrio played Holmes' rival, Moriarty.

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**Keats and the Poetic Process:  
The Relevant (pre)Text of "To Autumn"<sup>1</sup>**  
by Jerry Lee

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A majority of John Keats's poems were published "posthumously, in texts over which the poet therefore had no control" (Stillinger, *Texts* 8), so several of Keats's poems are, in their present condition, remarkably different from what the poet had originally intended to publish. This may not be the case, however, with "To Autumn," which was first published in the 1820 collection *Lamia, Isabella, The Eve of St. Agnes, and Other Poems*. With this particular poem, readers are privy to a text that was published before Keats's death, so we know that any changes made from the initial draft were likely approved by the poet prior to publication. In fact, we also have access to manuscripts of Keats's early draft, a letter copy for Richard Woodhouse, Woodhouse's own transcription from the letter, Charles Brown's copy (apparently made from Keats's original) and George Keats's copy made from Brown's. While these five manuscripts exist, the version from which the 1820 text was set from has apparently

been "lost" (Stillinger, *Texts* 259). In other words, we have a great deal of information on the composition history of the poem, especially from the two manuscripts written in Keats's own hand, but we simply cannot determine which changes, if any, were made from the final draft as it was set to be published. That is to say, unless the manuscript of the final draft is recovered, we will never know of any last minute changes. From the manuscripts that exist, however, we are able to learn much about not only the creation process of the poem, but also about the poem in its completed stage.

Jack Stillinger claims that the "critical significance" of studying the manuscripts of Keats's work "ought to be obvious" (*Texts* 11), and Stillinger provides readers with notes of textual variants in his 1978 edition *The Poems of John Keats*. Yet, a majority of the notes were omitted for Stillinger's 1982 edition *John Keats: Complete Poems*, which was "designed expressly for general readers and students."<sup>2</sup> While the general reader may understandably have little interest in the textual genetics of Keats's poetry, those partaking in any serious study of Keats's work should access such information. While the pruning of notes from Stillinger's 1982 collection suggests the general lack of critical interest in the textual variants, I contend that there is still a wealth of knowledge that can be gained from the examination of changes evidenced in draft manuscripts. Therefore, I argue that any scholar or student of literature who is undertaking study of Keats's poetry should consider the composition history of the work not only because the current published versions are notably different from what is seen in Keats's original drafts, but also because examining the genetics of the works reveals, or at least suggests, reasons behind specific changes made by the poet, which is beneficial, and perhaps even essential, to the reader who seeks a coherent interpretation of the work. For my argument, I will focus specifically on "To Autumn," for critics have merely begun to explore the significance of the various changes in

the poem.

I am, of course, not the first to mention the benefits of studying the composition of "To Autumn" and there exists an abundance of new historical approaches, which attempt to understand the creation process of the work. Andrew Motion, Keats's biographer, argues that the poem's perplexities may be attributed to the fact that the work is "ambitious to transmute or escape history" but paradoxically "cannot and does not want to escape its context" (462). Motion mentions two particular readings that support this claim, the first being Nicholas Roe's interpretation which includes a reading of the word "conspiring" as one that "embraces and deflects the plotting that Keats knew surrounded Henry Hunt's recent activities" (462). Motion also notes Andrew Bennet's analysis of Keats's image of the gleaner: "although the figure is obviously part of an appeal to the world of Classical fulfillment, and a refracted expression of Keats's wish to glean his teeming brain, it also refers to his sympathy for the denied and the dispossessed" (462). Motion adds his own interpretation as well: he argues that the bees serve as "a reminder of the miserable facts of labour that Keats had condemned during his walking tour in Scotland, and had mulled over in recent letters to George" (462). Ernest Lovell Jr.'s 1967 study "The Genesis of Keats's Ode 'To Autumn'" explains, through examination of Keats's letters, some of the work's idiosyncrasies in relation to Keats' other odes. For example, Lovell mentions that "To Autumn" is unique in that it has a "setting in actuality" and a "serene acceptance of this actuality" and that such distinct characteristics can be attributed to the "significant events" in the poet's life that occurred around the time of the work's composition (208). Lovell's study is compelling, but M.R. Ridley's 1933 study suggests that there is more to be learned through examination of the different manuscripts that exist of "To Autumn." My purpose, of course, is not to comment on the deficiencies of approaches that disregard the textual

variants that are revealed in the different manuscripts, but it should be noted that the very attempt to attribute historical context to Keats's lines suggests a discontent with the more traditional text-only readings of "To Autumn." In other words, I do not aim to slight such approaches, but merely hope to expand study of contexts to include earlier manuscripts of this particular poem.

As mentioned earlier, Stillinger's 1978 edition, *The Poems of John Keats*, provides accompanying notes on specific changes that were made from Keats's original draft of "To Autumn." Some of the modifications, such as the change of "furuits" to "fruit" in line 6 or "oozing" to "oozings" in line 22 are probably inconsequential slips of the pen or accidental misspellings, so it seems to make sense why many of the textual variants have largely been disregarded. There are, however, several changes that are indeed undeniably significant.

Thomas Dilworth, in his discussion of "To Autumn," mentions the change from "a gold cloud gilds" in the draft to "barred clouds bloom" in the 1820 text. Dilworth's study reveals (perhaps inadvertently) that there is a certain amount of logic and judgment involved in looking at manuscripts. For example, theoretically, one cannot conclusively determine whether the original word was "clouds" or simply "cloud," but Dilworth reasonably assumes that the phrase was originally "a gold cloud gilds" and not "a gold clouds gilds" (26). It is most likely that the "s" was added after "gold" was changed to "barred" and "gilds" was changed to "bloom," because "cloud" would need to be plural in order for the verb "bloom" to be grammatically correct. If one examines a manuscript of the draft directly, one can see that the "s" seems to be of a lighter pen mark, and the addition of this "s" makes the spacing of the words "clouds" and "gilds" closer than what is typical of Keats' writing evidenced elsewhere in the poem. Of course, there are still inconsistencies, such as line 31's "crickets," whose "s" hardly resembles

the typical "s" written by Keats in this draft and drafts of other poems (*Manuscripts* 223). It is most likely that Keats simply did not cross out the "a" before transcribing subsequent copies, and there is valid reason to believe this, for Keats' letter copy to Woodhouse, which was written shortly after the original draft (Stillinger *Texts* 259), does not have the "a" (*Letters* 170) and neither does the 1820 published version.

Dilworth also suggests that "Keats took some trouble over the image" (26), and it is clear that such an assertion is based on Dilworth's knowledge of the lines that Keats had originally composed. In other words, we can conclude that Keats, at least for a few moments, debated over which image would be more suitable. The decision was apparently not an easy one to make, for both choices encase the cloud(s) between a pair of alliterative words. The original image that Keats had contemplated, compared to the one that Keats would eventually select, also seems relatively apt, for the clouds that "gild the soft dying day" are reminiscent of some of poem's earlier lines:

To swell the gourd, and plump the hazel shells  
With a sweet kernel; to set budding more,  
And still more, later flowers for the bees,  
Until they think warm days will never cease,  
For summer has o'er-brimm'd their clammy cells. (7-11)

In these earlier lines, the speaker seems aware of autumn's "conspiring" (3) plan, which presumably also includes providing the bees with the false hope that the "warm days will never cease." Similarly, the act of gilding provides false impressions as well, for something gilded suggests an object whose exterior has been ornamented in order to conceal its true composition. Keats, however, obviously chose the image of the "barred clouds," apparently because it is superior to the one with the "clouds" that "gild." Dilworth suggests that the image of the "barred clouds" resonates with the image of the cells of the beehive that are

“clammy” and also adds to the poem’s elements of “enforcement” and “oppositional desire” (27). Additionally, this image seems more suitable when considering that by the beginning of the third stanza, the speaker has apparently come to terms with the inevitable passing of time: “Where are the songs of spring? Ay, where are they? / Think not of them, thou hast thy music too,— ” (23-24). It may seem as though the speaker is providing autumn, apparently yearning for the coming of spring, with a bit of consolation, but, especially considering the following lines that suggest the enforcing quality of nature, it seems more likely that the speaker has simply relinquished his own yearning for spring, and provides himself with consolation as a means of attempting to remain optimistic despite his constrained circumstance. To put it simply, Keats’s choice of “barred clouds” was probably the better option, because it helps to bring closure to the first and third stanzas, thereby providing the poem with more unifying stability.

In essence, by examining the imagery of the clouds in “To Autumn,” we are able to understand what choices Keats had contemplated but eventually abandoned. And by doing this, we are able to construct more informed postulations on the reasonings behind such decisions. One should also take into consideration Stillinger’s approach to “The Eve of St. Agnes,” in which he periodically draws on textual variants to support his claim that readers “may see that Keats had misgivings about Porphyro’s fitness to perform a spiritual pilgrimage and arrive at heaven” (76). For example, when Stillinger discusses Keats’s description of Porphyro in religious terms, he notes that, according to a stanza that was not included in the final published version, Porphyro “declares that he would be ‘full deified’ by the gift of a love token” (75). And when Stillinger discusses a “series of bird images that may be thought of in terms of the hunter’s game,” he refers to images that were rejected prior to publication, such as the poem’s reference to Madeline as “an

affrighted Swan” and Porphyro’s reference to her as a “Soft Nightingale” (77). Stillinger’s approach to “The Eve of St. Agnes,” originally published in 1961, reveals his willingness to draw on textual variants as a legitimate means of supporting an interpretation to Keats’s poetry. However, Stillinger’s 1982 edition, *Complete Poems* does not have a comprehensive list of changes made in “St. Agnes” from the original draft to the 1820 published text.

Of course, the same is true for the notes that accompany “To Autumn” in Stillinger’s 1982 edition: a majority of the changes are actually not mentioned. An examination of the manuscript reveals that several punctuation marks were added between the composition of the original draft and the publication of the poem, and the changes are not mentioned in the notes to either of Stillinger’s editions. These include commas in and/or following lines 1, 8, 9, 14, 16, 23, 24, dashes in lines 2, 5, 11, 21, 25, 26, semi-colons following lines 4, 6, 15, a period following line 11, and a colon following line 18. If we are to adopt Dilworth’s interpretation of the “barring clouds” as emblematic of the restrictive qualities of nature, then punctuation marks are in fact a significant part of the poem because in language, punctuation marks serve as guideposts that direct the reader. Even in an expressive artistic medium such as poetry, punctuation provides at least some stability and shapes one’s reading of the work, often in the most subtle ways. In the most general sense, a comma essentially requires the reader to take a quick pause before proceeding to the next set of words, and a period signals an even longer pause. In essence, the commas and period marks can be seen as restrictive (like the “barred clouds”) for they largely guide the reader and shape how he reads the poem. And with this particular poem, not only are there three stanzas of uniform length (which can be rather constraining themselves), but also the multitude of punctuation marks, which were added after the work’s original composition (likely by



Woodhouse or Brown), perhaps for that same reason the expression of gilding clouds was supplanted by that of the barring clouds. Of course, Stillinger has suggested that the abundance of minor changes made from original drafts to the final versions may indeed be of little scholarly value simply because Keats typically wrote somewhat carelessly, fully aware that his texts would be edited more stringently prior to publication (*Poems* 12-13).

In fact, it is reasonable to assume that some corrections were not mentioned by Stillinger in the 1978 or 1982 editions because they are of no real significance, namely the changes in capitalization from the original draft. In Keats's original draft, "summer" (line 11) and "spring" (line 23) were capitalized, but they are not in the 1820 published version of the poem or even in Keats's letter copy to Woodhouse (*Letters* 170), so it is possible, and even reasonable, for one to initially suspect that Keats made such changes to subordinate the two seasons in a poem that is dedicated to another, autumn. Such an interpretation, however, is disqualified by the fact that "Season of Mists," which refers directly to the season of autumn, is capitalized (as proper nouns typically are) in both the original draft and Keats' letter copy to Woodhouse, but before publication, "Mists" was decapitalized, and "Season" remains capitalized simply because it begins a line. In fact, all words that begin any of the 33 lines are capitalized, even if they are words that are typically not capitalized, such as the conjunctions "and" and "or" that begin lines 6, 16, 19, 21, 26, 29, 30, and 33. Additionally, there are several words in the original draft that were capitalized for no apparent reason: "Cottage" in line 5, "Cyder" in line 21, "Touch" in line 26, "Lambs" in line 30, "Redbreast" in line 32, and "Gather'd" and "Swallows" in line 33. Based on this, it becomes likely that the capitalizations of words that do not begin lines are themselves arbitrary, thereby making it safe to assume that the changes in capitalization of "summer" and "spring" are relatively

insignificant. And while others such as Grant Scott<sup>3</sup> have suggested that there is indeed a typical pattern in Keats's capitalizing, there is no noticeable pattern in this particular poem, which occludes any need for any further speculation.

Some of the changes that Stillinger chooses to not mention in the notes to his editions, however, may have greater significance. It becomes apparent that Stillinger does not mention the changes from the earlier drafts because he deemed them as minor corrections to inconsequential errors of careless penmanship, such as "wam" to "warm" in line 10, "gleans" to "gleaner" and "thost" to "thou" in line 19, and "afots" to "aloft" in line 28. It may seem a bit odd, of course, that Stillinger does mention in the notes to the 1978 edition two particular spelling errors: "furuits" and "sweeness" in line 6 (*The Poems of JK* 476). Because there are no references to any other spelling corrections, it is clear that Stillinger mentions these two errors not for the sake of highlighting the spelling errors, but rather simply as ancillary to his mention of the change in quantity ("fruit" was changed from plural to singular) and the change of word itself (the word "sweetness" was changed to "ripeness"). In essence, the incorrect spellings are mentioned simply because the initial word choices just happened to be spelled incorrectly.

One such error is not mentioned in Stillinger's two editions, but is mentioned in Stillinger's introduction to the 1990 edition of the manuscript collection *John Keats: Poetry Manuscripts at Harvard, a Facsimile Edition*. Stillinger notes that the change from "naturring" to "maturing" in line 2 was a correction to a careless spelling error (x), but there is reason to believe that "naturring" was initially intended to be used and just abandoned later in favor of a more suitable word. After all, Keats did not find it necessary to adhere strictly to the conventional uses of language in his poetry. In line 31 he uses poetic inversion, apparently to make possible the rhyming with line 32: "Hedge-crickets sing; and now with treble soft."

In "Ode to a Nightingale," he combines "towards" and "Lethe" to create "Lethe-wards" (4) to refer to the direction towards Lethe. Knowing Keats's habit for periodically disregarding the conventions of language, it is not unreasonable to assume that perhaps the only real spelling error was the extra "r" in "natturring." Of course, critics such as Ridley seem to concur that it was in fact a spelling error (283), but I contend that this seemingly minor change is the most significant, but also the most widely overlooked, revision in the poem from the initial draft. It is worthy of further examination because we cannot conclusively determine that the mistake is one of careless penmanship.

As I suggested earlier the potential reasons why Keats eventually chose the image of the barring clouds over the image of the gilding clouds, here too exists the possibility that the replacement of "natturring" with "maturing" was for the sake of choosing a word that Keats felt would more aptly express what he meant to say. If this were the case, we should explore reasons why Keats's original choice of "natturring sun" was a deliberate one. It does, of course, initially seem a bit peculiar when one considers that "nature" is typically used as a noun and not as a verb. According to the Oxford English Dictionary, however, "nature" can indeed be used as a verb: to mean to fix with a (new) nature, to fix in one's nature, or to make natural. And considering that the events mentioned in the stanza, such as the ripening of the fruits, are all natural occurrences, Keats could realistically have considered the use of the term as a verb. In other words, the sun is in fact "natturring" because it is the catalyst for said natural occurrences, and the poem presents autumn and the sun as conspirators that ensure that the natural cycle occurs.

But the word choice "natturring" might ultimately be inappropriate, or rather not as appropriate as "maturing." First, it seems a bit odd that the reader would require an explicit reminder that the occurrences were natural if the sun and autumn were indeed conspirators. By labeling

them as conspirators, the speaker is suggesting that they are culpable agents, and referring to the sun's actions as "natturring" provides a seemingly blatant contradiction. Additionally, by employing the initial word choice, it is more likely that the reader is reminded that autumn is a natural process, an ephemeral stage, and it is possible that one would be given the false hope that the pleasantries of summer mentioned in the paragraph will eventually return, which would be paradoxical to the poem's apparent celebration of autumn. In essence, I say *false* hope precisely because there is no mention in the poem of the recurring cycle of the seasons, and this is perhaps made most apparent in a pair of lines earlier mentioned, in which the speaker asks for the songs of spring and then immediately disregards them (lines 23-24). In fact, Helen Vendler notes a pair of lines from Keats's poetry influenced by Milton's imagery of autumn in "Il Penseroso": "[Man] has his winter too of pale misfeature, / Or else he would forget his mortal nature" (236) that may provide further reason why "natturring" was an intentional choice. Winter exists for the sake of reminding man of his "mortal nature," and Keats's "To Autumn" is ripe with imagery of preparation of the fall harvest, which suggests that winter is imminent. Therefore, one can reasonably argue that the "natturring sun," which is a "Close bosom-friend" of autumn, is indeed "natturring" because it not only serves as a catalyst for the natural processes, but it also reminds humans, capable of higher thought and capable of constructing their own consciousness (they are apparently able to consciously forget the "songs of spring") that they are not immune to the natural process of aging. Additionally, one should remember the distinction drawn between humans and bees, the latter of which are apparently able to be deceived by nature (it is suggested that they will "think warm days will never cease"). In other words, humans, operating at a higher level of consciousness, are apparently immune to such deception, for the "natturring" sun, along with the season of

autumn, reminds man of "his mortal nature."

At this point, however, one may argue that it was in fact a spelling error, for in Keats's copy to Woodhouse (Stillinger, *Texts* 259), the change was made to "maturing" (*Letters* 170). All this proves, however, is that Keats did not take long to determine that "maturing" was in fact a better word choice than "naturring" (assuming that Keats did in fact write the letter shortly after he wrote the original poem). In other words, the almost immediate change from "naturring" to "maturing" does not necessarily prove that "naturring" was an unintentional and careless spelling error.

By understanding why "naturring" is a decent but nonetheless inadequate choice, readers are better able to understand why "maturing" is ultimately a more suitable choice of the two. More specifically, the choice of "maturing" is more fitting, for the word can refer to the fact that the sun is itself maturing, as the end of autumn is imminent. The sun's brilliance is typically at its peak in the summer, and perhaps this also explains why Keats eventually abandoned "While bright the Sun slants through the husky barn" for line 16 (*Manuscripts* 223): it would make little sense that the sun should be referred to as "bright" during the months of autumn, especially in the poem that deliberately contrasts autumn with other seasons that are associated with sunlight, such as spring and summer. The use of the word "maturing," then, suggests that the speaker himself is cognizant of the inevitable fading of the sun's brilliance, but the bees described in line 10 are simply not. The sun also causes the maturing of the events described, so we can safely assume that Keats likely chose "maturing" because it incorporates the implication that the events are "natural" as well.

It is likely, of course, that such an "error" has been disregarded simply because many critics assume that Keats was a "faulty speller" (Stillinger, *Manuscripts* x.). If not a faulty speller, others would agree that Keats typically wrote and copied in a hurried fashion (Ridley 282),

so it was only a matter of time before Keats would accidentally write a "n" in place of a "m," because in all the English alphabet, those two letters are arguably the most visually similar. One should remember, however, that the reasons I have provided for any of Keats's corrections are nonetheless ultimately inconclusive, especially considering potential reasons for changes elsewhere in the poem. For example, in Keats's original draft, lines 3-4 read: "Conspiring with him how to load and bless / The Vines with fruit that round the thatch eves run" (*Manuscripts* 223) and in Keats's letter copy to Woodhouse the only changes made were the decapitalization of "Vines" in line 4 and the addition of a semicolon at the end of the line (*Letters* 170). In the 1820 text, the order of words in line 4 was changed to read "With fruit the vines that round the thatch eves run" (Stillinger, *Poems of JK* 476). It is apparent here that the correction was made for the sake of disambiguation: the object "fruit" has simply been moved closer to the verbs "load" and "bless." Keats had simply desired to make it clearer that the vines will be loaded and blessed with fruit, as opposed to the vines with fruit being loaded and blessed. The subtleties may seem insignificant, but necessary in order to establish the image of autumn as a "conspiring" agent that provides the vines with an overabundance of fruit, as an indication of the season of autumn nearing its end.

Elsewhere in the poem, however, Keats actually removes lines that would otherwise provide some clarification and replaces them with lines that seemingly add an element of ambiguity. For example, in the original line 18, "Spares for some slumberous minutes the next swath," the reader is certain that the next swath will simply be spared for a few minutes, but when the line is replaced with "Spares the next swath and all its twined flouers [sic]" (*Manuscripts* 223) it is no longer clear whether the next swath will be spared momentarily or indefinitely. Perhaps Keats felt that it was not necessary to explicitly state that the next swath would only be spared

for a few moments, for the rest of the poem suggests an image of autumn as emblematic of the penultimate end. With this particular line, however, there is also the very likely possibility that the line was simply changed in order to make possible a rhyme with the last line of the stanza: "Thou watchest the last oozings hours by hours" (22). This provides this entire second stanza with a rhyme scheme that is similar to that of the first and third stanzas. In other words, the various ostensible reasons behind different changes or corrections makes it impossible to inductively try and attribute reasons for modifications of one line to those of another, so we must examine different alterations on a line-by-line or even on a word-by-word basis.

I must clarify that I am not suggesting that we should painstakingly examine every minor detail of the manuscripts; trying to determine the purpose of every comma in every line of Keats's poetry would likely be of little scholarly value, especially considering the at times arbitrary placement of commas in Keats's poetry. As I mentioned before, one should rely on one's judgment when trying to determine which changes are worth acknowledging, and especially which changes are worth consideration for further examination. I have chosen to explore specifically the change from "naturring" from the early draft to "maturing" in later editions simply because I do not believe that we can unequivocally determine that this change was in fact a correction to a carelessly misspelled word.

As of now, information on textual variants of Keats's works, especially the more influential ones, are by no means difficult to access. Of course, even Stillinger's 1982 edition for "general readers and students" provides readers with the most significant textual variants, such as the ambiguous placement of the quotation marks in the closing lines of "Ode on a Grecian Urn" and the phantom first stanza<sup>4</sup> of "Ode on Melancholy" (470). And while I am not suggesting that we force the general readership to consider the various existing earlier drafts of Keats's poems, I will

suggest that it is indeed a worthwhile practice to provide students of literature with such information. Although some may argue that exposing readers to Keats's earlier drafts will inadvertently damage his credibility (because the numerous spelling errors and the inconsistencies from draft to draft are themselves suggestive), examining the revision processes of each of Keats's poems ultimately reveals the poetic skill involved in their composition, thereby allowing us to confirm, rather than question, why we study and appreciate the poetry of John Keats in the first place.

#### Notes

1. I would like to thank Professors Beth Lau and Jack Stillinger for taking the time to read this essay and offer their suggestions for improvement.
2. From the back cover of this edition.
3. See *The Selected Letters of John Keats* (2002), ed. Grant Scott, pg. xvii.
4. A "phantom limb" generally describes the condition in which a person who has lost a limb periodically experiences the sensation that the lost body part is actually still there. Similarly, the final published versions of "Ode on Melancholy" do not have the first stanza, although most readers know that it existed at one time.

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**'Minor' Variations on an Eastern European Theme:  
Becoming Balkan in Ismail Kadare's *The File on H*  
by Mark Olague**

*Mark Olague will be receiving his Masters Degree in Interdisciplinary Studies (with an emphasis on literatures from Eastern Europe) from California State University, Long Beach this spring. As a 2008 Sally Cassanova Scholar, he will be interning at the University of Texas at Austin this summer in the comparative literature department. It is today natural that the Balkan peoples need Europe. But on the other hand the question whether anyone needs the Balkans, or rather whether the Balkans can be of any use to Europe, is rarely posed.*

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—Ismail Kadare

How remarkable it is that the works of writers like Milan Kundera and Witold Gombrowicz, which once commanded international acclaim and scholarly attention thirty years ago, are viewed as less relevant in today's transformed "axis of evil" political terrain. It is precisely this notion of "relevancy" versus obsolescence which has prompted scholars such as Princeton's Caryl Emerson and Northwestern University's

Andrew Wachtel to address the predicament those studying Eastern European texts find themselves in these days as they try to adjust to a diminishing western readership. Whereas Edward Said's magisterial *Orientalism* exposed the insidious relationship between so called "pure" and "political" knowledge as it related to discourses on and about the Middle East, another analogous field of inquiry has never denied its conspicuous affiliation with politics. "Nourished by crisis," is how Emerson characterizes the historical financial support for Slavic Studies Departments in this country by military and governmental institutions during the Cold War. Rather than overly fret the loss of such support, both Emerson and Wachtel regard the drop in critical and commercial interest in Eastern European texts as more of a boon than a burden: finally freed from the ideological fetters of the Cold War, the field appears to have happily breached a threshold of Kantian disinterestedness, a depoliticized space which all "hardcore" disciplines in the humanities should portend.<sup>1</sup>

How then to establish more contemporary theoretical frameworks beyond Cold War problematics to analyze texts coming from Eastern Europe? Since the decline of communism and the rise of various nationalisms in the region, more recent scholarship has attempted to situate texts from Eastern Europe under postcolonialism's expansive rubric by shifting postcolonial methodologies away from center and periphery paradigms towards semi-peripheral regions within Europe (Klobucka 125). This makes sense for critics like Timothy Brennan who view the "East/West" rhetorical divide fundamental to many postcolonial critiques as a reflexive "linguistic tick that assigns hemispheres to social types as it betrays an ambiguity that reflects the double duty it performs" (40). This "double duty" Brennan refers to is the elision between what he deems as the "racial" and "socialist other" absent from many tendentious postcolonial critiques focusing on those that emerge from non-European,

Third World regions. But even an observance like Brennan's keenly realizes the critical potential in investigating the legacy of the vanished Second World with the development of the postcolonial Third (41). Other critics have likewise called for a break in the theoretical silence regarding post-Socialist Eastern Europe, noting how the region's own history of colonization or neo-colonization affords it the same degree of postcolonial analyses other transitioning geographical regions undergo.<sup>2</sup>

Arguably the most developed postcolonial critical response toward Eastern Europe, particular the area's historiography, has been the concept of "Balkanism" articulated by Bulgarian historian Maria Todorova. In short, "Balkanism" is an analogous yet discrete discourse formation similar to Said's conception of "Orientalism"—only in this instance, the region of Southeastern Europe known as the Balkans is viewed not merely as a self-affirming European "other" as is the Middle East but as a repressed and underdeveloped "other self" within Europe itself (Todorova 17). Proponents of Balkanism more indebted to Said argue that the Balkans have been every bit as "narratively colonized" by western European discourses as the Middle East, evident in both popular and scholarly writings on the region. As a consequence of such misrepresentations, many critics point to how the term "Balkanization" has entered the global lexicon as a metonym for warring and inassimilable neighboring entities incurred from negative stereotypes of the region (Goldsworthy 2). Meanwhile, opponents of Balkanism's wide claims counter that the idea of a purely "narrative" or textual colonization, arguing that such claims do not square evenly with the economic and political exploitation experienced more directly by Third World states from which most legitimate postcolonial analyses emerged. Moreover, the absence of a coterminous history of Balkan studies with what is recognized as Orientalist or Middle East studies in the western academy disqualifies most Saidian critiques of the region, specific as Said's critiques were made

in their western imperial contexts (Fleming 1228). Nevertheless, even those who question Balkanism as a fashionable methodology contend that the gulf between how those living in Eastern Europe and Balkans view themselves and their relationship to Western Europe, and how, in turn, Western Europe receives the Balkans, provides fertile ground for further critical engagement. For it is arguably in semi-peripheral regions within Europe like the Balkans where issues of inclusion and exclusion, “minor” and “major,” play out more dynamically.

It is within this semi-peripheral, self-perceptual void that the theories of Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari, particularly their notions of “minor” versus “major,” become applicable when resituating Eastern European writing in the post-Cold War environment. Specifically, how the historical baggage and imperial experiences of the Balkans might be of some “use” to Europe and all that it continues to signify mark points of entry for the claims in this essay. What this paper hopes to show is how the Balkans’ semi-peripheral sense of simultaneously “becoming” and “not becoming” Europe echoes the Deleuzian sense of an object being both “between” and “among” two states of being as opposed to more static and repressive identity markers. Moreover, the cultural liminality of the Balkans in relation to Western Europe and the west produces the apt “schizoid” condition from which Deleuze and Guattari’s theory of “minor literature emerges,” specifically the “deterritorializing” effect such literatures have on global literary values, highlighting the various problems of translatability, including the threat minor languages face from major language dominance. Most recently, critic Rosi Braidotti has employed Deleuzian concepts to discuss the dynamic political and social changes occurring in post-socialist Eastern Europe. Braidotti sees the region contributing to a dynamic pluralism within the European continent as a whole, evidence of what she calls a Europe “becoming-minoritarian,” whereby contemporary social

identities are defined in terms of “multiple belongings,” across states, as opposed to traditional nationalistic identifications (85). It is this gesture toward “multiple belongings,” particularly how such connections might be made, that much of the relevancy of Balkan and Eastern European texts might be reestablished.

To illustrate this dynamic, this paper focuses on Albanian writer Ismail Kadare’s relatively obscure novel *The File on H*, written in the 1970’s. Emerging during the height of the country’s long communist rule and enforced isolation from the west during the reign of then president, Enver Hoxha, the novel tells the travails of two Irish-American scholars who come to Albania in the 1930’s in order to solve the “enigma of Homer” (11) By isolating the structural elements of the epic, its “machinery,” the scholars hope to account for its endurance in the modern era, where it is preserved by mainly illiterate peasant singers roaming the northern part of the country. In Deleuzian terms, Kadare’s novel allegorizes the historic encounter between an organic Balkan writing “machine” versus what critic Emily Apter has called “the machinic labor force in the economy of global translation” seeking to territorialize all non-western literary phenomena within its own traditions, its own epistemologies (“Balkan Babel” 65). Ultimately, the effort to culturally link the Balkans and Western Europe through the Homeric epic is reversed in the novel: it is not until the two Irish-American scholars “become minoritarian” or “become Balkan” themselves as a reflection of their own semi-peripheral subjectivity as displaced Irishmen, are they at last able to comprehend the epic’s true literary and cultural value.

#### Towards a “Minor” Epic

*The File on H* fictionalizes a seminal event in Balkan history in which two western scholars, Milman Parry and Albert Lord, visited the region in the 1920’s to study illiterate rhapsodists whose reputed ability

to memorize thousands of lines of verse were believed to parallel the epic-producing capabilities of Homer (Valtchinova 104). Whereas the real Parry and Lord conducted their field research in areas of the former Yugoslavia—specifically parts of Bosnia and Montenegro—Kadare's fictional Irish-American scholars, Bill Norton and Max Ross, come from New York to study Albanian rhapsodists. While the scholars approach their project innocently enough, they soon become embroiled in various political intrigues and misapprehensions from their hosts, climaxing in the destruction of their work by a local hermit at the urging of a Serbian monk. In the novel's coda, one of the scholars, Bill, from whose viewpoint most of the novel is told, loses his eyesight while at that same time being inexplicably stricken with the ability to compose and recite swaths of epic verse.

At the core of the novel is this search for the Homeric roots of the epic and the issue of cultural patrimony: whether or not the epic is a proto-literary western cultural tradition or an eastern, Balkan one. By transposing Parry and Lord's actual study of Slav rhapsodists as specifically Albanian, many critics of the novel have accused Kadare of exhibiting, albeit retroactively, a trace of ethnic chauvinism, symptomatic of the "nesting orientalism" rhetoric locatable in various Balkan nationalist discourses which emerged during the post-communist transition phase in several Eastern European republics. "Nesting orientalism" refers to the phenomenon of those Balkan or Eastern European republics which seek to establish more solid cultural links with Western Europe at the expense of exoticizing or "Orientalizing" their eastern neighbors (Bakic-Hayden 920). By claiming the Albanian origins of the Homeric epic, Kadare plays the "Illyrian card," linking one of the tribes of ancient Greece (and thus western civilization) with the founding of modern Albania, a powerful myth essential to the Albanian social imagination particularly visible during the country's post-communist, re-integration

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phase (Valtchinova 110). It is thus within this internecine Balkan conflict over cultural traditions and the claim of shared European heritage that the scholars' search for the epic takes place.<sup>3</sup>

The idea of a shared common cultural heritage between Albania and Western Europe is a persistent thread in virtually all of Kadare's work. In his non-fictional works, Kadare has gone to great lengths to downplay if not downright reject Albania's Ottoman and Soviet history. Not surprisingly, Kadare has often expressed Albania's reintegration with Western Europe during its post-communist phase in Oedipal terms: the "stepchild" Albania being reunited with "mother" Europe after dethroning its imperial "father(s)" of Ottoman and Soviet rule (*Albanian Spring* 9). *The File on H* also critiques westerners, particularly those literary tourists, who at the turn of the twentieth century, traveled to the Balkans searching for the roots of western literary traditions. These oftentimes misguided autochthonic adventures, and the skewed reports of the region and its people that were produced in its wake, established what scholars today acknowledge as the origin of Balkan studies. Kadare's novel thus employs an exemplary Balkan parable replete with all the ambiguities and ambivalences such a designation implies. Like the novel genre itself, particularly its development in Eastern Europe, the epic becomes contestable literary ground in which various east/west "desires" for Oedipal wholeness and reintegration is projected.

In *Kafka: Towards a Minor Literature*, Deleuze and Guattari argue that Franz Kafka, an exemplary semi-peripheral European figure himself, inaugurated a phenomenon known as "minor literature" by deliberately choosing to write in German rather than Czech, despite his minority status as a Prague Jew. By doing so, Kafka, according to Deleuze and Guattari, was able to "deterritorialize" a space within the German language inflected by his own marginalized and minoritarian perspective. Deleuze and Guattari delineate three distinct features of

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a minor literature extrapolated from their analysis of Kafka's works: a "high coefficient of deterritorialization," its inescapable political nature, and its collective "enunciative" value (18). Whereas some have criticized the theory's application as a call for a "prescriptive" type of writing, critic Bruce Baugh contends that the main thrust of Deleuze and Guattari's thesis remains in its "descriptive" value, particularly in terms of how to properly read a literary text. According to Baugh, rather than traditionally looking for what a text "means," what Deleuze and Guattari refer to as the "imperial despotic system" behind traditional hermeneutical practices, readers are better served observing what types of "affects" are produced by a text, and what type of connections are forged from it (37). Interestingly, this "transcendental empirical" approach is precisely the lesson the scholars learn at the end of the novel.

In *The File on H*, the epic enacts minor literature tendencies primarily through its literal and figurative "collective assemblage" nature. In short, the epic is connected to all facets of the Albanian socius, from the paranoid government officials who suspect the scholars as spies, to the largely indifferent rhapsodist themselves, whose performance of ancient verse triggers the country's layered imperial memory. Initially, the two scholars seek only to develop a comparative method of classification in an effort to discover how Homer's "epic machinery" manages to be preserved in an obscure country like Albania. In addition, they hope to solve the eternal riddle of Homeric authorship: whether or not the epic is the product of one solitary individual or the collaborative effort of many nameless "editors." Ultimately, it becomes impossible for the scholars to remain completely apart from what Deleuze and Guattari remarked are the "individual intrigue[s]" from the cramped [ideological] space[s]" minor literatures emerge from (*Kafka* 17). In this respect, it is important to note how some critics have read the novel as an allegory of the repressive political environment of the Hoxha dictatorship under which

most of Kadare's novels were written and published. Recontextualized for current global literary conditions, however, the epic in the novel tacitly reflects Kadare's anxiety as an Eastern European writer trying to situate his texts within western literary markets without compromising their unique "minoritarian" perspectives. Moreover, preserving the inherent "collective enunciative" character of the Eastern European novel as an apparatus for political expression becomes more urgent when faced with the cultural homogenizing tendencies of global translational politics. It is within this concept of what is translatable in writing when it crosses regional and cultural boundaries that literature from Eastern Europe retains its relevancy. For it is within Deleuze and Guattari's analysis of Kafka's texts as open-ended critiques of power wherein literary "expression" precedes political "content" as Kafka's biggest achievement, his way of "prefigur[ing] the rigid forms into which [power is] going to flow" thus making it easier to make these forms "take off along a line of flight or of transformation" (*Kafka* 85). Similarly, Kadare's novel gives "expression" to the "rigid forms" of contemporary global translation dominated by major languages, which determine the literary value or fashionableness of non-western works based upon its own current ideological demands. Desire for interpretation as expressed in the novel reflects the broader "failures" of translation, the inaccessibility of certain contexts, at work in Kadare's text. These underscores echo Deleuze and Guattari's notion that a minor literature is always political: in how it is always *connected to* and yet tries incessantly to *escape from* politics (*Kafka* 17).

### Becoming-Balkan

A less discussed element in the novel concerns Kadare's amicable depiction of the Irish-American scholars in the novel, a fact which perhaps accounts for why the novel was banned from publication in Albania during Hoxha's reign. In fact, the scholars' own semi-peripheral

status as Irishmen living in New York might account for their relatively even-handed, non-stereotypical responses to the unforgiving and exotic Albanian landscape and locale not at all commensurate with either past or contemporary western reports of the region.<sup>4</sup> In other words, Kadare views Albania from the westerners' points-of-view—albeit westerners ambivalent by their own colonial heritage as Irishmen now lost in the Balkans, who while seeking the roots of what is essentially a European cultural tradition, ponder their own. This irony is underscored when both scholars debate among themselves the efficacy of telling the locals, upon their arrival, the nature of their research and how it might be in their “national interest” to cooperate with them. The suggestion is abruptly withdrawn once the scholars realize how their privileged perceptions as outsiders, emissaries of the west, affords them the luxury of romanticizing their endeavor, exaggerating its worth to the country's mostly indifferent inhabitants. It is a sentiment that perhaps only Irishmen can express toward the appraisal of another's cultural traditions by those who live comfortably beyond a country's borders. As Bill elliptically infers to Max at one point: “Looking from afar, you imagine that every inhabitant is eager to slave away for [one's own country] but when you get nearer...I guess it's the same with us” (70). This is also echoed earlier in the novel when Bill likens the rhapsodists' ability to transform recent historical events into Homeric verse to those laborious transformations he recalls witnessing at a local tannery on the outskirts of Dublin in his youth—a humble and quotidian skill managing to survive the modern era of mass production. Moreover, as the scholars become more deeply invested in their project they have to remind themselves that they have come to Albania to study the epic of Homer, not the Albanian version, that their project is *literary* as opposed to *cultural*.

Yet, increasingly, the scholars cannot avoid noticing the role the epic plays in reifying an identity for Albanians. The source of the epic's

malleability as a literary form thus resides in its ability to produce “infinite connections [...] from the events [it] contain[s]” by its intermingling of past historic events with more recent ones (Baugh 52). Consequently, the Albanian epic has a built-in universalizing appeal, comprised of what Deleuze and Guattari call “connective singularities,” thus making certain cultural forms amenable to other minoritarian, colonial experiences. In this case, the Albanian colonial experience triggered by the performance of the rhapsodists psychically connects with the Irish colonial experience of the two scholars (although the scholars never articulate it in the narrative as such). In a contemporary context, this phenomenon is what critic Emily Apter calls “translational transnationalism,” the cross-dialect literary exchange between minor languages within a global literary market beneath the gaze of major languages (4). Theoretically, such translation networks represent, according to Apter, a potentially new and spontaneous development in global translation studies, a phenomenon facilitated by the global and digital logic of the new millennium. The novel's minor element is thus in expressing the cross-cultural literary transactions capable between two semi-peripheral, neocolonial identities beyond the technological surveillances of major languages.<sup>5</sup>

Initially in the novel, the scholars were impervious to the effects aroused by the rhapsodists' performance, concentrated as they were with “taming” its diasporic nature through structural methods. By only comparing the specific Albanian motifs against western versions of the same historical material, their dialectical method, rather than providing insight into the epic's durability, only affirms western epistemological dominance over non-western cultural phenomena. However, the scholars learn soon enough that what they are also witnessing with each rhapsodist's performance is a minor language's resistance to the “territorializations” of a major language seeking to colonize local traditions as its own. They realize that the epic machinery they have come to study is maintained

not by extraordinary mnemonic devices for remembering and glorifying an epic past, but an organic literary apparatus inducing the country's forgetting of recent traumatic events in its history:

On other occasions [the scholars] told themselves that the oral epic could only ever exist in scattered form in which they found it, and that they were betraying and altering their material by trying to piece it together. In that way of thinking, oral recitation was less a poetic entity than a medieval order whose members, the rhapsodes [sic], had converted singing into a ritual and spread it far and wide, as they had been propagating a gospel or liturgy. (141)

It is only by discovering the link between “remembering” and “forgetting” do the scholars get a glimpse of the epic's worth to Albanians. In Eastern Europe and the Balkans, especially during the post-communist transition era, the issue of historical memory is an issue with added weight. But unlike a writer like Kundera, whose well-known warning that the “forgetting” of a country's recent political past ethically paralyzes it, Kadare's novel advances an altogether different notion: namely that “remembering” is an imperial or authoritarian concern, linked to nationalist narratives often manipulated by political elites. Meanwhile, the work of “forgetting,” at the heart of the rhapsodists' art, is the people's concern, a cathartic ritual articulating and exorcizing loss that bounds all listeners. This injunction for “forgetting,” the struggle of individual citizens to move past tragic historical events, echoes historian Ernest Renan's famous remark: “*Or l'essence d'une nation est que tous les individus aient beaucoup de choses en commun, et aussi que tous aient oublié bien des choses.*” (“Those who wish to make up a nation must possess much in common and also be willing to forget many things.”)<sup>6</sup> In this respect, the epic in Kadare's novel retains what Deleuze would call a “revolutionary” force for Albanians because it frees historical memory imprisoned by those nationalist myths built on blame and retribution.

By the novel's end, the scholars realize the oral epic in the novel is too unwieldy, too “rhizomatic” for structural analysis, dependent as such analysis is upon “cognition” as opposed to “experience.” This is what and Deleuze and Guattari really refer to when they call for writing to be “experimental” in order to be minor: not in the sense of being innovative or avant-garde but having the ability to trigger within individual readers a type of affective experience. This pragmatic “use” of a text allows readers to accomplish goals beyond simply reading and interpreting (Baugh 36). This fact is underscored at the end of the novel when one of the scholars, Bill, expresses how the oral epic is best apprehended viscerally as opposed to cognitively, through the “ear” as opposed to the “eye,” the despotic organ of surveillance and false signification:

There is no doubt the oral epic is primarily an art of the ear. The eye that allows us to understand literature today played no great role in the Homeric period. It could even become an obstacle. It is no coincidence that Homer is imagined as a man deprived of sight [...] After all, aren't the blind supposed to have memories that are different from those of the sighted? (120)

Rather than simply establishing a link between a lost western tradition and its eastern variant, Kadare deterritorializes western literary expectations of the epic by placing it in the Balkans where it continues to have “use” as a literary machine enunciating collective loss. This affective approach toward literary analysis is made physically manifest in the end of the novel when Bill loses his sight and is suddenly stricken with the ability to memorize and recite epic verse—in this case, a contemporary account of the novel's events, the scholars' own personal catastrophe in the Balkans. In effect, rather than bringing the Albanian epic home so that it can “become European,” the two Irish-American scholars, in effect, “become Balkan.” In other words, their failed scholarly project loosens their own semi-peripheral, historical consciousness, embodied

in Bill's transformation from western scholar to Balkan rhapsodist. It is only through this Irish-Balkan connection, linking both cultures through their imperial and neocolonial histories, that ultimately provides the scholars' success in "translating" the epic.

### Conclusion

The point of repositioning literatures from Eastern Europe and the Balkans as a minor literature addresses larger issues in contemporary translation studies. For critics like Apter and Brennan, the crucial problematic in contemporary translation studies remains the struggle of smaller languages to find a space in a global literary marketplace more restricted since 9/11. Conversely, both critics worry about the cost of inclusion, whether or not it comes at the expense of homogenizing non-western literatures. Since the end of the Cold War and the various political developments that have since ensued, one might have imagined western publishers producing more first-hand translations of Eastern European texts. Yet, quite the reverse is true: not only has distribution of Eastern European texts fallen dramatically in the west, but a number of those translations that do arrive—including Kadare's novels—are, in effect, re-translated from other languages, "twice-removed" from their original language.<sup>7</sup> How Eastern European texts should address these problems prompts both theorists to reach different conclusions.

Brennan argues that literature from Eastern Europe has always been warmly received in the west—"domesticated" even—by offering western readers a comfortable bit of "politico-exotic": just enough of the political and culturally exotic to satisfy certain readers but not enough to challenge an overall sensibility as required with other non-western literatures. For all the discussion about the "relevancy" of Eastern European literary texts and how they fit within a gathering global literary canon, the larger and unexamined question for Brennan remains the issue of "comparative

cultural value" and "market inclusion"—two issues more urgent for Third World literatures. For Brennan, Eastern European literatures in the new millennium represent an "imperial problematic" in translation studies; whereas, post-colonial critiques do apply to the region, especially evident in more recent Eastern European texts, such texts do not require the full-scale ideological conversions that Third World literatures involve (58). Instead, Brennan believes Eastern European literature offers a sort of safe critical vantage point for western readers wherein post-colonial and ideological issues are made more accessible to a western audience. This issue of market inclusion that Eastern European literatures are currently contending with, according to Brennan, has long been suffered by less welcomed literatures in the Third World. By contrast, Apter views literature from the Balkans, especially Kadare's work, as purposely highlighting the multiple "failures" at work in global translation. Just as technology has made it possible to potentially translate all minor languages into a universal "Globalspeak," within semi-peripheral regions like the Balkans, one finds linguistic wars breaking out, fierce resistances put up by minor languages toward the encroachment of major languages. According to Apter, minor languages find themselves encircled by two types of contemporary language "wars"—"mafia wars" between dialects within languages and "total war," a global utopian project to standardize, as the euro, all linguistic currencies under one serviceable hybrid (79). It is within this complex machinery of global translation that Kadare's novels find themselves situated.

In 2005, Kadare received the International Man Booker Prize for Literature. It was an award most western critics assumed given to Kadare retroactively, for his questionable status as a dissident during the Hoxha regime.<sup>8</sup> Yet nearly twenty years after his major works were written, thus beyond their original political contexts, Kadare's work continues to be translated and favorably received in the west. Tracing the process of

how Kadare's texts reach western bookshelves provides an insight into the complex and sometimes absurd machinery of global translation. As his English translator David Bellos has exposed, due to the paucity of Albanian translators in the Anglo-American world, Kadare's novels are usually translated from existing French translations rather than the original Albanian. By "Englishing" from French in this manner, Kadare's texts enter western literary markets twice-removed from their original linguistic context.<sup>9</sup> As a consequence, a western reader of Kadare's novels is never quite certain if he or she is reading an Albanian piece of literature or a French gloss. In this respect, the ambivalent cultural patrimony of a so-called original text so well depicted in *The File on H* reflects what might be called a Kadarean dilemma: are such novels as Kadare's Western European assemblages merely accented with a semi-peripheral perspective or an authentically Balkan one? It is this schizoid nature of this process that reiterates the fitness of Deleuze and Guattari when discussing Balkan and Eastern European translatability. In addition, one sees within the Irish-Albanian exchange in *The File on H* a gesture towards what political theorists Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri have formulated as the "multitude," the transnational affiliations between individual subjects beyond traditional variables such as class, race and gender. Whereas the "people" are unified and difference is sublimated, the "multitude," according to Hardt and Negri, is plural and linked exclusively through difference (99). It is toward this potential that applying the minor literature hypothesis to argue for the relevancy of texts from Eastern European and the Balkans seems intuitive.

The point here is not to uncritically reframe all Eastern European texts as a Deleuzian minor literature, but to illustrate how Kadare's text reflect some of the problematics attending the phenomenon of translation. Just like that which occurs to the Albanian epic described in Kadare's novel, one might argue that right at the moment when an

Eastern European literary text is on the verge of being translated and situated within a global literary canon, it eludes signification, clings to its local context where its efficacy is more urgent. What ultimately remains "relevant" in the study of Eastern European texts is not only how such texts retain, despite translation, stubborn elements of *untranslatability* but how this *untranslatability* connects it with other minoritarian experiences. The lateral cultural exchange between the Irish and Albanian subjects in Kadare's novel reflects the possibility for multiple minoritarian correspondences.<sup>10</sup> It is from this "minor" chord in the major key of global translation as an inflection reverberating within several vehicular languages that makes translation in a deeper sense possible. It is perhaps through this "translational transnationalism" direction, as it promotes cultural and literary exchanges across dialects within major languages, wherein contemporary comparative methodologies might develop.

#### Notes

1. See Emerson's "Slavic Studies in a Post-Communist, Post 9/11 World: For and Against Our Remaining in the Hardcore Humanities" *The Slavic and Eastern European Journal* (Autumn 2002) and Wachtel's *Remaining Relevant After Communism: The Role of the Writer in Eastern Europe* respectively.
2. As critic David Chioni Moore writes: "In my view, at least two features of this giant sphere [Eastern Europe] are significant for currently constituted postcolonial studies: first, how extraordinary postcolonial the societies of the former Soviet Union are, and, second, how extraordinary little attention is paid to this fact, at least in these terms" (114).
3. For an analysis of how "nesting orientalisms" in nationalist discourses in the Balkans affect inclusion or exclusion into NATO or the European Union see Merje Kuus's "Europe's Eastern Expansion and the Reinscription of Otherness in East-Central Europe" in *Progress in Human Geography* (2004).
4. See Gezim Alpi's scathing analysis of the chauvinistic representation of Albania in British journalism in "Western Media and the European 'Other': Images of Albania in the British Press in the New Millennium." *Albanian Journal of Politics*. Vol. 1.1 (2005): 4-25.
5. In the novel the two scholars employ a phonograph to record the voices of the rhapsodists, making it easy to draw an analogy between the nineteenth century phonograph and twenty-first century digital software that claims to translate all languages into a universal language minus specific cultural and political referents .

6. By this privileging of “forgetting” over “remembering,” Kadare, at least in *The File on H*, appears presciently to be critiquing those nationalistic voices who manipulate political rhetoric by deciding what gets remembered—usually for their own political purposes. Such debates over selective historical memory were implicated, according to several analyses, in the break-up of Yugoslavia in the early 1990’s. Renan quoted in Christopher Hitchens’ “Ireland” from *Unacknowledged Legislation*. New York: Verso, 2002.

7. See “Twice Removed: The Baffling Phenomenon of the Translated and Re-Translated Text” in *The Complete Review*. Vol. 4, Issue 4 (Nov. 2003).

8. Kadare had been the focus on an intense debate among critics regarding the authenticity of his status as a dissident during the Hoxha regime. Some have looked at the writer’s high position within the Hoxha government as proof of his complicity with the regime. For his part, Kadare insist that active dissent was not possible during the communist era in Albania, and would likely have resulted in imprisonment or execution. Rather than risk exposure Kadare chose, as other Eastern European dissidents, the path of dissimulation allegorically embedded in their “official” works. Kadare left Albania for Paris in the early 1990’s where he remains in exile.

9. Bellos provides a fascinating account of how he was solicited to be Kadare’s English translator—or rather “re-translator”—despite having no knowledge of Albanian in “The Englishing of Ismail Kadare: Notes of a Retranslator” at <<http://www.complete-review.com/quaterly/vol6/issue2/bellos.html>>.

10. As an example of such minoritarian correspondences, Apter points to a contemporary translation of Scottish writer Irvine Welsh’s *Trainspotting* into Quebecois Joul from the original Scottish argot.

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**Cyber-Heterotopia:  
Figurations of Space and Subjectivity in the Virtual Domain  
by Eddie Piñuelas**

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With the ever-increasing expansion of computer-based technology, particularly that related to the internet, there has been an equally substantial growth in theories regarding media, information, and communication in the postmodern age. As a technology that has drastically changed the mode, speed and staging of communication, the internet has prompted many to re-theorize concepts of subjectivity and community within the framework of cyberspace. As David Holmes indicates in his book *Communication Theory*, the point of tension within this body of work tends to surround the question of liberation and independence from dominant centers of informational access, as some celebrate the decentralized structure of cyberspace, while others argue against its fragmented, indirect mode of interaction between faceless individuals. Regardless of

whether or not the internet allows for a free flow of information and ideas, what is clear is that its structure poses a site of communication unlike any other framework upon which theories of community and subjectivity are often based. In order to access its potential as a new space of collaboration and possible subject formation—not to mention new forms of subjection and control—I feel it is therefore crucial to develop a concept of cyberspace that considers the ways in which the structure of the internet and its modes of contact and intercourse allow for new forms of identification and politicization within a virtual domain.

In his short lecture entitled “Of Other Spaces,” Michel Foucault offers a conceptualization of space that is somewhat different from the institutional spaces he expands upon in his major works. Given as a lecture on architecture, this text provides a notion of space that expands beyond the constraints of any enclosed geographic location, incorporating juxtaposed and omnilateral relations of space and temporality that closely relate to contemporary theories of cyberspace and virtuality. As Peter Johnson argues, this spatial-temporal juxtaposition is partly inherent within Foucault’s use of the term *espace*:

As is often remarked, there are complex and subtle relational differences in English and French between space [*espace*] and place [*lieu*]. Augé provides a helpful and succinct distinction. ‘Space’ is much more abstract than ‘place’. The former term can refer to an area, a distance and, significantly in relation to Foucault’s concept of heterotopia, a temporal period (the space of two days). The latter, more tangible term, refers to an event or a history, whether mythical or real. (qtd. in Johnson 76-77)

Given this vital distinction, it is important to view the heterotopia as a manifestation of all of the various meanings attached to the word *espace*, as it is a space that extends beyond the merely physical boundaries of any particular locale, simultaneously challenging common concepts

of temporality—a space that reflects what Foucault calls our “epoch of simultaneity” (22). It is a space that, in my opinion, is very much akin to cyberspace; in its juxtaposition of the real and the virtual, its overlapping, ever-vanishing and re-appearing presence of real and imagined subjectivities and relations, and its paradoxical establishment and erasure of lines of territorial demarcation.

The connection between cyberspace and heterotopia emerges early in Foucault’s text, in his use of the mirror as a fundamental concept-metaphor for the heterotopia:

The mirror is, after all, a utopia, since it is a placeless place. In the mirror, I see myself there where I am not, in an unreal, virtual space that opens up behind the surface [...] But it is also a heterotopia in so far as the mirror does exist in reality, where it exerts a sort of counteraction on the position I occupy. [...] it makes this place that I occupy at the moment when I look at myself in the glass at once absolutely real, connected with all the space that surrounds it, and absolutely unreal, since in order to be perceived it has to pass through this virtual point which is over there. (24)

Thus, the heterotopia is conditioned by the displacement and simultaneous presence of the real and the unreal; it is an aporetic space in which the “right here” of the subject occupies the same *espace* with the “over there” of the object, both spatially and temporally. What is interesting about the mirror in this metaphor is its juxtaposition of the real and the virtual, as the mirror’s image is neither real nor unreal, nor does it simply travel back and forth between real and unreal spaces; it is rather the absolute threshold between these spaces, the space that opens up under the conditional suspension of reality and virtuality. What remains undetermined in this scene, however, is the role of—and effect on—the subject within this threshold, the one who is concomitantly present in the virtual space of the reflected image and the real space of his/her physical

presence (one might even say that the truly real space of the looking subject is his/her body itself), the one who both activates the encounter and is affected by it.

In this paper I will attempt to place the Foucauldian concept of the heterotopia within the context of cyberspace. Using Foucault’s “Of Other Spaces” as the foundational text of this inquiry, I will attempt to build upon the concept of the heterotopia by relating it to contemporary theories of cyberspace and new media, hoping ultimately to extend Foucault’s focus on external space into a domain in which the internal and external are inextricably linked, in which the “hidden presence of the sacred” (23) is interweaved with the profane, the everyday, the common. Rather than simply evaluating the relevance of the Foucauldian heterotopia—with the aim of either validating or dismissing it—I hope to examine the specific ways in which cyberspace problematizes *and* reinvigorates it. In this examination, I will address the following questions:

1. In what ways has the explosion of cyberspace affected/shifted the concept of space itself? How have theories of virtuality and cybernetics shifted the ground of inquiry regarding space and spatial relations? Considering the fragmentary nature of cyberspace, as well as questions of access and restriction, it will be necessary to examine concepts of relationality, internality/externality, sacredness/profanity, and belonging within virtual communities.
2. How does Foucault’s focus on the territorialized space of the institution relate to contemporary social conditions, most notably characterized by Michael Hardt’s “postcivil society,”<sup>1</sup> which are mediated less and less by clearly established terrains of public discourse and interaction? Is it enough to say, as does Hardt, that social relations of postmodernity have corroded the disciplinary model and have replaced it with the control model of Deleuze;<sup>2</sup> or might we instead say that institutionality itself must be rethought



within a deterritorialized framework?

3. How might the relation between cyberspace and physical social space shift the paradigm of subjectivity and subjectivation in a way that surpasses traditional models of politics, identification, and ethical community?

### Foucault's Other Spaces

Perhaps one of the most significant elements of Foucault's "Of Other Spaces" is its insightful recognition of the role of space and spatiality in the modern conception of reality and experience. While Foucault does not dismiss time as an element of a bygone era, it is clear that his theoretical shift to elements of spatiality marks a significant change in the way social interaction and subjectivity are formulated in contemporary experience. While Foucault's overall concept of space is somewhat confusing and at times contradictory (perhaps a symptom of its lack of thorough development), it is this very opacity and incompleteness that allow the space of Foucault's heterotopia to mold itself to contemporary conditions of cyberspace and virtuality. Rather than attempting to summarize Foucault's own assertions regarding the role of space in modern society, I am instead interested in closely and symptomatically reading the examples of heterotopia provided by Foucault throughout the text, for it is through such a reading that it is possible to find both the gaps and passageways the text allows—many of which are one and the same.

### Sacred Space

While the sacred is a concept with which Foucault does not seem particularly concerned, it is one that constantly emerges throughout his text. Foucault himself is apparently aware of this emergence, as he asserts that the "desanctification of space" experienced in modernity is simultaneously "nurtured by the hidden presence of the sacred" (23).

Foucault's first mention of sacred space appears in his description of "crisis heterotopias," spaces which represent a sort of displacement from the normal social order in moments of crisis. These are spaces defined by absolute externality, a temporary emplacement outside of the social domain in which the necessary metamorphoses of the body and, as a result, the self, are to take place. Foucault offers the honeymoon as an example of this externality, for since the bride's "deflowering [...] could take place 'nowhere'" the honeymoon creates the site of this nowhere space (i.e. the hotel, the train, the cabin located outside of town, etc.) into a "heterotopia without geographical markers" (24-25). It is this paradoxical nowhere-ness, this sanctification of the absolutely external, this creation of a radical outside that is also a point of transition *within* the social body that most interests me about the crisis heterotopia, for it points to a similar formation within the context of cyberspace, which I would argue is also a heterotopia without geographical markers. In this sense, just as the crisis heterotopia is a seemingly integral sacred space within the social order, existing both in a point of transition between necessary life stages and a place of territorial exclusion from the social body itself, the internet appears in a similarly double bind of integration and exclusion—a vanishing point of the lines that separate the sacred from the profane.

Perhaps the most fully developed example of sacred space in the text is Foucault's description of the "strange heterotopia of the cemetery." The cemetery, for Foucault, presents an example of the adaptability of the heterotopia, its capacity to provide several functions, according to the "synchrony of the culture in which it occurs" (15). In this sense, the movement of the cemetery from the center of the town to its outskirts, the cemetery's detachment from the physical proximity of the church, the individualization and compartmentalization of the body and its decay all represent, for Foucault, a parallel shift between the cemetery

and the culture to which it is attached. In modern culture, the cemetery constitutes a quarantining apparatus for the bodies of the dead, enclosing them within a clearly delineated space that is external yet accessible to the social order. Part of this reterritorialization of burial space is the movement away from the sacredness of death, the shift in focus from the soul of the deceased to the body of the deceased. Death, it would seem, now has its appropriate *place*. But is this to say that the sacred is somehow removed from the everyday, or is it perhaps present in a less localized manner, in a more diffuse and deterritorialized space?

In January of 2007, *The New York Times* released an online video obituary for humorist Art Buchwald, as the first installment in their “Last Word” series of online multimedia obituaries. The obituary—which consists of images and videos from Buchwald’s life and career, as well as an interview conducted toward the end of his life by the *Times*—reflects the paradoxical relation between the real space of the heterotopia and its other, juxtaposed, virtual spaces (including, as previously indicated, temporal space). The interview, conducted by journalist Tim Weiner, is a strange mixture of autobiography and guided narrativization. With questions such as “What *are* you doing here [on earth]?” and “How do you want to be remembered?” there is a clear narrative impulse to the feature, one which is common of obituaries in general. What makes the multimedia obituary unique, however, is analogous to what makes the narrative site of cyberspace unique in itself. As Elayne Zalis argues in her work on autobiography and cyberspace, this narrative site is one in which the positionality of the storyteller is under constant displacement within the virtual space of the website. Within this narrative space, in which the “hypermedia features” of the internet allow the viewer to create connections and pathways between multiple lives, the boundaries between the individual and the collective are blurred, creating “autobiographical scenes that document real-and-imagined<sup>3</sup> spaces the subjects have chosen

to represent as well as those they have not” (90). Within this emplacement (to borrow a term from Foucault), the narrating subject thus finds itself in the midst of a space in which the narrative performance is in the hands of the viewer, who is given the power to guide him/herself through the narrative at his/her satisfaction. Such is the case in the *Times*’ interactive obituary of Sadaam Hussein—definitively titled “Death of the Iraqi Tyrant”—in which the viewer is able to choose the structure and chronology of the summative narrative of Hussein’s life (which is constantly underscored by his ever-present death) by selecting the order of the sections and images, the pace of the slideshow, and the volume or muteness of the background music and narration.

Within the context of cyberspace, it seems that the space of the sacred has shifted away from the localized model of the cemetery. Whereas the modern cemetery is a place in which the body of the dead is extracted from the body of society, in which the performance of mourning is to be enacted outside of the limits of the city, the interactive obituary is a space in which the boundaries and thresholds of space and time are exploded. This explosion mirrors Foucault’s principle regarding time within the heterotopia:

Heterotopias are most often linked to slices in time—which is to say that they open onto what might be termed, for the sake of symmetry, heterochronies. The heterotopia begins to function at full capacity when men arrive at a sort of absolute break with their traditional time. This situation shows us that the cemetery is indeed a highly heterotopic place since, for the individual, the cemetery begins with this strange heterochrony, the loss of life, and with this quasi-eternity in which her permanent lot is dissolution and disappearance. (26)

Within the heterotopia, then, time undergoes a strange metamorphosis in relation to society at large. In the case of death, the absolute break with traditional time appears to be symbiotically attached to the body of the

dead, its movement away from the space of the living thus marking its simultaneous break from the time of the living. The “quasi-eternity” of Foucault’s heterochrony is therefore dependent upon a highly demarcated boundary between separate territories (i.e. the cemetery, the museum, adolescence, lifespan, etc.). In the interactive obituary, this territoriality is completely displaced, as the image of the dead (placed amidst the sacred, virtual terrain of cyberspace) is juxtaposed upon the familiar space of the viewing subject, who may him/herself be virtually anywhere. Thus the very notion of sacredness must be rethought outside of the domain of territory and boundary, beyond the restrictive demarcations that separate the sacred space of the dead body from the common space of the living. In this sense, if the modern cemetery works to extract the sacredness of death from the social body, to quarantine the dead from the living, to separate from the common temporal domain a “quasi-eternal” heterochrony in which the living may choose to enter and exit through clearly established thresholds, the online obituary corrodes these boundaries and thresholds, allowing the dead (now detached from the body) to spread throughout the social space, overlapping the spaces of the heterotopia with those of the real.

### Common (Virtual) Space

The heterotopia of cyberspace is unlike any real place Foucault may have imagined at the time of his short lecture—although his allusion to virtuality within the metaphor of the mirror is surprisingly similar to contemporary medium theories of cyberspace and virtual community. While some have chosen to move away from Foucault’s attention to institutions and their effects on subjects and the social order—many in favor of a Deleuzian model based on rhizomatics and smooth space—what many of these theories overlook is the hidden presence of the institutional framework within the apparently rhizomatic, decentralized space of the internet.<sup>4</sup> As John Campbell and Matt Carlson have argued,

while institutional structures of surveillance and discipline have somewhat dissipated within the fragmentary space of the internet, cyberspace has nevertheless become increasingly panoptic, particularly for the sake of consumerism—as in the case of adware programs and ad servers, which use data-mining software to gather information on consumers’ tastes and interests to create more personalized advertising. What is peculiar about this phenomenon is the complicity it requires of the surveilled subject, for while certain online surveillance programs operate independent of the user, “marketers are still dependent on individuals themselves providing relevant offline data.” In other words, in order for the surveillance to properly function, it requires “an element of participation on the part of the subject” (591). Within this cybernetic context of participatory and complicit surveillance, I feel that it is necessary to return to a Foucauldian model of discipline and subjectivation, examining the ways in which the modalities and relations of power within cyberspace have created new spaces of institutionality, new technologies of control and subjection, new economies of power. Ironically, it seems that the very structure of cyberspace is somewhat of a pharmakon, allowing for a greater variety of horizontal relations among individuals while simultaneously allowing for more opaque, invisible forms of surveillance. Much like Foucault’s heterotopia, which “is capable of juxtaposing in a single real place several spaces, several sites that are in themselves incompatible” (24), cyberspace appears capable of juxtaposing and expanding free space with restricted space, institutional space with home space, private space with public space. It therefore requires a rethinking of traditional theories of subjectivity, community and political action.

In “The Subject and Power,” Foucault posits a theory of subjectivity and its connection with power relations in a manner that relates well to the fragmentary architecture of cyberspace. Rather than focusing on sources of power, or on power itself, Foucault is quick to point out that

his main concern involves the techniques and modalities of power in subject relations. He consequently constructs a model of subjection that is horizontal as opposed to vertical, as it takes as its object processes of communication and social relations among subjects, as opposed to relations of dominance between subjects and the State. What defines a power relationship for Foucault is not necessarily an act of domination over one's other, but may in fact emerge from a set of relations that encloses both subjects in a territory of possible behavior:

In itself, the exercise of power is not a violence that sometimes hides, or an implicitly renewed consent. It operates on the field of possibilities in which the behavior of *active* subjects is able to inscribe itself. It is a set of actions on possible actions; it incites, it induces, it makes easier or more difficult; [...] in the extreme, it constrains or forbids absolutely, but it is always a way of acting upon one or more acting subjects *by virtue of their acting or being capable of action*. (138, emphasis mine)

What constitutes the subject within a power relation is not his/her position beneath a power that is exercised by another; it is not a power that simply dominates or forces itself upon the subject's ability to act. Power is instead inscribed in the subject's grid of possible actions, supplying both the condition of the subject's agency and the paradoxical impossibility of his/her independence. It is thus the agency of the individual that creates him/her into a subject of power, for in order to assert oneself as an agent one must first submit to the dominant "field of possibilities" that render one's actions intelligible. In this sense, power seems to be much more mobile than is often perceived by critics of Foucault's work, as it is not simply attached to the boundaries of the institution (i.e. the prison, the school, the mental hospital), but rather spreads throughout the entire social body. The institution becomes deterritorialized, yet is capable of reterritorializing itself at any given moment, establishing boundaries of

possible relation between subjects.

Within the Foucauldian framework of power, in which control and struggle are in constant "agonism,"<sup>5</sup> the freedom of the subject to choose avenues of communication and collaboration with others might in fact create a domain for further enactments of power—enactments that may work against the subject's own agency. Within the context of cyberspace, in which communication takes place within a virtual domain, this effect is further complicated by the incorporation of machines into inter-subjective relations. As Mark Poster indicates in his theory of the "humachine," which he describes as "not a prosthesis but an intimate mixing of human and machine that constitutes an interface outside the subject/object binary," the relationship between the individual and the machine is not simply that of subject-apparatus, but involves a rather complex interweaving of subject-object relations that allows for further possibilities of power and resistance ("Hardt and Negri" 113). Timothy Luke extends this connection between human and machine into a rethinking of the very constitution of subjectivity within the context of cyberspace, developing what he terms "cybernetic subjectivity" to account for "the sense in which human beings experience new forms of consciousness and agency through the telematic channels provided by computerized calculations, communications, codes" (Luke section 5) According to Luke, cyberspace has opened new channels of subject relation and ethical action, as it has removed the face-to-face scene inherent in traditional theories of ethical subjectivity and community:

This kind of digital being as a significant positionalization of cybersubjectivity is becoming more interesting morally, politically, and socially, because so many real moves in human ethics presume face-to-face personal contact [...] or materially embodied synchronous collocation [...] Digital beings can create cybersubjective interactions that apparently satisfy their initiators in screen-to-screen "non-

contact” or virtually disembodied asynchronous “dis-location.”  
(Section 13)

Within this context, the question of ethical subjectivity and community in cyberspace requires a reexamination of traditional models of communication and interdependence. As a space that is a non-space—as it does not exist in physical reality the way it exists in virtual effect—cyberspace opens a domain in which subjectivity may form without any expectation of coherence, and collectives may form between individuals without physical contact or presence. Clearly, this does not mean that communities cannot form, nor does it mean that communication cannot completely occur; it means, rather, that the very concepts of the subject and the community need to be reconstructed within the heterotopic “placeless place” of cyberspace (“Other Spaces” 24).

Thus the notion of subjectivity within cyberspace requires an examination of the various forms of relation and identification among individual “humachines,” within a virtual domain in which interaction and collaboration are much more fragmentary and horizontal than in traditional political models. Within such a space, the notion of community becomes expanded beyond traditional boundaries of identification, the possibilities of which are yet to be realized. Poster offers some possible outcomes of this potentiality:

Humachines are able to connect with others out of mutual interest, no longer limited by the terrible shortcomings of territorial specificity—blood, race, ethnicity, proximity, and scourges of the past millennia some prefer to dignify with the term “community.” [...] If the nation-state and the corporation scurry to bend this network to their brandings with identities [...], the Internet also resists this distortion by opening new paths of multiple identity, anonymity, temporary identity, fluid identity. (“Everyday (Virtual) Life” 758)

With this concept of fluid and fragmented identification and interaction in mind, the place of hegemony within cyberspace exists in a point of crisis, as traditional models of representational politics begin to lose their dominance in favor of political relations that are based on unstable, incoherent, disjunctive cyber-subjects. This is not to say, however, that there is no ethical domain within cyberspace, nor does it mean that the community has vanished into virtuality. However, it requires that the notion of the ethical be reevaluated in relation to a community that is formed within virtuality, among subjects who possess the potential of fluid movement, fragmentation and de/reconstruction.

Rather than locating the cybercommunity in regard to boundaries of “territorial specificity”—whether based on geographic regions or hegemonic identification—perhaps the community within cyberspace is to be found at the level of interaction and collaboration. One of the most debated examples of this form of interaction between cyber-subjects is the issue of file sharing. While file sharing encroaches upon certain legal domains of the State—particularly those related to copyrighting and intellectual property—the very structure of cyberspace requires an ethical paradigm that surpasses the reach of the legal system. In his essay subtitled “Why the Internet’s Spirit of ‘Sharing’ Must Be Broken,” Albert Kovacs similarly argues for such a reconceptualization; for while “[i]n the real world, one’s conduct is governed largely by one’s location in space,” in the virtual world, in which the very notion location is complicated, “inhibitions and restrictions that accompany one’s place and identity [...] can vanish” (757-58). From this perspective, as a space which defies the logic and restrictions of any particular enclosure, cyberspace displaces the territorial limits that condition the possibility of ethical universalization, inhibiting stable communities from forming, de-situating subjects within the threshold of reality and virtuality. Inside this virtual/real threshold of cyberspace, the lines between public and private become blurred beyond

distinction, creating spaces that Linda Carroli describes as “the interstices between the public and private into which a range of identities can be projected” (359). Rather than collaborating under some fundamental principle, rather than grouping together to master a shared landscape, the virtual communities of cyberspace form, deform and disappear according to the immediate needs and desires of subjects without bodies, subjects who are united in a common *espace* without a particular *lieu*, subjects who share a common space of intelligibility without necessarily establishing norms of intelligibility.

### Cyber-Heterotopia

In the final paragraph of “Of Other Spaces, Foucault offers a closing metaphor for the heterotopia that closely parallels the cybersubjective model:

[...] if we think, after all, that the boat is a floating piece of space, a place without a place, that exists by itself, that is closed in on itself and at the same time is given over to the infinity of the sea and that, from port to port, from tack to tack, from brothel to brothel, it goes as far as the colonies in search of the most precious treasures they conceal in their gardens, you will understand why the boat has not only been or our civilization [...] the great instrument of economic development [...] but has been simultaneously the greatest reserve of the imagination. The ship is the heterotopia *par excellence*. (27)

In this description of the boat, Foucault anticipates a concept of space that displaces and overlaps positionalities in a way that is both territorialized and deterritorialized. The space of the boat is, in my opinion, the very position of the subject within the heterotopia of cyberspace. It is a space in which movement between places becomes possible within a domain of infinite destination and, ironically, infinite precariousness. It is a space in which the subject, a free-floating, unanchored (virtual) being, becomes

capable of multiple forms of identification and collaboration, without the normative restrictions of the traditional ethical community. What remains to be seen is the potential of this form of relationality and collaboration to manifest itself into political action and social change, allowing for greater political participation among subjects detached from any particular hegemony, connected by a mutual terrain as oblique and infinite as the ocean, drifting from place to place within a fragmentary, disjunctive, heterotopic space.

### Notes

1. In “The Withering of Civil Society,” Hardt offers the following analysis of social relations within the context of late capitalism: “Instead of disciplining the citizen as a fixed social identity, the new social regime seeks to control the citizen as a whatever identity, or rather as an infinitely flexible placeholder for identity” (40). Breaking away from traditional views of civil society that locate it as the space of social and political dialectic between individuals and the State (Hegel and Gramsci), or as the site of institutional discipline (Foucault), Hardt develops a concept of society in which the individual and the State have no fixed mediating force. Instead, he argues, social relations themselves come to mediate the relationship between the individual and the State, spreading throughout the social body in ways that separate rather than unify.

2. Deleuze develops this notion of control in “Postscript on Control Societies,” a response to Foucault’s *Discipline and Punish*. His main argument is that, contrary to Foucault’s model of disciplinary power—which is predicated upon a logic of confinement and enclosure—contemporary social power seeks to individualize rather than institutionalize, to promote controlled heterogeneity rather than forced homogeneity. In this way, while traditional places of fixed social contact (i.e. institutions) continue to exist; their controlling forces have become much more mobile, detached from the *lieu* of a particular site and spreading throughout the social *espace*.

3. The term “real-and-imagined” alludes to Edward Soja’s work on spatiality and perception in *Thirdspace: Journeys to Los Angeles and Other Real-and-Imagined Places*. For Soja, the real and the imagined cannot be separated, nor can they be negotiated. Instead, they come to form a third notion (Thirdspace), the realm of the real-and-imagined (or, as he also calls it, the *realandimagined*) that, rather than forming an in-between area of the real and the imagined, forms a space of absolute otherness, an “invitation to continuous deconstruction and reconstitution, to a constant effort to move beyond the established limits of our understanding of the world” (126). It is a space of pure potentiality, in which the contingency of the real and the possibility of the imagined come to cohabit a space

where all things, all possibilities, all histories are present—even if only in trace.

4. Perhaps this statement requires some elaboration. While the decentralized framework of the internet has been celebrated by some as liberating, I would argue that within this framework there exist many tendencies to confine subjects within particular categories and spaces of identification—to institutionalize them in the virtual world. An example of this institutionalizing effect can be found in social networking sites which, even while claiming to offer a free space of interaction and expression, simultaneously form individuals into groups and networks, organizing them by traditional categories such as age, gender, and ethnicity.

5. The term “agonism” is used by Foucault to establish a break from dialectical notions of relation and subjection—which are traditionally premised on the antagonism between the Self and the Other. For Foucault, the relationship between subjects is “at the same time mutual incitement and struggle; less of a face-to-face confrontation that paralyzes both sides than a permanent provocation” (*The Subject and Power* 139). Within this agonism, the subject’s freedom is paradoxical, for while individuals may assert acts of agency within systems of power, these acts themselves further solidify the power that constitutes the subjection of the individual.

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**“With His Doxies Around”:  
Queering Alan Ayckbourn’s *A Chorus of Disapproval*  
by Sarah Stoeckl**

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Late in *A Chorus of Disapproval* (1984) the lovers Guy Jones and Hannah Llewelyn attempt to conduct a meaningful conversation while standing on stage, in full costume, during rehearsal for a community production of John Gay’s *The Beggar’s Opera* (1728). Further complicating their discourse is the presence of Hannah’s husband, Guy’s friend, and the play’s director, Dafydd Llewelyn, who bustles back and forth, tweaking the stage lighting. As Hannah and Guy move in and out of shadow, their talk is frequently interrupted by Dafydd, who finally requests they stand in the center of the stage, Hannah on tiptoes (to mimic the height of “Annie Anderson”) and Guy crouched low (to approximate “Tony Mofitt’s size”) (113). Dafydd’s uncomfortable positioning of his leading lady and man (rather than just having them switch sides he adjusts them to match the gendered bodies he pictures), suggests the examination

of gender roles that Alan Ayckbourn undertakes in this play. Likewise, Dafydd’s oblivious engagement with the situation between his wife and friend hints at an erotic triangle between these three, rather than between Guy and his two female lovers. And, ultimately, the self-referentiality of the play-within-a-play trope requires the audience to acknowledge they’re in a theater and to question the reality played out for them on stage. Thus, in his send-up of Britain under Margaret Thatcher’s regime, Ayckbourn also implicates the audience in his critique of prescribed gender roles and, at the same time, provides a space for their realization of the inherently performative and socially enforced nature of gender.

Ayckbourn deftly balances politics and sex in his play, knitting them seamlessly into the farce, and allowing them to veer close to the edge of absurdity. And, as Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick claims, “The two sides, the political and the erotic, necessarily obscure and misrepresent each other—but in ways that offer important and shifting affordances to all parties in historical gender and class struggles” (15). Most discussions of *A Chorus of Disapproval* focus on the play’s critique of 1980s capitalism, with some nods to how class politics distort human relationships. I extend these discussions by arguing that Ayckbourn also delves into gender politics by situating the ineffectual Guy in the role of the rake Macheath and then placing him in a variety of situations and relationships that reveal the hermaphroditic nature of his character, thereby acknowledging the “put on” or performed nature of gender. Judith Butler writes that “all signification takes place within the orbit of the compulsion to repeat; ‘agency,’ then, is to be located within the possibility of a variation on that repetition. [...] [I]t is only *within* the practices of repetitive signifying that a subversion of identity becomes possible” (145). As a character, Guy proves Butler’s concept by embodying its opposite; as Mel Shapiro argues, his agency only goes to “having other people write all over him” (175). He does not “repeat,” only blows with the prevailing wind.



However, Ayckbourn's placement of such a character within a group displaying various representations of gendered roles highlights Guy's own ambiguous gendered orientation and, thus, the stifling strength of such expectations. In her introduction to *Performance Studies* (2003), Erin Striff claims, "A performance might assume there are spectators appreciating the act *as performance*, even if we are only watching ourselves. Further, if there is no proscenium arch separating actor from audience, this can mean that the spectators are implicated as much as the performer" (2). In *A Chorus* there are, naturally, markers akin to a "proscenium arch" with which the individuals in the audience can distance themselves. Except in this play, the blank nature of Guy emphasizes the performance of gender in the other characters, people who are very like the audience and the people in their lives. This similarity, queered by Guy's hermaphroditic blankness, creates a space where the audience can see, and then begin to question, the nature of gender in society.

*A Chorus of Disapproval* parodies *The Beggar's Opera*, and features a unique re-characterization of Gay's Macheath. Guy, a minor employee for a major corporation, auditions for the Pendon Amateur Light Operatic Society (PALOS) and meets a buffet of provincial locals in the process. As the play continues he becomes embroiled in two affairs and one local jockeying for a piece of land, and his rise in importance to the members of PALOS is marked by his rise through parts in their production of *The Beggar's Opera*—from the bit part of Crook-fingered Jack all the way to Macheath. Guy participates consciously in these dramas with all the agency of a piece of detritus floating down a river, and it is this strange unsettling of Macheath and his relationships that marks Ayckbourn's parody of Gay. Linda Hutcheon explores what she believes to be the primarily twentieth-century art form of parody, saying, "It is part of a move away from the tendency ... to mask any sources by cunning cannibalization, and towards a frank acknowledgement (by

incorporation) that includes ironic commentary" (8). Thus, Ayckbourn plays off the political and sexual intertwinings of Gay's play, while modernizing the politics and the sex.

Guy Jones is the locus of Ayckbourn's gender exploration and he's a tough character to read. When he reveals to Dafydd and Hannah that his wife has died recently he says, "I decided it was high time I took a grip on things and got out and about again," and when Hannah asks if he misses his wife, the stage directions state that Guy act "*as if he's considering the question for the first time*" before responding, "Yes. Yes, I do. Very much" (45–46, 48; italics for stage directions in Ayckbourn). Such characterization leaves the audience to ponder how much (if any) depth there is under Guy's surface. Indeed, throughout *A Chorus* he's more *tabula rasa* than Don Juan and thereby complicates the hyper-masculinized figure of Macheath as he's portrayed in *The Beggar's Opera* and other iterations such as Bertolt Brecht's *The Threepenny Opera* (1928). Yet he has an inexplicable sexual draw for Ayckbourn's female characters (at least) that complicates any attempt to read his character as simply anti-masculine.

In rehearsal, just after his first sexual conquest and inter-play promotion to Filch, Guy sits obliviously on stage while "*the women parade around Crispin as Macheath*." When the song ends, "*The women are all turned in Guy's direction except for Enid who, quite correctly, is facing Crispin*" (76, 77). Guy's passivity and objectified sexual magnetism "feminizes" him, but his lengthening list of conquests and intrigues "masculinizes" him. Ultimately, his ineptitude becomes most obvious just as he appears most virile, making for an ironic dissonance that allows the audience to question assigned genderizations. Butler writes that "multiple and coexisting identifications produce conflicts, convergences, and innovative dissonances within gender configurations, which contest the fixity of masculine and feminine placements with respect to the paternal law"

(67). Guy manifests these flickering configurations of gender and his innocence ends up making him appear more like an ingénue (à la Gay's Polly) than a rake such as Macheath.

Ayckbourn's critique of bourgeois life is evident in the dysfunctional and unhappy heterosexual marriages portrayed in *A Chorus of Disapproval*. Even the well-meaning Dafydd is absent from his family, so much so that he's completely disconnected from Hannah, and their twin daughters have a life-sized "Daddy-doll" as a stand-in. And Hannah too complains that "the trouble is, my family are under the impression that there's a female counterpart to that thing ... Only it happens to be me. Hooray for Mummy-doll" (49). Her willingness to discuss with Guy her dissatisfaction leads directly to their affair, under the nose of Dafydd, who also seems to contrive reasons to spend time with Guy rather than his family. As well, the falseness of the dolls, whether the stuffed figure that apes Dafydd or the real woman objectified that is Hannah, suggests the false and socially performed nature of identity itself, which naturally includes gender as a primary construct.

But such unhappiness amongst the lower middle class does not seem surprising in the climate of Margaret Thatcher's England, where "the first woman prime minister did little to advance the political cause of women. [...] Actual advances oscillated between snail-like and imperceptible" (Evans 24). For the arts, too, the 1980s were a particularly dismal time, and mirrored the backwards motion of gender relations: "Unfortunately, the 1980s, the Bush-Reagan/Thatcher decade, witnessed a retrenchment in the self-presentation and media representation of the (male) artistic subject" (Jones 30). Eric Evans claims, "Despite, or perhaps because of, the extraordinary political triumphs of Margaret Thatcher, Britain by the late 1980s had become a more grasping, greedy and mean-spirited society. Hers is a legacy to be lived down" (124). This colder world is the setting for Ayckbourn's play, and Michael Billington writes

that "Ayckbourn has shown a particular ability to handle domestic pain and disaster from the wry standpoint of comedy and with the technical ingenuity of farce" (170). When Guy first accompanies the cast of PALOS (well, most of them; Hannah is at home with the children) to the pub, he is given Dafydd's beer to hold and obliviously drains it before its rightful owner can reclaim his drink (26–33). This small foreshadowing suggests how much Guy takes from Dafydd, how intimate (on multiple levels) their relationship will be, and how aimlessly Guy will go through these motions. All of these maneuvers seem especially telling under the shadow of Thatcherism.

Butler writes that "gender is always a doing, though not a doing by a subject who might be said to preexist the deed" (25). Guy Jones embodies this concept when his ineffectual attempts to please everybody land him in two women's beds and at the heart of a town intrigue, making him great lover and devious conspirator through no agency of his own. Guy is not a libertine or a mastermind until he has inadvertently done the deeds that make him so. But Ayckbourn also plays with Guy's sexuality in his relationship to Dafydd, bringing up questions over how far his eager-to-please persona would be willing to go if encouraged properly. And despite his best attempts, Guy finds that, rather than satisfying anyone, he has alienated everyone. *A Chorus of Disapproval* opens with the final scene of *The Beggar's Opera* and Guy as Macheath singing, surrounded by his "doxies." But despite this characterization, and the generally affectionate applause, Guy finds himself alone and ignored once the curtain falls, seemingly uncertain of how he got to this point. As the play moves backward in time, to the moment when Guy first walks into PALOS, the viewer feels the ironic tension between the Macheath on stage and the nervous man who appears for an audition.

Ayckbourn makes his Macheath neither a dashing philanderer nor a faithful lover, again showing that Guy's queering of gendered

expectations highlights everyone else's gendered rigidity. Guy engages in affairs with two married women—the vampish Fay and the domestic Hannah—re-enacting the Herculean dilemma presented in both of Gay's plays and throughout art history, the image of a man caught in a choice between two women. Sedgwick calls this position an “erotic triangle,” and in Ayckbourn's portrait the proper choice for Guy seems clear—Hannah appears as the virtuous image while Fay is vice-ridden. But Ayckbourn's play will not let the audience simply substitute Fay and Hannah for the rejected loves of *The Beggar's Opera*.

Early in Act II Guy sits at a café between Hannah and Fay, and the patrons of the café as well as the audience can all see the impending disaster, as Guy cannot. Thus, the viewers cannot regard the image of a man caught between two women as they are trained to do, and, indeed, are forced to consider who's really in the center position of this triangle. Fay and Hannah are, instead, both complicated by Ayckbourn out of easily assigned roles: Fay by her position as manipulator rather than lover of Guy, and Hannah by her willingness to abandon everything for her relationship with him. She says, “I was prepared to give up everything for you, you know. [...] My home, my marriage, even my children” (114). The lack of true affection in Fay moves her out of the role of adoring doxie to Guy's Macheath, while Hannah engages in a serious taboo for a mother—willingness to leave her children for a sexual connection. Thus, Ayckbourn complicates the stereotypes for these women in such a way that the audience cannot fail to notice to change.

At the same time as the audience is getting to know Fay and Hannah, they see Guy falling into bed with these women without any real impetus on his part. He loves each equally and without any notion of who they are in their connection to him or their outside lives, adding irony to Guy's naiveté as he fumbles through the jockeying for land and money between the neighbors. The addition of commodification to

sexual relationships is present in both Ayckbourn and Gay, and is also an important aspect of Sedgwick's discussions of male homosocial desire. She writes, “To misunderstand the kind of property women are or the kind of transaction in which alone their value is realizable means, for a man, to endanger his own position as a subject in the relationship of exchange: to be permanently feminized or objectified in relation to other men” (51). This is particularly evident in Guy's affair with Fay, seemingly devised by her husband Ian as a means of getting Guy on his side of the land scrabble. However, in the core triangle, Dafydd and Guy misunderstand Hannah, thereby leaving both of them feminized in relation to each other—Dafydd as the cuckold, Guy as the accidental villain, and both for being unable to step outside of their prescribed roles in order to acknowledge each other.

Ultimately, the erotic triangle in *A Chorus of Disapproval* shifts to include Guy, Hannah, and Dafydd. According to Sedgwick, René Girard insists that “in any erotic rivalry, the bond that links the two rivals is as intense and potent as the bond that links either of the rivals to the beloved: [...] the bonds of ‘rivalry’ and ‘love,’ differently as they are experienced, are equally powerful and in many senses equivalent” (21). Indeed, Dafydd appears much more connected to his new relationship with Guy than his old marriage to Hannah. Guy, too, “loves” Hannah, but is unwilling to hurt Dafydd or upset their lives to be with her. Tellingly, sex, relationships, and gender frequently creep into the discourse between the two men. Dafydd often refers to stereotypes about wives and women (34) and bemoans the closeted nature of sex in the present time: “Can you imagine Captain Macheath furtively purchasing marital aids [...]?” (41). He also reveals uncomfortable personal details about his sexual life with Hannah to Guy, unaware that Guy is involved in a passionate affair with his wife. Dafydd says, “Right from our wedding night. Ice tongs to lift her nightdress [...]. God, it's not that I didn't try ... I really wanted to

make it work, I really did. The nights I spent—battering at those damn defences of hers. But nothing” (101). When Guy points out that they did manage to have twins, Dafydd responds (“*darkly*”), “Yes. Well, we never talk about that. Never” (102). This obscure and almost menacing tidbit is never explained, and the audience is left to wonder how the twins came to be: Adoption? Marital rape? Or, as seems most likely, a previous affair on the part of Hannah? This unacknowledged possibility suggests the problem lies with Dafydd rather than with Hannah. Most significant, however, is the intimacy these conversations imply between the two men, a bond never evident in their discourses with Hannah.

Not all of Ayckbourn’s homoerotic subtext is nearly so disconcerting. Dafydd, prone to using the discourse of rugby, acknowledges his distaste for it, saying, “Can’t stand the game. Had to play it for seven years. Total misery. But my dad was a fanatic.” The cliché of the sport-obsessed father and the theatrical son is only highlighted by the sexually-charged language Dafydd uses to describe rugby: “That man’s up-and-under imagery constituted my entire verbal childhood upbringing. Making sure life fed you plenty of good clean ball. Getting women in loose mauls and all that bollocks. God, I was glad to leave home” (34). Ayckbourn pokes fun at the evident sexual, even homosexual, undertones so prevalent in athletic language, and also allows the dissonance between Dafydd’s heterosexual life and the appearance of homosexual clichés in his personality (theatrical, hates sports) to complicate the audience’s perception of his gendered identity. Ironically, Hannah misreads Dafydd too, using him as a heterosexual threat to Guy should he ever find out about the affair: “He’d sort you out, he really would. He’d beat you senseless. He’d punch you into a pulp. He’d smash your face in and jump on you and he’d kick you where it really hurt. And I’d laugh. Ha! Ha! He’s bloody tough. He was a ruggie player, you know” (81). Perhaps not surprisingly, Hannah can’t see Dafydd’s actual relationship to rugby, masking him instead behind the

stereotype of athletes as pillars of heterosexual masculinity. And, once more, this dissonance allows the audience to see and, therefore, question such designations.

Indeed, Dafydd’s response when he discovers the affair is the opposite of Hannah’s threatened pummeling. He approaches Guy and states, quietly, “Ian’s just told me, you bastard. About you and Hannah. I just want you to know, I think you are a total and utter bastard. And my one prayer is that one of these days you’ll get what’s coming to you. OK? That’s all I have to say to you” (122). Such a speech leaves a lot of room for the actor and director to determine the tone, but it will always provide space for speculation: Is Dafydd hurt because Guy slept with Hannah? Or because Guy betrayed Dafydd? The linkage between the two rivals is key to Sedgwick’s erotic triangle: “‘To cuckold’ is by definition a sexual act, performed on a man, by another man. Its central position means that the play emphasizes heterosexual love chiefly as a strategy of homosocial desire” (49). Her point is only strengthened by the lack of passion (in Dafydd’s case) and true love (in Guy’s case) for Hannah, combined with the strongly emotional reaction Dafydd has to Guy.

Even with these layers of gendered play, *A Chorus of Disapproval* is a theatrical text and as such requires a physical body to play the part of Guy. This fact creates ironic tension between the hermaphroditic qualities of Guy’s persona and the biologically male body present on stage. And the biologically sexed body signifies specific things to a viewing audience, potentially bringing up problems with a queer reading of Ayckbourn’s play. As Butler writes, “The loss of homosexuality is refused and the love sustained or encrypted in the parts of the body itself, literalized in the ostensible anatomical facticity of sex. Here we see the general strategy of literalization as a form of forgetfulness, which, in the case of a literalized sexual anatomy, ‘forgets’ the imaginary and, with it, an imaginable homosexuality” (71). And, as Anja Müller notes even more

specifically, “the intertextual allusion to *The Beggar’s Opera* encodes the figure of Guy with the roguish implications of Macheath—no matter how innocent this figure once was conceived, the character of Guy’s highwayman to some extent also informs our reading of Guy Jones, rendering this figure highly ambiguous” (334). Likewise, Macheath’s hyper-sexuality is mimicked and contrasted in Guy, and yet made ironic alongside his ineffectualness as a man. It is easy for the audience to gloss over the homosexual undertones because of the sexed male body on stage. However, the hermaphroditic performance points to the socially constructed nature of identity. The socially designated rules “impart to any body a specificity that must be acknowledged, yet they also connect that body to other cultural orchestrations of identity” (Foster 176). In this way, the shifting gendered behaviors in Guy suggest to the audience the constructedness of gender.

Also complicating the sexed male figure are theories about how the viewed body in Western culture becomes “feminized” due to the empowered position of the viewer. Such concerns also hint at the social constructedness of gendered identities. Butler says:

If gender attributes and acts, the various ways in which a body shows or produces its cultural signification, are performative, then there is no preexisting identity by which an act or attribute might be measured; there would be no true or false, real or distorted acts of gender, and the postulation of a true gender identity would be revealed as a regulatory fiction. (141)

Applying Butler’s theory, Guy’s performative aspects of male and female gendered behavior suggests the falseness of “real” gender identity.<sup>1</sup> However, Guy’s biological sex could be problematic from a feminist perspective as it once again places a male body in the “normal” or “basic” position of protagonist and seat of discourse. Instead, however, Ayckbourn’s use of a biologically male character becomes an answer

to and extension of feminism’s critique of gender in culture, especially since the majority of discussions of hermaphroditic or androgynous figures in literature focus on those who are biologically female. As well, Ayckbourn’s character suggests how “masculinity” is just as culturally constructed as “femininity.” The subtle yet obvious exploration within Ayckbourn speaks to the rigid gender expectations of the 1980s and our circular willingness to critique those preceding cultural constructs now.

Butler and others have done a competent job establishing that gender roles are constructed by societies. However, what Ayckbourn does is explore this truth in a way that is approachable to an audience, allowing them to see and to question, and then, potentially, realize their complicity in continuing strictures of gender identity. Alisa Solomon argues that “comparing gender to theater not only suggests that it is not an immutable or inevitable biological function. More important, the comparison reminds us of the spectator’s role, providing a framework for recognizing our complicity in the social conventions that sustain a collective illusion” (3). It is not simply enough to read Ayckbourn’s play as a political text—written and performed—and not consider the text of the audience as well, their potential for self-awareness and reflection, and their complicity in the status quo critiqued for them on stage. Duncan Wu claims that Ayckbourn’s plays offer an alternative to the “flawed spirit capable of ideal construction” seen in so many playwrights. Rather, he offers up “purely physical beings who may or may not choose to aspire to higher things” (14). The bodily humanity of Ayckbourn’s characters is inseparable from their intellectual or emotional selves. And in *A Chorus of Disapproval* the complication of gendered behavior, culminating in the hermaphroditic perspective on Guy Jones, makes those bodies signify more to the audience than just “women” and “men” in a post-capitalist mess.

Having said all that, there is an ironic tension to Ayckbourn’s ending

that resonates as well with *The Beggar's Opera*, and allows an uncomfortable audience an exit from thinking too hard about these issues. For, as Butler says, "The loss of gender norms would have the effect of proliferating gender configurations, destabilizing substantive identity, and depriving the naturalizing narratives of compulsory heterosexuality of their central protagonists: 'man' and 'woman'" (146). Rather than the uncomfortable backstage scene between Guy and his cast-mates that opens *A Chorus of Disapproval* and gets explained in flashback, the actual "ending" shows the whole cast as the curtain falls and they "embrace each other, most especially their hero of the night, Guy himself" (126). Thus, "The ending of *A Chorus of Disapproval* also holds up a mirror for its own audience, tentatively suggesting they might have wished for a happy ending, too," such as gets mocked in *The Beggar's Opera* (Müller 344).

But, as Wu claims, "Most of the audience with whom [he] observed the play at the National Theatre in 1986 found such observations slightly too close to the bone for outright hilarity. They provide the faintest outline of a country in painful transition from the paternalistic conservatism of Mr. Macmillan and Mrs. Thatcher's enterprise culture" (120). And it is this transition that interests me here. An audience could walk away from the play feeling satisfied and unmocked, but only through a deliberate act of self-blinding. Instead, the ending itself, altered and disconcerting, is one final call for the audience to realize their complicity in the creation of culture. This returns to the mocking call to follow the "taste of the town" that closes Gay's and Ayckbourn's plays, asking the audience to consider what they desire to see and why. In 1980s Britain, gender roles were plump for probing, engorged with their own containment. But, as Ayckbourn does so well, they had to be probed lightly, deftly, subtly, and handled with a good dash of humor, in order to make this concoction palatable to the audience watching their mythologies mocked and questioned on stage.

## Notes

1. Interestingly, Butler's book *Gender Trouble*, from which I take these quotes, came out in 1990, six years after *A Chorus of Disapproval*.

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**The Rhetoric of Racism:  
First-Year Composition Students on Affirmative Action  
by Amanda Wray**

*I am indebted to all the individuals more race-cognizant than I who modeled an anti-racist discourse that challenged me to consider the social implications of my rhetoric. May my words and those that I teach my son speak true of our embodied ideologies, and may your discourse reflect critical consciousness. I am grateful to those in my life who may not yet understand but who support my devotion to anti-racist work; my hope is that soon they will appreciate how we are all implicated in the system of racism.*

First-year college students arrive at the university equipped to interpret their social interactions and surroundings by relying on the assumptions internalized within their familial environment. These new students are thrust into an environment where the ideologies in which they were socialized will be contested and/or reinforced as they are faced with diverging cultures, ethnicities, and discourses, as well as contending value and belief systems. College is, to borrow Mary Louise Pratt's phrase, a *contact zone*; it is a space where "cultures meet, clash, and grapple with each other, often in contexts of highly asymmetrical relations of power" (33). Students will be invited into or denied access to social communities based upon the ways that their assumptions and/or cultural

constructions about the world and those of the world "meet" or "clash" with other members of the university setting. A student who makes obvious in conversation his commitment to fundamentalist Christian ideologies, for example, situates himself within certain social groups while simultaneously ostracizing him from others. Since the writing classroom is a space that almost all first-year students will experience during their college careers, it is an ideal "crossroads" at which to interrogate the ways in which the assumptions embedded in our language and writing divide people along intangible, socially constructed lines of "culture," "race," and "class."

Meanings embedded in the language we use, written and oral, can often reveal aspects of a person that she may wish to conceal or with which she may disagree. This paradox is possible because the language she uses is *collective* in that she is socialized to know how to use language even though the words she chooses in any given moment is an *individual* selection. Nancy DiTomaso et al demonstrate the multiplicity of meaning-making inherent in discourses through their ethnographic study of white participants' reactions to affirmative action. The authors conclude that whites are socialized to support the intent of affirmative action programs because they fear being labeled by the collective majority as racist, yet these same participants vilify the material reality of affirmative action because they sense individual threat (DiTomaso et al 353). Affirmative action policies, then, are ideal lenses through which to demonstrate to my writing students the possible intersections of and disconnections between an individual's intent and the meaning conveyed through the language they use. It is a foundation of my pedagogy to illustrate to students the urgency of evaluating and choosing with critical inquiry between the often clashing assumptions about the world that they internalized during childhood and the varying ideologies they are being faced with in the college setting. Accordingly, my goals for this article are to articulate the

discourse codes students use to e-race racist rhetoric (that is, to replace race as the formative element in racism) and to examine the storylines that are created to challenge the justness of affirmative action because both elements work together to normalize and re-center whiteness as hegemonic.

Though I will use the umbrella term “whiteness” throughout this article, my intent is not to essentialize whiteness as a single racial identity; although all whites benefit from the cultural capital associated with whiteness, I understand that these privileges are not shared equally among all whites. It is because *all* whites are required to function within the system of racial oppression that has historically and overwhelmingly situated them in privileged positions that I feel relatively comfortable generalizing across “whiteness” in this isolated instance to put forth my reflections on the racist rhetoric of my students’ arguments for/against affirmative action. Throughout this article I include anonymous student discourse as italicized text, not to draw attention to the ways students are racist, but to exhibit the strength of unexamined racial scripts to perpetuate racist ideologies.<sup>1</sup> You may hear your voice at times—and that is okay—as long as you do not allow that voice to go critically unexamined. How does your language challenge or reaffirm white as “normal” and hegemonic?

### Absolution of Responsibility

*If people would just stop worrying so much about race and look at people as just people rather than seeing people’s skin color first, then there couldn’t be racism. How can we end racism if all we talk about is race? It divides us. We are all just human and should just be the human race.*

None of my students claim to be “racist.” In fact, when asked, they refer to racists very abstractly and in association with white supremacy groups such as the KKK and Nazis, making racism about *those* people

who refuse to see beyond a person’s skin color. Colorblindness, according to my students’ rhetoric, is a more progressive and preferred ideology. DiTomaso et al argue that “by not acknowledging or giving attention to race” my students believe themselves to be “contributing to the elimination of racial problems” (356); yet colorblindness, according to Eduardo Bonilla-Silva, “serves today as the ideological armor for a covert and institutionalized system [of racism] in the post-Civil Rights era” (3). It explains social and institutional racial inequities as “the product of market dynamics, naturally occurring phenomena, and...cultural limitations” (2), making the act of racism an almost invisible social practice that maintains the hegemony that is white privilege. In essence, by removing race as the critical element in explaining material disparities of power and cultural capital, colorblindness absolves the hegemonic groups from responsibility for continued oppression.

Since post-Civil Rights social norms frown on explicitly racist discourse, racist speech gets buried within politically correct, socially polite strategies used to erase the potentially negative implications of saying something “inappropriate.” The outcome is that these *rules* of political correctness become a racial script: “a series of programmed messages (e.g., stereotypes and myths) about a particular ethnic group and transmitted to children by parents, relatives, teachers, media, religious groups and significant others” (Williams 1). Our students then may enter the *contact zones* of college employing a rhetoric that articulates race politics with which they may not agree; or, perhaps it is safer to say, their racial script is informed by the previous generation’s in a way that consciously and unconsciously reproduces the same cultural and racial divides for the next generation. Through this process of reproducing unquestioned racial scripts, the excuse of *unintended* racism is created as a way to absolve the speaker of responsibility for perpetuating racism. It must be noted, though, that lack of intent (or unconscious racism) is the



type of excuse afforded only to those in power, such that employing this excuse is just one more privilege of whiteness.

Bonilla-Silva refers to denials of racism as “rhetorical shields” that “save face because whites can always go back to the safety of the disclaimers (‘I didn’t mean that because, as I told you, I *am not a racist*’)” (57). Since levels of racist appropriateness are constructed by the shared notions of the group, those speaking about race may disguise their racism rhetorically as a way to feel out the group’s level of passive acceptance. Of course, a consequence of intended—though camouflaged—racist language leads to the internalizing of racist rhetoric by those unable or unwilling to critically interrogate the discourse (for example, children). The continued dominance of socially acceptable racist language eliminates the possibility for students to choose anti-racist language since they lack the opportunity to internalize it in our “colorblind” society. Bonilla-Silva argues that “Ideologies, like grammar, are learned socially, and therefore, the rules of how to speak properly come ‘naturally’ to people socialized in particular societies. Thus, whites construct their accounts with the frames, style, and stories available in color-blind America in a mostly unconscious fashion” (54).

Through language socialization the “rules” on how to politely discuss race become racial scripts through which whites produce and reproduce racist rhetoric. I use this phrase—racist rhetoric—to imply that the speaker’s language about race crafts an argument to the listener about how the listener should conceptualize race, as well as how the orator conceives of its purpose and social power. My students’ discussions of affirmative action, then, become more of a lens into the ways they were socialized to consider race. The racism of their rhetoric on affirmative action policies is almost always concealed using a variety of “framing” techniques that work to absolve the speaker of responsibility. The paradox is that the rhetor, or speaker, can unwittingly create, negate, or

reinforce assumptions about difference, racialized ideologies, and people of other races by simply speaking his inherited racial script.

### Frames of Colorblindness

*Minorities have many more scholarships that they can use than the people who aren't minority. The advantage to this is that minorities can make it into college more easily now, but I also think this puts an unfair binder on those who don't qualify as a minority.*

Theorists categorize the frames whites use to deny responsibility for perpetuated racism in a variety of ways, but the central argument remains: racial codes are internalized, inherited through social group identities, and shape the way the speaker views the world as well as how the listener interprets it.<sup>2</sup> Abstract liberalism and minimization of racism, to borrow the terms from Bonilla-Silva, are the two frames that are relied upon most heavily in my students’ lack of support for affirmative action programs.<sup>3</sup> Abstract liberalism involves the use of politically liberal ideals (such as equal opportunity) and economic liberalism ideals (such as individualism and personal choice) in abstract ways to explain away racial inequality (28). In short, it is the myths students tell themselves that deny material reality as evidence. For example, the student quoted above claims it is easier for minorities to “make it into college” than for white students, even though the material reality is that the University of Arizona, where I teach, is 63% white, 3% black, 14% Hispanic, 6% Asian, and 2% Native American (the remaining 12% are students of alien status or unknown ethnicity) (*UA Factbook*). Though greater numbers of minority students are entering higher education, their presence is still marginalized and their experiences often tokenized within the institutional setting.

Another model of abstract liberalism is the student’s claim that affirmative action is “not fair for people who work really hard and someone gets in over them just because they are a minority.” This frame of interpretation assumes that the minority student did not work as hard

as the normalized (i.e. white) “people” of which he speaks by positing the effort of an individual against the assumptions of an entire racial group. The use of abstract liberalism is probably the most common frame through which students interpret race issues since individualism is highly valued in our society. The ways in which students discuss the power of the individual, however, erases the (dis)privilege of racial group association.

*I think everything is pretty equal now.*

*It should all be equal starting now. We can't fix everything of the past.*

*Racism will never be completely gone.*

Minimization of racism is the second rhetorical frame my students most frequently turn to in their arguments about affirmative action. Bonilla-Silva explains that this frame of colorblind racism “suggests discrimination is no longer a central faction affecting minorities’ life chances” (29), encouraging whites to believe that racism is a thing of the past. More importantly, minimization erases racisms that are not explicit or materially produced, such as social, structural, and institutional racism. Students believe that as long as crosses are not burning outside the dorms or minorities are not being attacked on campus then racial equality is “pretty equal,” even though a gaze across our campus will show a disproportionate amount of white faces. In just as troubling (perhaps more troubling) ways, this frame is also used to demonize minority students who “play the race card.” Since the frame of minimization is often used in tandem with abstract liberalism, with one serving as evidence for the other, white students’ language conveys the belief that minorities are unwilling to work hard (abstract liberalism) and that they turn to their race as an excuse for their lack of social status and opportunity (minimization of race).

Through these frames, my students filter understanding and

meaning in ways that form their assumptions about and common sense notions of reality, and, unfortunately, these frames are not isolated to the racial scripts of white people. The way all people racialize through their language affects how race is commodified in the spaces we occupy. Thus, students’ racial scripts can affect the seat they choose on the first day of class, who they invite into their essay workshop group, how they construct the “other” in their research and writing projects, the manner in which they (in)validate perspectives of their classmates, and how they read and interpret the texts of our classroom. In short, the racial assumptions students make (even unconsciously) alter almost every aspect of our classrooms including the type of knowledge-making in which we can engage. At the center of my pedagogy, then, is the desire to challenge students’ reliance on racialized assumptions and generalizations, and to teach the importance of critical inquiry and analytical thought grounded in the self (as opposed to inherited language) as a more informed way to make meaning of the world.

### Storylines of Affirmative Action

Affirmative action is:

*The way our country attempts to jump start minorities by making it easier for them to get jobs as well as get into colleges.*

*When a group of people get special treatment because of their ethnicity or race.*

*Where an organization or employer must hire a certain number/percentage of minority workers.*

*Guarantees a certain quota of students from each ethnicity be admitted to a university.*

*Is when minority students are given preferential treatment over the non-minority students regardless of who has better grades.*

Of fifty students, I have only one who defines affirmative action closely to the way the law defines it.<sup>4</sup> She writes: “Affirmative action’s

goal is to give equal opportunity to everyone regardless of race, gender, ethnicity, social class, age, etc. . . . meaning the most qualified person for the job will get the job.” The majority of the remaining forty-nine students suggest that affirmative action is about fulfilling racial quotas or offering an unfair advantage to minorities. Students interpret the law through the frame of colorblind racism. Since social norms consider it impolite to make race explicit, a law that acknowledges race—even though its acknowledgement of race is to require those in positions of power to disregard it in hiring and educational settings—is misinterpreted as making the majority (assumed, most often, to be whites) the new victim of racial inequality. The law is clear, but the interpretation of the law is socially embedded in whites’ language to preserve the hegemony of white privilege.

The predictability of students’ rationalizations for or against affirmative action makes material the pervasiveness of colorblind racist rhetoric by exposing how students formulate meaning of the world through racialized constructs of the “other.” As discussed earlier, no student considers himself racist: instead, he hides behind the rhetorical shield of good intentions to position himself as a socially polite colorblind progressive, yet arguing against the need for affirmative action. The research of DiTomaso et al proves that whites’ more liberal racial attitudes are in opposition to their lack of support for public policies designed to contest racial inequality. Research concludes that an astonishing 246 white interviewees “manage to claim in one collective breath how nonracist and nonprejudiced they are while vilifying programs like affirmative action” (353). Fearing being labeled racist or playing the race card, my students, white and non-white, abide by the social norm to express some type of support for affirmative action, though the stories most of them construct outlining the potential outcomes of affirmative action reveal a less progressive rhetorical agenda.

As I indicated above, I have one student who understands the policy of affirmative action, and all of her conversations indicate complete support with the policy. Most students express support of the policy on a theoretical level, but when we discuss and write about the material reality of affirmative action, six storylines emerge with grave predictability. Students see one or more of the outcomes of affirmative action as:

1. Reverse racism by decreasing the amount of opportunities for whites.
2. Encouraging hatred and race crimes by making minorities and whites so competitive.
3. Requiring current whites to pay for the mistakes of other whites.
4. Enabling minorities to become dependent on the “system” (a generalized entity that is sometimes the government and at other times the university).
5. Being racist against minorities by telling them they could not get the job or get into college on their own.
6. Trying to fix a problem that will never be fixed.

These storylines appear in more than one student’s verbal and written conversations, and they serve as colorblind racist rhetoric that becomes a denial of responsibility for perpetuating racism. It is through storylines such as these that students’ language reveals the disconnect between what they verbalize as their intention (support for programs designed to discourage racism, such as affirmative action) and the meaning that is created through their language (that minorities do not need these programs in our current society).

*I feel like if I try hard, I should be rewarded for what I do. I mean, this is America. Everyone has the chance to succeed if you try really hard.*

Reverse racism is the most consistently used storyline to argue against affirmative action in my classroom. This is not surprising since the majority of my students are middle to upper class whites

who have benefited immensely from white privilege and unquestioned preferential treatment over minorities on social, political, institutional, and interpersonal levels.<sup>5</sup> They falsely assume that their position in the university was earned without favoritism, which then becomes their argument against affirmative action because, as they see it, the policy “discriminates against whites.” The ethnographic research of DiTomaso et al explains this disparate construction of reality, arguing that “the advantages that whites enjoy because of their access to social and cultural capital and to economic resources protect whites from having to face ‘equal opportunity’—that is, the market forces—that they so readily see as the solution to the disadvantage of blacks and other nonwhites” (354). In short, my students rely on abstract liberalism to argue that minorities should succeed in life the same way middle class whites do but without the real possibility of minorities’ equal access to the market forces—conveyed either through racial identity or social status—that would enable such success. My white students can point to one of the minority students in the classroom as proof of the possibility that minorities can “make it,” and my non-white students too often agree because these students share the desire to be recognized based upon their *individual* drive for success as opposed to benefiting from a variety of social, political, and economic factors.

In addition to the argument of individualism, students may invest in the reverse racism storyline because they feel personally threatened by exclusion. They misinterpret the recruitment of minorities—through scholarships, social groups, cultural events, etc—into academic and work settings as a process of exclusion for whites. One student writes, “There’s no scholarships for white people based on their race. No clubs for white people.” Reverse racism logic says: Because there are no scholarships where only whites qualify, then whites are being discriminated against. This argument relies on the false analogy of similar social opportunities,

historically and in the present, of minorities and whites by failing to address the fact that all US citizens do not share equal access to and similar experiences with social capital. By disregarding the “savage inequalities between blacks and whites” and ignoring “the effects of past and contemporary discrimination on the social, economic, and educational status of minorities” they “safeguard white privilege” (Bonilla-Silva 31). Again, the storyline is conveniently based upon unproven notions of abstract liberalism.

*If we could just move past racism, stop talking about it all the time, then people could focus on other stuff and forget that they are white or black or whatever.*

The second storyline, which is a little shocking to me, is that affirmative action will encourage hatred and race crimes by making minorities and whites competitive. One student argues that “[affirmative action] creates animosity wherever it is taking place and enforces racist thoughts.” The foundation for this storyline relies on a misinterpretation of the affirmative action law as a policy that encourages people to compete for positions based purely on their ethnicity rather than on measurable factors (e.g., GPA, education, experiences, etc.). In class a student offered the following example as proof of affirmative action’s ability to induce animosity: Because he did not receive a scholarship to college and his roommate—a black male who, according to my student, had a dramatically lower high school GPA and SAT score—did receive a scholarship, my student refuses to socialize with his roommate because he resents the perceived favoritism of his roommate’s position in the academy. The student falsely assumes that his roommate’s scholarship is a direct result of his status as a black man, negating the possibility that the scholarship criteria was based upon something other than GPA and standardized test scores (such as, community service). In believing his roommate’s path to college was not only cheaper but also “much

easier" than his own, my student assumes that the most difficult part of college is getting in and paying for it. He fails to acknowledge the challenges inherent in attending a university where only 3% of the student population identifies as black.

Furthermore, there is the assumption that it is animosity between ethnic groups that leads to racist thoughts, erasing the political and social forces from above. With this example, we see an oversimplification of the term "racist" (as something static) and the need to find solidarity along lines of ethnicity, a desire that requires an "us"/"them" binary that points to the possibility of homogenous ethnic social groups. Teun van Dijk argues that through this binary, whites create group solidarity against the "other" such that "[t]hey mark social boundaries and reaffirm social and ethnic identities, and self-attribute moral superiority to their own group" (310). This group solidarity enables the minimization of the racist discourse frame discussed above since it is the group in power that determines what will and will not be valued in discourse (that is, colorblindness is considered "progressive" rather than "racist").

*I understand the need to help minorities get access to things just handed to whites, like education. But, should it have to be at my expense? I didn't make the world the way it is. I'm just trying to live in it too.*

A few students argue that affirmative action requires current whites to pay for the mistakes of other whites, who are, presumably, the explicitly racist whites that owned slaves (little room is left for less abstract definitions of racists). This argument is particularly underhanded as it not only denies current whites' responsibility for racism, but it also erases the benefits and privileges that whites have received through the racism of the past and the present. This storyline uses notions of abstract liberalism as evidence (some blacks made it so all blacks have the same chance as whites) to support the frame of minimization of

racism (it is not race that is the key element in cultural capital inequities). In class, a student responds to my question querying how affirmative action is meant to be beneficial to minorities with an angry, "I'm not racist so why do I have to lose opportunities to pay for the racists of the past?" Such a response redirects the argument away from affirmative action and toward the unfairness of paying for someone else's mistakes. In this exchange, relying on the commonplace value of individualism, the student is correct; it is not fair to pay for the mistakes of others. Yet, his logic fails to consider that he has benefited from the racism of others, even unconsciously, and that he continues to benefit from the racism of others. This student assumes that racism is a problem of the past and, in so doing, is confident in opposing affirmative action in the present on the grounds that it now requires him to pay for the mistakes of the *past* rather than seeing affirmative action as a program focused on the *future*.

*So many people are dependent on welfare. How can people be success as an individual if the government is always finding a way to interfere and offer hand outs to the "less fortunate"?*

A few students argued that affirmative action policies encourage minorities to become dependent on the system; but such an assertion draws vast conclusions about entire ethnic groups based upon evidence gathered from a small segment of an entire population. Again, this storyline is grounded in an inaccurate, though socially propagated, understanding of affirmative action as a "handout" rather than a policy requiring *equal* consideration for *all* ethnicities. The creation of this storyline is dependent upon the ideal that the dominant group is *giving* something to minorities, rather than minorities taking advantage of an opportunity. As long as white remains the defining center then whiteness is implied to be the group both *offering* and having to *give up* something for the advantage of non-whites. This, however, contributes to whites' entitlement to judge the behavior of non-white individuals they come in

contact with as representatives for an entire ethnic group.

*[Affirmative action] belittles the minority population as to say they "need" a helping hand just because they have a different skin color. Maybe implying that for some reason they aren't as smart as whites which [is] ridiculous and highly offensive.*

Arguing that affirmative action is racist against minorities is the fifth storyline that emerged in our classroom. Students employed a tactic of projection as they argued that the policy implies that minorities cannot get the job or get into college on their own accord. Bonilla-Silva finds in his ethnographic study that projection is part of the most commonly used objections to affirmative action, and that it works to absolve whites of responsibility for racism while also enabling them to feel good about themselves (64-65). In crafting the policy's purpose as a "helping hand," the student quoted above diminishes the binding market forces of a non-white racial identity, making the *problem* out to be a racialized body rather than an issue of power. She is projecting racism—that minorities are not as smart or motivated—onto the policy rather than onto herself or the social, political, and economic forces associated with white hegemony.

*I get so tired of talking about race all of the time. It isn't ever going away. We're all different and all the same. Why can't we just move on and deal with some problems in our world that affect everybody.*

The last storyline—that affirmative action is trying to fix a problem that will never be fixed—is based upon students' assumption that racism is not a problem of hegemony, but of "others'" inadequacies. When my student writes, "There is no solution to racism," he assumes that because racism has not previously been eliminated from our culture, it is impossible it ever will. The implication, then, is that we should just embrace racism as a natural part of our society. Yet, if the doctor told him that he had cancer, a disease for which there is, as of yet, no cure, he would still probably pursue treatment since he is young and capable

of beating mortality, if only temporarily. Racism is much the same. We may not be able to *cure* it, but we can work to decrease its impact on our society.

### Relinquishing the Rhetorical Shield

My students have adeptly learned the racist rhetoric game—how to sound colorblind while propagating racist discourse and preserving white dominance—from years of conditioning. The *contact zones* of the university are wonderful spaces for students to interrogate the legacy of these racial assumptions as they are consistently confronted with difference and differences that may or may not measure up to the commonplace assumptions with which they were socialized. It is important for all students to understand that racism is not the product of one person, and that one of the most detrimental elements of white privilege "is that whites do not have to be racists in order for racial inequality to be reproduced" (DiTomaso et al 354). The racist rhetoric my students use in connection to affirmative action is learned, internalized, and (un)consciously reproduced. The ways to combat it are clearly rhetorical.

Both white and minority students stand behind the shield of "I am not a racist" without really understanding the implications of their assumptions. We need our students to take responsibility for the ways they use language to (de)humanize others, and I approach this responsibility by teaching my students (through the lens of affirmative action) how to rhetorically ground their critical and analytical inquiries. Writing is not just about communicating any more than rhetoric is just about arguing; students are constructing the world through their language and affecting how others interpret the world through their rhetoric. It is therefore crucial that we engage the "clashes" of the *contact zone* so that we construct meaning in socially responsible and civically motivated ways.

## Notes

1. Students were asked to anonymously write about affirmative action at the beginning of the semester. We used these pieces as discussion starters throughout the first six weeks of the course as students learned how to craft an argument and rhetorically analyze language. Many of my students' final papers reflected a more informed standpoint on affirmative action, which does not imply that students came to my side of the fence and agreed that affirmative action is necessary. Instead, their arguments were built upon critical inquiry rather than assumptions developed through their inherited racial scripts, and attention was paid to the intricacies of current race relations in light of their ethnic and social positioning.

2. Teun van Dijk refers to whites' colorblind rhetoric as "denials of racism." Philomena Essed discusses the phenomena of continued racism in a self-proclaimed colorblind society as "the everyday" notions of racism; they are so common as to become invisible. Bonilla-Silva explains four frames of colorblind racism in *Racism without Racists*: abstract liberalism, minimization of race, naturalization and cultural racism. See also: Victor Villanueva.

3. The two frames that are the most pertinent to students' discussions of affirmative action in our classroom, and the two to be discussed in this article, are abstract liberalism and minimization of race. Students rely heavily on naturalization and cultural racism as a way to explain why minority students do not take advantage of all the "free scholarship money" they are so "generously" given, but I will not offer an in-depth discussion of these frames here for the sake of time and space. I will touch on these issues as I summarize the storylines my students use to argue the negative outcomes of affirmative action.

4. See the governmental website for accurate wording of the equal opportunity, anti-discrimination law: <<http://www.dol.gov/dol/topic/discrimination/ethnicdisc.htm>>.

5. My position within the classroom is, in itself, a space of privilege. How much of my success hinges on my whiteness? I will never and can never know. However, I am cognizant of white privilege on a variety of levels and try to work toward transparency of these privileges in my life. It is impossible to operate within our current system of racial oppression independent of my privilege. Racism affects us all deeply.

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**A Review of Amy Christine Billone's *Little Songs: Women, Silence, and the Nineteenth-Century Sonnet***  
by Heather Bowlby

Amy Christine Billone's purpose in *Little Songs: Women, Silence, and the Nineteenth-Century Sonnet*—namely, to propose that the sonnet form is an important component of women's literary history—falls squarely within an increasing emphasis within Victorian studies on reevaluations of nineteenth-century female poetics. Billone seeks to fill a void in this emerging field through *Little Songs*, which she claims is currently “the only book-length study devoted to a range of female sonneteers from the long nineteenth century” (2). Using gender as her primary point of focus, Billone examines the ways in which both canonical and non-canonical British women writers used the sonnet form as a means of engagement with the lyric tradition. Billone's objective, however, is not merely to bring long-neglected women poets into the critical spotlight and make “muted, forgotten, or misunderstood words freshly audible” (2). Rather, this study assumes a more sophisticated approach by investigating the ideological constructions that rendered the sonnet so appealing to nineteenth-century women poets, intriguingly suggesting that the sonnet, with its

structural compatibility for feminized reticence, permitted interrogations of gender in a way not possible through other poetic forms.

The meaning of the word “sonnet”—derived from the Italian *sonnetto*, or “little song”—is itself a paradox. Like its literal denotation, a sonnet implies both musicality and silence and, as Billone argues, mirrors the complex negotiations nineteenth-century women poets engaged in between culturally gendered acts of silencing and the need for artistic voice. Embracing a poetic form that embodied both aspects of their contradictory positions within a male literary tradition enabled these women to articulate their desire for professional recognition and to mask this subversive expression beneath a seemingly silent, outwardly conforming exterior. In this way, Billone asserts that nineteenth-century women poets often used both silence and speech to explore the indeterminate relationship between gender and language.

In an effort to portray the long nineteenth century, each chapter in *Little Songs* focuses on a different woman poet, beginning with Charlotte Smith at the late Romantic side of the spectrum and ending on the other end of the century with Isabella Southern as the representative late Victorian. Smith's *Elegiac Sonnets* (1784), the topic of chapter one, establishes poetic speech through the vehicle of silent grief, and by doing so blends an unspeaking silence with a silence that gives rise to a type of poetic expression. As Billone maintains, Smith's fusion of two distinct types of poetic silence signifies Smith's belief that the female voice is enabled at the moment when masculine speech is *disabled* within the sonnet form. Interestingly, Billone also examines the responses of Smith's female contemporaries to Smith's idea of silence as an expression of grief in this chapter, showing how women's ideas of silence as inscribed within the sonnet form differed from each other.

Any study of the nineteenth-century women's sonnet must inevitably address the monumental contributions of Elizabeth Barrett Browning,



and Billone's second and third chapters affords due attention to both Barrett Browning and Christina Rossetti's use of this poetic form. In chapter two, Billone asserts that Barrett Browning extends Smith's idea of the sonnet's uniquely reserved structure as a metaphor for unspeakable grief and uses this quality to highlight and question gender norms. Within Barrett Browning's *Sonnets from the Portuguese* (1850), silence simultaneously operates as a catalyst and as a restraint for her artistic ambitions. Chapter three explores the ways in which Rossetti's sonnet sequence *Monna Innominata* ("sonnet of sonnets" in the Italian) focuses on the paradoxical tension between the reticence of Rossetti's speaker, a woman who claims that she cannot express herself, and the musically expressive nature of the sonnets themselves. While Rossetti leads Barrett Browning's conception of silence to its natural conclusion in the self-destruction of poetic voice, Billone claims that by doing so Rossetti significantly redefines silence by depicting "poetry as the music of inexpressivity itself" (11).

Chapter four discusses how other women poets both contemporary to and immediately following Barrett Browning and Rossetti reacted to these prominent women as poetic models. Although the sonnets of other nineteenth-century women poets often praised the work of Barrett Browning and Rossetti, Billone emphasizes that a revisionary desire underpins this overt admiration. Billone cites Isabella J. Southern's *Sonnets and Other Poems* (1891) as particularly indicative of the late nineteenth-century progression away from the conceptualization of silence that occupied earlier women poets towards a twentieth-century mode of thinking.

Great strides have taken in the last thirty years to recover the female poetic tradition that Barrett Browning once found so invisible when she famously remarked, "Where are the poetesses? . . . I look for grandmothers and I find none" (14). Accordingly, the attention Billone affords to lesser-

known women poets in *Little Songs* in chapters one and four is perhaps one of the most valuable contributions of her study. While much work has been done with canonical figures like Barrett Browning and Rossetti, until recently little consideration has been paid to other women poets of the long nineteenth century. An accurate representation of the spectrum of women's poetics over the substantial era that *Little Songs* tackles would be difficult, and Billone does not quite achieve this ambitious objective in her book. However, even Billone's acknowledgement of the variety and complexity inherent in women's perceptions of poetic silence, particularly through her discussion of non-canonical poets, does go far towards compensating for *Little Songs's* inability to present a more inclusive cross-section of this burgeoning field.

Billone's study is part of a growing body of feminist criticism that objects to Sandra M. Gilbert and Susan Gubar's highly influential conception of nineteenth-century women poets as implicitly constrained, in part by a lack of female poetic exemplars. Many feminist critics, like Billone, have argued that Gilbert and Gubar's characterization of the nineteenth-century woman poet as a "madwoman in the attic" is one-dimensional and fails to recognize the significant contributions of a large body of lesser-known women poets in this time period. In this sense, the central premise of *Little Songs* is not unique. Even so, Billone's argument for increased recognition of the importance of the sonnet form within nineteenth-century female poetics is significant, and it opens a new avenue of inquiry within the field that others may productively follow.

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