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CHARTER

GONZAGA UNIVERSITY'S JOURNAL
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“My home is such a powerfully imaginative place that the space is almost irrelevant.”

- TONI MORRISON

Charter
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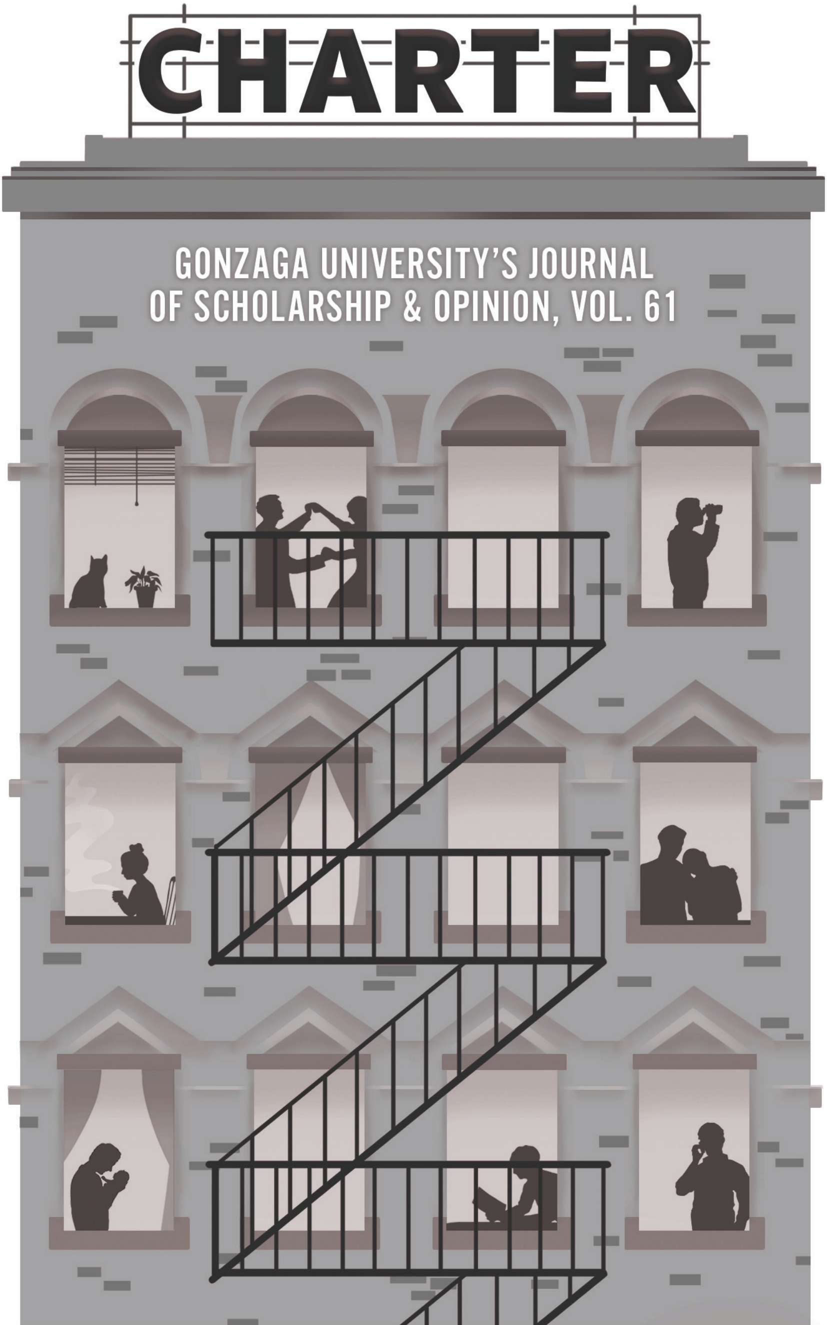

Letter from **the Editor**

February 13, 2024

Dearest reader,

I write to you again this year in the dull gray of a long February. The still leafless trees and gathering momentum of the semester give the campus a restless, unsettled feeling. As school, work, and life reach a feverish pace, it feels difficult to find rest. To feel at home. In our world, home feels harder and harder to come by. Violence and conflict in Gaza continue on, leaving countless displaced from homeland and earthly home. Hate, fascism, and oppression still terrorize and alienate marginalized communities around the world from feeling truly at home. Devastatingly extreme weather across the globe warns us that environmental degradation still threatens the planet which we call home.

In a time when any semblance of physical home seems ravaged beyond recognition, I find myself wondering if the idea of home is still compatible with our contemporary reality. Is home still possible in a world where violence, inequality, and prejudice keeps many from calling a space their own? What does it look like to have a home without walls?

I look to the words of the great Toni Morrison, the first Black woman to receive the Pulitzer Prize for Literature who has written extensively on community in the face of adversity, including her novel aptly titled *Home*. In Morrison's home, "space is almost irrelevant," because home for her is "a powerfully imaginative place." While one's space as home is important, home often transcends four walls and a roof; Morrison explains that it is the feelings and ideas that set people free. Morrison's writing invites us to imagine otherwise: to contemplate our current reality in which so many are displaced from ancestral and physical home, and to imagine how we can create a world that values making all people feel at home.

It was with these reflections in mind that I called writers to consider our theme for this year's edition of *Charter*: "Home." Thinking about home might call up ideas of a certain physical location or building, one perhaps with a shingled roof and a trim green lawn. Our theme this year asked writers to imagine otherwise: to consider the ideas that construct home, the people called in or out of this home, and how home might be reconstructed to draw in, rather than cast out. Our writers took this charge eagerly, considering home in many ways— from finding home in one's own self and identity, to discovering home in one's local community, to examining home as it is found in the world in a broader sense.

I encourage you, dear reader, to imagine otherwise. To suspend the idea of home as just a building or place. To open your imagination to what home might look like in our contemporary reality. I am deeply grateful to have witnessed the voices in these pages, as they speak to one another and imagine a new human home— a home rebuilt from critical thought and radical inclusivity. Our authors' diverse work across form, topic, and critical perspectives calls to mind the words of Audre Lorde: "For the master's tool will never dismantle the master's house." This volume endeavors to dismantle harmful, exclusionary conceptions of home and to consider home as "a powerfully imaginative place."

Dear reader, I invite you to imagine alongside them.

Cordially,

Delaney Sousa
EDITOR-IN-CHIEF

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PART ONE

SELF

Finding Community in Alienation

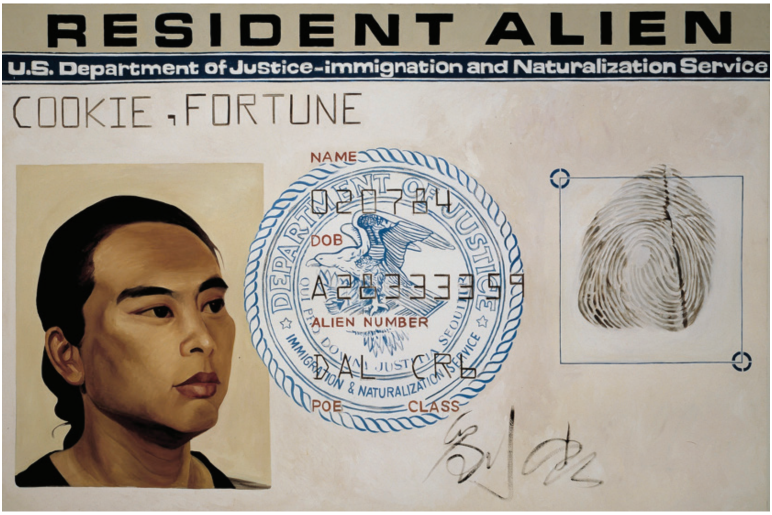
KIRA BIFONE

"Call it the catalog of mixed bloods, or / the book of naught... [the] I don't understand you... What do you call that space between"

-NATASHA TRETHEWEY

My family is a lot like the melting pot we seem to imagine America to be. It is multicultural and multireligious. My family includes members born across the country and around the world, of various religions and ethnicities. My Italian father, my Russian and Polish mother, and my brother, the perfect mix of the two, and my sister and I, adoptees from China. Together we celebrate Chinese New Year, Christmas, and Channukah. My siblings and I were raised in a house of many cultures and lived in a diverse community. However, in reality, many societal norms loomed overhead, restricting the simplicity of belonging and blending into this melting pot due to my identities. I am an immigrant, a daughter of white parents, and a transracial adoptee. Alien is no alien word to me, it is familiar like the feeling of walking into a space where nobody looks at or experiences the world like you. Alien describes an element of my life experience, but not who I am as a person, but what the world has decided to call me and displace me in society because of it.

Growing up I told my mom that we fit together like puzzle pieces, and heard stories of how parents would approach her in the park and ask where I came from. Puzzled looks cross their faces as they try to find the connection between the little Asian baby they saw in the stroller and the white mother pushing it. This feeling of alienation goes beyond just my personal experience to include immigrants, children of color to white parents, and transracial adoptees, who are all pressured to feel grateful in a country that is not ready to make them feel welcome. I look for community everywhere, but I feel out of place among people raised in Chinese culture, and my race makes it hard for me to easily fit into American culture. I feel stuck, in which I cannot fit into either my Chinese or American communities. The feeling of being in between cultures and communities is not easy to describe. Looking at the art of Natasha Trethewey and Hung Liu, I feel that the experience of alienation is represented and articulated well. Natasha Trethewey, a biracial poet, and Hung Liu, a Chinese immigrant artist, capture this common experience of alienation through their art and show how people can locate a community through the shared experience of alienation.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Hung Liu's art (see above) shows how the government alienates people through the immigrant documentation process and forces minoritized and rejected groups to find community with each other. This is seen in Hung Liu's painting "Resident Alien," depicting a green card. This painting is meant to represent the generalization of immigrants, reducing them to a card. In this instance, they do not even have a name; rather, Liu intentionally chooses to use the name "Cookie, Fortune" showing the stereotypes of Asian Americans, misunderstanding of culture, and unrealistic expectations of their status in the United States. Fortune cookies are meant to be lucky, but in this image, they are simplified and appropriated, pushing the idea that immigrants are expected to feel "lucky" in a country that reduces them to stereotypes. When dehumanized, the immigrants subjected to this process are grouped together and labeled as others. Resident alien implies permanent outsider status.

Due to this social exile yet physical closeness, immigrants are bonded together in their communities. This bond is beneficial because "when we have meaningful experiences, we usually seek to share those experiences with someone else. In doing so, we hope to be heard and understood, to feel validated by the other" (Tatum 337). Immigrant communities have historically gathered in closeness as support systems to face this exclusion. Within these communities of exiled people, there has been the creation of an Americanized culture accepted by white people. For example, the fortune cookie referenced in the painting is a product of these enclosed communities. Fortune cookies were created by Japanese immigrants in California (Lee) as a consumable and socially acceptable representation of Asian culture. This painting nods to this process, showing the creation of community within a foreign landscape, something Hung Liu experienced herself: "I am not really Chinese anymore. But I am not 100% American. I cannot get close to my own history, but I cannot get rid of it" (Liu). In not conforming to the in-group, Liu falls out of the traditional binary, but her art provides the opportunity for viewers to know they are not alone. As bell hooks explains in "Yearning: Race, Gender, and Cultural Politics," "one of the most vital ways we sustain ourselves is by building communities of resistance" (hooks). It is through this critique of alienation that Liu plants the seed of community and resistance.

In Natasha Trethewey's book of poetry, *Thrall*, she references many pieces of art and relates them to her personal experience of being biracial and the alienation she experiences as a result. In her poem "Knowledge," written based on the chalk drawing by J. H. Hasselhorst, she writes, "I hear, again, his words - I study / my crossbreed child - misnomer / and taxonomy, the language of zoology" (Trethewey). Trethewey refers to the differences being observed by her white father. Her father, a man whom she did not expect to be clinically observed by, like the woman being dissected in the image, broke a boundary and made her feel an emotional alienation from the biological connection between father and daughter. In an interview with Chard deNiord, Trethewey refers to the chalk drawing and the reading she did with her father as poets, "I would always feel, standing there next to him, something like the Venus Hottentot on display, that all of a sudden I became that creature that was sort of turning around in her 'Otherness' and difference" ("The Typology").

The pain Tretheway feels gets channeled into this ekphrastic poem that comments on an image. In this image, Tretheway creates a community by relating the woman to the alienating experience of many biracial women who feel inspected by society. This invites readers to join this community of people who feel othered. "As a result of the small population and lack of media representation, multiracial youth may feel that they do not have a multiracial community and lack role models to help them understand their mixed identity" (Greig). The poems from the book, especially "Knowledge", open up the opportunity for people to find connection and community with peers and mentors who have shared experiences. A unique sense of community identity can stem from the collective experience of being alienated.

Another poem by Natasha Trethewey is able to describe the familial community created from the shared experiences with her mother that bond them. In her poem "The Americans: 3. The Help, 1968," inspired by the photograph "The Americans" by Robert Frank, she writes,

> That year when my mother took me for walks
> she was mistaken again and again
> for my maid. Years later she told me
> she'd say I was her daughter, and each time
> strangers would stare in disbelief, then
> empty the change from their pockets. (Trethewey)

These moments of alienation that Trethewey and her mother experienced emphasized the importance of community between them. They shared an identity that was not able to be shared by Trethewey's father, yet it was something that was unclear to the wider public but was essential to their identity. It shows the immense value in finding similarities, seen or unseen, between oneself and a trusted adult. In an interview following the release of a book about her mother, who was murdered by Trethewey's stepfather, she said "I think that I have two existential wounds that make me a writer, and one of them is that great loss. I think that's my deepest wound, losing my mother, but the other one is the wound of history that has everything to do with being born Black and biracial" (Chotiner). The pain of her identity in relation to American history is deepened by the early loss of her mother and the community and the connection between them. Shared connection with family is critical for those who share an alienated identity and Trethewey allows readers to examine this relationship and sense of community within their own lives and family structure.

Natasha Trethewey and Hung Liu captured their personal experiences of being biracial or an immigrant in America through their art. In their feeling of alienation, they have created art that has allowed people who have also been alienated into a community. Through commentary on the documentation process for immigrants, the observations of white parents towards their mixed-race children, and description of societal views of family, Trethewey and Liu have pointed to this "melting pot" that is America as being a place where people of diverse backgrounds are alienated.

No matter how hard I try, I will never feel fully included in my family community, in the culture of the United States and the world, because of my identity as a transracial adoptee. This partial belonging has made me feel alienated, isolated, alone, and separated from a community that I can fully believe will love and support me. However, I have learned to find connections with others that have internalized similar forms of alienation. Reading Tretheway and reflecting on Liu's artwork, I have felt seen and heard; I realized that my life was being reflected in their pieces. Their work, which critiqued alienation by the dominant group, also gave me the invitation to relate to their feelings and find validation.

How do people of color, immigrants, biracial, and transracial adoptees navigate a world that is not built to make us feel included? By sharing their personal experiences of heartache, frustration, and desire to be accepted, these artists open up for people who have shared identities to relate and feel seen. Art is a way that people can find community through shared life events. People sharing their stories allows others, like me, to see that they are not alone. The United States is not a welcoming place for all; alienation is not a unique experience. There is value in the community that some people must search for themselves by relating to others. Art opens the conversation to find those people. Navigating a country that is not necessarily welcoming to all is challenging, but finding people with commonalities is a powerful source of validation, resilience, and resistance.

Home will likely never be a physical place for me. I will likely always feel split between the different countries and experiences that have influenced me. The communities that I have been lucky enough to be a part of have allowed me to find home outside of the traditional four-walled building. Home is the place where I find belonging; it comes from solidarity and an understanding of different life experiences. I find home in the process of writing, in the articulation of the complex thoughts and emotions that are guided by my biggest questions, much like what artists do through poetry or visual art. In an effort to understand the creation of community through alienation, I open myself up to the opportunity to build a community of people through my search for knowledge. If you are without a community or home, I hope this essay helped guide you to finding your home, whatever it may look like.

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Home: A Sociologist's Perspective

An Interview with Dr. Vikas Gumbhir

INTERVIEW BY AMISA RAMADHANI

What is your field of study and research?

I am trained as a sociologist; I received my undergraduate degree in sociology from Regis University in 1995. I received my Ph.D. in sociology from the University of Oregon in 2005. I have taught in the Department of Sociology and Criminology for nineteen years.

How did you become interested in this field?

I came to sociology after taking two classes as an undergraduate at Regis University the first was Introduction to sociology, and that prompted the next semester, after completing that class, to take a class on crime and deviance; after that class, I was sure that I was sure I wanted to major in sociology. Sociology as a discipline, its theories and methods, provide us with a broad understanding of human experience. It's also very reflexive it allows us to look at ourselves, and it provides us that chance to compare our experiences with other people's experiences and to look for patterns in the experiences of people all around the world, and it's beautiful. It's a window into humanity that really has minimal limits, and that's what I love about it, that's how I became a sociologist.

Having said that, our theme for this year's edition of* Charter *is Home. How would you define home? How do you encounter this theme in your field?

My home is in Kansas City. I have not lived in Kansas City for almost three decades. It has been over twenty-five years since I lived in Kansas City, and I still think of it as my home because so many things that have contributed to who I am today are in Kansas City. It is where I grew up, I made lifelong friends, and it is where I came to come to understand certain things about the world. My time at Regis as an undergraduate and at the University of Oregon, where I did my doctoral work, is probably more important to understanding who I am today, but I wasn't ready for those experiences without my experiences in Kansas City and the people I grew up with there. I lived in Kansas City from birth until nineteen years of age. By the end of this academic year, I will have been here in Spokane for nineteen years. By the end of August 2024, I will have lived longer in Spokane than I did in Kansas City, but Spokane is not my home. Gonzaga has felt like home at times. It has been a place where I have done a lot of growing and met people who are very, very important to me, and I am very much the person I am today because of the time I have spent at Gonzaga, but I don't consider Spokane my home. I have an address in Spokane, but it is not my home, Kansas City is.

There is something deeply familiar when I return to visit Kansas City. It's strange when I return, and things that I expected to stay have changed. When I was at home in the middle of 2020 during the pandemic, I went to visit my mother, who still lived in Kansas City at the time. The house across the street had been sold by the family who had lived there for three decades to a new young family, and they made some changes. To look across the street and see the house where my where I grew up with my friends, with new people in it who made changes, it was disorienting. It was not the same. It is weird when places that I used to go to as a kid and as a young adult have closed, and buildings have been torn down and new buildings have come up. It is strange. When areas that used just to be farm land are now populated with shopping malls, office buildings, and apartment complexes—it's weird, but it still feels like home to me. I have thought about this topic well before *Charter* ever thought to make home their theme.

Sociology welcomes us to study things on a small level or at a remarkably large and broad level. I like the remarkably large and broad level because of some experiences very early on in my life in high school; one of my English teachers had us read a book by Studs Terkel, *Working*. Numerous people either wrote essays or gave interviews about their jobs. The author's point was to look at the diversity and similarity between people with this wide variety of jobs. This book made an impact on me. For years, I have wanted to do a sociological study on how people understand home. I think sociology has a wonderful view of the idea of home. Home can be a place, a physical structure, a region, a city, a state, or geography. Home can be a community, family, or people who share similar experiences, similar sets of priorities, similar aspirations in life. You can feel at home with people who you are like or who you want to be like.

Home can be a spontaneous place where that community arises. I say spontaneous so far as communities can go and take over areas and make them theirs, or a place can welcome a community into it. Numerous bars, restaurants, and coffee houses may intentionally or unintentionally cater to certain communities. Home can be a little space that people take over; in College Hall, there are several little conference rooms and classrooms on the first floor that, on the evenings and weekends, people use to study or to watch movies on the projector. One of my favorite things is that they play Dungeons and Dragons in one of the conference rooms. Community arises in these places, and people relate strongly and deeply to one another. There's something homey about that. Home can be a feeling of being welcome, a feeling of being in the right place, a feeling of being safe, of knowing that you can let down whatever guard you keep up daily and be yourself. Home can be an aspiration, a goal, something that we want to build in our lives. Home can also be a great source of pain and trauma. Something you are trying to get away from, something you are trying to keep distance from. In that sense, home can be very complicated. You may love that home but know that it can no longer be the home that it once was. It is hard to think about losing one's home, losing one's place, losing whatever special it was about that. Home is difficult and challenging. Ideally, I hope people can find it and make it whatever they need it to be.

Would you speak a bit on what systems, practices, and values contribute to the construction of what home is?

I want to talk about the work of one specific sociologist who is very important in my life because it was while reading her book that I decided to pursue academia. The sociologist is Arlie Hochschild, and the book is *The Second Shift*. I read this in my junior year as part of a class called The Sociology of the Family. The professor is Dr. Alice Reich, and she is an amazing teacher. I try to model some aspects of how I teach almost directly after how Dr. Reich taught her class. Dr. Reich's choice of this book was transformative. Hochschild's book is one of those cases where you know you take something that seems relatively simple and realize its immense complexity. Hochschild wanted to understand how dual-income spouses and heterosexual couples divide the housework. How is it that husbands and wives figured out who did what around the house now? The idea of "the second shift" is that women are primarily responsible for the work around the home, cooking, cleaning, and childcare.

The title of *The Second Shift* means that when women go and work their first shift at their job, they come home to work a second shift of household labor. A study cited by Hochschild stated that when asked to report all the time they spent doing it, women put in a full month of 24-hour days more work around the house than men. Hochschild wanted not to measure it but to understand how people negotiated who would do what. How did conflicts and tensions about the second shift emerge and get resolved? I say this to get to the concept of the economy of gratitude. It's about the gifts we give to others and the gifts we hope to receive. There's a story in that book of a couple, Peter and Nina Tanagawa. Peter runs a specialized bookstore that caters to a very small clientele; he doesn't make very much money, and he's good at his job, but it's not enough; he's not really the breadwinner. Nina is an executive; she starts working for a company and quickly rises through the ranks, earning considerably more than Peter. One might think that in a household where the wife earns more than the husband, maybe the husband would make up for it by doing more of the housework; it's a very economical approach.

In the case of the Tanagawas and in the case of every family that Hochschild studied where the woman earned more than the man, the woman did most of the housework, but it's the Tanagawas that gives us this sort of entree into how or the reasons why. Nina Tanagawa did most of the housework to protect Peter Tanagawa's ego because she had taken on the male provider role for their family. This is the economy of gratitude: what gifts do we give each other, and what gifts do we give in return? For Nina, the gift to the family was her wage; on Peter's salary alone, the family would have struggled. So, Nina gives that gift; Peter wants a wife who takes care of him and the family and the housework.

So, when we talk about family space, houses, and homes where even just two people live, there are not necessarily formal gift exchanges. Maybe one earns more than the other, and they see their gift as sort of being able to pay the rent, being able to pay the mortgage, being able to pay for somebody from outside of service to come in and clean the house; the gift that the other person really wants is that person to share the work with them. When we start talking about this in more complex terms, when we start talking about families with children, children may very well want the gift to be accepted for who they are at any moment in time, while parents might be giving them the gift by saying "I will provide for you, for college, for your bills, but I need you to do these things," but the children may not feel that way. The economy of gratitude allows us to understand how people feel appreciated, welcomed, and loved.

Another part of the social and cultural structure that shapes the family is generational disconnects, when we as adults think that children who are going through adolescence and young adulthood are having an experience similar to us. I am quite sure that my life as a teenager and my life as young are remarkably different than the students and children who are going through that today. A huge part of that has to do with economics. As I said earlier, I believe that many people, residents of the United States, think of their 20s and 30s as times when they are going to to find the person who they are going to settle down with, maybe have children if they choose to do so, and buy a house.

The economics of that are becoming impossible. I bought a house in 2009 or 2010. I was able to buy a nice enough house for under $200,000 at a reasonable interest rate, and I was able to make a proper down payment of 20%. I don't know if future generations will be able to do this. Mortgage rates are very high right now and are outrageous; housing costs are outrageous, and there seems to be no relief in sight. So that expectation of being able to buy a house, build a family in that house, and have those walls be able to speak to the lives that flourished within them, I am not sure that's going to be an applicable situation for the future. That's the very harsh economic reality: that the ability to have what so many have been socialized to think of as a home, a family home, will be beyond their grasp unless their families are already wealthy.

Finally, I will respond from a slightly more interactionist standpoint. Symbolic interactionism is a field in social psychology and theory in sociology. One of the things that is a source of conflict within families is what makes for a good father, mother, or child, how do we perform these roles, how do we figure out these roles (because being a parent is incredibly challenging, I believe), and how do we figure out who we want to be as parents? I imagine that sociological literature on families asserts that we look to our own parents as positive, negative, and ambiguous role models, but we don't become our own parents. They shape how we make choices about how we will be parents. But we also make those choices and look at other people in our lives and how they go about parenting. We make choices based on how we evaluate other people's work as parents.

When it comes to children, a challenge is when our definitions of what it means to be a good parent run into contradictions regarding what our children think is best for them. They tell us we're not a good mother or father, and sometimes this can be resolved by looking at psychosocial development: you're just not old enough, you're going through an egocentric phase. But sometimes our best intentions can still lead us to do harm. There is no simple way out or around that. That's the toughest part of it because as much as we may want to be a good, thoughtful, caring parent and a parent who provides for and sets their children up for success, our way of doing it, what may have been what we wanted when we were children, that might not work for our children.

You mentioned that the meaning of being a good parent might run into contradiction with what children think is best for them. It seems like in the process of thinking or doing what is best in another person's interests, one might inflict harm on them–yet they want what is best for that person. How do we go about this? How can we improve this?

I have been an educator at the University of Oregon and at Gonzaga University for over twenty years. I've worked with high school-aged kids and summer camps during my time as a student at the University of Oregon. One thing I can say is to be mindful and cautious of how we go about constructing and communicating our expectations to others. How do we convey to others what we expect of them? What do we want of them? Which we frequently frame as what want for them. I encounter so many students for whom the expectations are eventually internalized from their parents, their teachers, and others in their lives for what success looks like is a huge burden. It doesn't happen often, but when students realize that they get to create their own definition of what success looks like in their lives, there is liberation.

People place expectations on others in a way that they want to believe conveys caring. I want you to do well in school because you will be better prepared for life after school. I want you to get good grades because good grades will look good to others who are looking to hire you job or admit you to graduate school. I want you to stay out of trouble because having a bad reputation or even a criminal record can have a deleterious effect on your future. It comes out as this: I'm caring for you by having these expectations, but the experience of having those expectations on you can be frightfully repressive, even if that's not the intent.

One of the practices that I find very problematic is gender reveal parties. A gender reveal party is when expectant parents have a little party, usually a short while before the baby is to be born, and they either reveal to the people who attend the party or possibly learn whether the child will be, biologically speaking, male or female. Are they having a boy or a girl? Are they looking forward to playing sports with the little boy or teaching the little girl how to cook? These are all stereotypical. These are all expectations being developed before that child even enters the world. I imagine these are largely ways of preparing to be a parent these days. When the child comes around and shows their interests, the parents move with the child; they embrace the child's interests, but children also experience tensions that may arise, for instance, between a father who really wants his son to be interested in sports and a child who is interested in art.

It's not just what we do intentionally that sets these expectations; it's so many other elements of it, and even if the parents and the local community and the extended family are absolutely great about conveying expectations in a way that fosters growth and exploring amongst children, you still have to look at the culture, television, books so many of which enforce traditional gender values and norms of who we are supposed to be. So, home may be trying to be a safe space for these children. To me, if we want to foster, which can be about home, we first have to fix our housing crisis, and we need to be careful and willing to talk openly and acceptably about what we expect of others in our lives.

The work you do is amazing. To anyone in our readership who has never felt like they belong, what words of comfort or advice would you offer them?

As a developing sociologist, I learned about kids and how adolescents develop their identities in unregulated spaces. For my generation, those spaces were indoor shopping malls; they littered the urban and suburban landscapes. They spent hours at the mall because it was a space where their parents and teachers were not present to control them.

The most beautiful thing about spaces is you can own them. Of course, people will push you back, so you don’t necessarily get to own your own space, but if you've never felt like there's a space or place for you, you can create it and make it your own. We live in a highly regulated surveillance culture where it feels like people are always watching, but you can do little things to make a space more amenable to you, who you are, what you think, and what you believe. Sometimes, it's as simple as having your table at a coffee shop or your stool at a bar, and slowly but surely, people come to recognize it. I mean, think about classes. People tend to sit in the same seats those become your seats, that's your chair; somebody else moves into there, you defend it. It is good when somebody else defends the right to your chair.

We largely feel like space is controlled by others, but all it takes is a little bit of will and determination, and you can start to build a place when people start to see you there, you become part of it, and they will relate to you. Communities will just grow like this. Find a space, be in public, alternate space. There are plenty of ungoverned spaces; go there and find ways of making it your own, put a sticker on a place. In a dirty area, take some seeds and plant some flowers. You will slowly but surely be building your own community. You may not have that many people that you see, but it's there.

The Harm of Hegemony

An Autoethnography of My Socialization into Whiteness

JACK STEHR

Discomfort and Harmful Defense of Whiteness and the Color-Blind Racial Order

In the late spring and early summer of 2020 in the wake of the string of highly publicized police and vigilante lynchings of Black folks, the most notable being Breonna Taylor, Ahmaud Arbery, and George Floyd, there was one evening when I did what is easily one of the things I regret the most in my entire life.

It is roughly 7:00 p.m., but the early May sun is still shining brightly through the family room window where I am sitting in a rickety and old wooden rocking chair playing video games with my white friends that I met in one way or another from my time attending a de facto segregated private Catholic K-8 school. As planned, we all booted up our Xboxes after finishing eating dinner with our families. As I load up one of our favorite games to play, I let out a tiny laugh thinking about something funny my dad said earlier in the evening as we ate. I don't think about it for long as I open Instagram on my phone and begin scrolling through my feed.

Dinner tonight is a typical Stehr family dinner. We have some iteration of stir fry and spend zero time talking about real, pressing issues in the world and instead trade some jokes and primarily engage in small talk. My white parents and I ask about each other's days in the dining room of our craftsman-style house at the base of the Oakland Hills that my parents were able to afford back in the late '90s because of access to generational wealth. My mom, who is a former teacher and a current high school learning differences advisor, says, "You know, same old same old. Working on Zoom sucks."

I reply, "I am sorry, Mom. COVID really blows." Then, after shifting my body to face the head of the table, I ask, "How 'bout you, Dad?"

"Oh… It was good. I worked with Esteban in Chris Walter's garage all day. We are super lucky to be able to work on the furniture for Chris' summer home in his garage. Most other people we know have had to shut down all work because of the stay-at-home order."

My dad was right. We were extremely lucky. While other people had their incomes shut off instantly, my dad, who brings in way more money than my mom given the underfunding of education in the United States, found a large amount of work for an extremely wealthy client a few weeks before COVID hit. This client, who owns a massive retail chain, had space on his property where my dad and a Latino worker from a company my dad frequently works alongside could keep working without violating the stay-at-home order. My family largely dodged the COVID recession as my mom kept her job and my self-employed dad had steady work for the next several months. While our class and race privilege, along with some luck, shielded us from the worst effects of the global pandemic, Black and Brown bodies were facing the worst of the pandemic along with continued state-sanctioned violence from the police both in the forms of highly publicized police and vigilante lynchings and the response to the resulting protests. Our "luck" managed to reach the dinner table discussion, but the lack of "luck" for groups oppressed by structural, systemic violence and their resistance to it was not conversation material. My dad was and is a staunch colorblind racist, my mom was a sympathetic liberal, and I had been shaped into a member of the white moderate by the hegemonic belief system that was so pervasive in my education and through my agency as I ultimately accepted these harmful ideologies. Systemic racial violence and rampant inequality, injustice, and the resistance to it could not be discussed as it would be too awkward and tense despite the common thread of conservatism present in each of our perspectives.

Robin DiAngelo, in her paper "Nothing to add: A Challenge to White Silence in Racial Discussions," provides an overview of why white people hesitate to talk about race and privilege—specifically as it relates to white racial comfort and feelings of racial equilibrium. She explains that white feelings of racial comfort and equilibrium are "rooted in norms and traditions that uphold relations of inequality," and that "one of these norms is to avoid talking openly about race" (DiAngelo 4). Therefore, silence is a tool used by white folks to restore white racial comfort and feelings of racial equilibrium when they are challenged by racial discussion. Ultimately, silence is thus a tactic to regain and maintain white dominance in discussion and society at large. When race is not discussed, white privilege cannot be interrogated and critiqued. Without frequent discussion of white supremacy, white folks can maintain racial comfort as their position at the top of the racial hierarchy is less questioned and contested in discourse. Moreover, as white supremacy and class hierarchy have been deeply connected throughout the history of the United States (Du Bois 688-689; Omi and Winant; Zinn), avoiding conversation on issues of race also limits conversation surrounding class—helping to preserve economic inequality in society as well. From this perspective, our family's racial and class privileges, specifically our desire to protect these privileges, incentivized our silence regarding current events in the United States.

The same person who could not talk about systemic racism at the dinner table with his parents somehow thought his voice needed to be heard on his Snapchat story later that night. As I wait for the rest of my friends to get online, I browse through Instagram. I see multiple black squares posted by some kids from my high school in support of Black Lives Matter and NPR videos reporting on the peaceful demonstrations taking place all over the country as well as the more 'violent' actions of other protests. One person's Instagram story displays a post from another account that has the text "These are not protests or riots. This is an uprising. A rebellion." superimposed on a photograph of a protester holding an upside-down American flag as they walk past a burning liquor store. A pang of insecurity and uneasiness fills my diaphragm. I feel inundated with news on the racial tensions in the country and decide to open up TikTok instead.

No dice. The first video I see is a montage of clips from Black Lives Matter protests paired with the audio from a remix of Childish Gambino's hit song "This is America." Swipe. The next video is a clip showing a Black man attempting to open the safe under a self-checkout station at a Target in Minneapolis while the rest of the store is looted in the background. Swipe. The next video is a meme that is completely unrelated to the ongoing protests gripping the nation. I feel guilty as a sense of relief fills my mind since I can now briefly forget that people are protesting against the denial of rights and the perpetuation of white supremacy and injustice by the state. Just then, I get several texts from the group chat with my friends.

"I am getting on."

"Same."

"Me too."

"Ok."

The game we play over the next thirty minutes involves some downtime which allows me to go on Instagram again. I see even more posts of black squares and people from school voicing their support for Black Lives Matter. At this point, I am not entirely focused on the game as I feel confused. Seeing my peers voice their support makes me feel like I need to say something as well. Coming out in absolute support of the protests across the country, however, doesn't sit well with me.

The previous day I had a brief conversation with my mom about the report of a federal law enforcement officer being shot dead during a protest in Oakland. When my mom read me the headline, I experienced a jumble of emotions that consisted of sadness and a paternalistic sense of disappointment and hopelessness. With an irritated tone like that of an adolescent boy complaining about what is being served for dinner, I said to my mom, "They are playing right into the Republican narrative of violence and lawlessness! Now no one will take them seriously or listen to their demands!" I correctly diagnosed the conservative tactic of appealing to the public's general distaste of violence on behalf of the oppressed to discredit Black Lives Matter and the demands of protestors. The problem was that my education had instilled in me the politics of respectability (Kerrison, Cobbina, and Bender 7-26) and nonviolence as the only acceptable and effective modes of protest through the aforementioned erasure or whitewashing of key figures and organizations engaged in liberation struggles of the 1960s and '70s. Therefore, as I lamented the potential loss of support from moderate white folks, given that conservatives now had more fuel to support their narrative of violence and disorder being broadcasted on Fox News, I failed to realize that I was a member of this white moderate as I essentially had bought into the conservative narrative.

In his famous *Letter from a Birmingham Jail*, Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. describes the white moderate and indicts it as the greatest obstacle to freedom for Black folks. He identifies a member of the white moderate as one

> [W]ho is more devoted to "order" than to justice; who prefers a negative peace which is the absence of tension to a positive peace which is the presence of justice; who constantly says: "I agree with you in the goal you seek, but I cannot agree with your methods of direct action"; who paternalistically believes he can set the timetable for another man's freedom; who lives by a mythical concept of time and who constantly advises the Negro to wait for a "more convenient season." (King Jr.)

The white moderate is not willing to sacrifice public order even if it involves the pursuit of justice. For them, the oppression and violence that maintains injustice is not grounds for a violent political response by the oppressed. The white moderate, lacking true empathy, believes Black folks should exclusively pursue justice in a nonviolent and respectable manner. If that does not yield results, then they must continue to bear the weight of oppression and wait for a possible moment in the future when people are more receptive to nonviolent, respectable protest. Importantly, they must never turn to violence when their more acceptable calls for justice are ignored. Constraining activism this way maintains surface level peace, but this peace is a negative one as the violence wrapped up into systemic oppression continues to be inflicted on people who are marginalized by those in power. In this negative peace, however, the white moderate finds comfort. They are not greatly disturbed, disrupted, or made uncomfortable by the forces of oppression or the disorder stemming from types of activism deemed ‘violent’ that challenge this oppression.

When I finally decide to express my perspective on social media, I embody just about every component of Rev. Dr. King Jr.’s diagnosis. During the downtime between rounds of Tom Clancy’s Rainbow Six Siege, I open Snapchat and place my phone’s camera against the floor and snap a photo. The empty picture serves as the background for me to frame my problematic perspective. As I type out my message, I feel the nervousness related to the intense match my friends and I are in online combined with an escalation in the subtle queasiness that I have been experiencing for the past few days. In retrospect, this queasiness stemmed from the turmoil within me surrounding the conflict between my values of respect and love for others, my somewhat subconscious self-interest in the perpetuation of a system of white supremacy and capitalism, and my aversion to violent modes of protest and demands by Black folks for justice.

I decided to quickly type the crux of my views first, writing, “I support BLM, but I do not support the riots or violence.” I post it and quickly follow that up with another short blurb to support and explain my perspective which states, “There is a reason why MLK was the face of the Civil Rights Movement and not Malcolm X.” Staring down at my phone screen, I reread what I’ve typed a few times to check for syntax and grammatical errors as if that is the problem with what I am about to share with other people. Satisfied by my proofreading, I click “Send to My Story”.

My little middle-class white self sure felt like a really smart person after sending this preposterous, ahistorical statement out into the world. I believed my perspective was valid as I had such a great understanding of American racial history from a watered-down AP U.S. History class I took junior year. I was definitely not furthering the construction of hegemony by spreading rhetoric that dismissed the calls for justice in favor of “order” and a “negative peace” (King Jr.). I was definitely not speaking out for the sake of the white moderate’s comfort and thereby further protecting white supremacy.

My sense of self-righteousness only began to crack when Jessica, a cisgender, heterosexual, biracial Black woman in my class at high school who I was not close friends with, but with whom I had always been on good terms, responded to my story. Without using the same language as Rev. Dr. King Jr., Jessica called me out for agreeing with the goals but not the methods of the Black struggle for justice. I spent the next hour and a half of that night bouncing from video games with my friends to my Snapchat keyboard where I hurriedly typed responses to Jessica as we argued over the ethics of violent action as a political tool.

Drawing on the incomplete education on issues of racial justice and struggle I gained from AP U.S. History the year prior, I try to explain that, as the textbook told me, “The Civil Rights Movement made its big strides after the brutality against peaceful demonstrators in the South was broadcasted on national television.”

“So, you’re asking us to just turn the other cheek?” she responds. “When German Shepherds are sent on defenseless Black folks and police use batons, water cannons, and their fists against protestors… you’re saying that is just a part of the process? We have been facing violence for over four hundred years and you say we should just accept the violence? We do what you ask and see no change.”

Echoing the hegemonic colorblind conception of the United States as a near post-racial society after the passage of Civil Rights legislation, I respond with the question, "Well, what laws still need to be changed or passed to reach full equality? Besides voter ID laws, the main problem is the racist stereotypes that police officers and other people hold that manifest in police brutality and other racist actions. The way to achieve equality is to dismantle these stereotypes like those that say Black folks are criminals. This is not going to happen by rioting and destroying things. It will just reaffirm the racist ideas in people's heads." I had the audacity to say this while sitting comfortably in my family's house situated in a predominantly white neighborhood, comfortably distanced from the protests and the violent police response rocking Downtown Oakland at the same time. I was insulated from the violence surrounding the struggle against systemic anti-Blackness and white supremacy that I claimed to no longer significantly influence society. The redlined middle to upper-middle-class white neighborhood my family lived in placed a few miles between us and the battle against racist structural violence.

I can't remember if Jessica[1] critiqued my heavily individualistic analysis of police brutality, racial inequality, and inequity for being entirely void of systemic considerations. I do know that we continued to exchange messages over Snapchat until I admitted that it would feel good to fight back against a repetitive wrong, but I was largely still in the same place as when we started our argument. Although, as I put down my phone and attempted to redirect all my attention to video games and my friends, I couldn't help but feel my stomach churning from a sense of guilt I was reluctant to recognize. I did not want to admit the possibility that I might've been wrong.

At stake was my entire perspective of race and racism I had cultivated with the help of systemically racist institutions. If I was wrong that would mean that my understanding of United States history would be a carefully crafted product of hegemony (Hedbidge 15-16; Lull 62) and not an authentically righteous story of progress. I would have to come to terms with my use of the Missionary face of whiteness (Warren and Hytten 321); I believed I possessed sufficient knowledge regarding race and power from my whitewashed education to critique the use of violence as a means of resistance and to paternalistically direct Black folks to the more palatable mode of non-violent protest (328).

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[1] **1.** A pseudonym is used here for privacy purposes.

If I was wrong and there were still massive inequities present in all aspects of life in the United States that demanded radical reform or abolition, what was I to make of my family's position in society and my own accomplishments? I would no longer be able to understand my family's stature as merit based as the ideology of the American Dream would no longer be a sufficient explanation of the U.S. social structure (Johnson 20). Seeing inequality and oppression at the structural level would force me to question, and possibly reject, the idea that the U.S. is a meritocracy and that one's place is not shaped by outside structural forces but rather individual decision making (23). This would mean something else besides my mom and dad's hard work was at play in shaping our lived experience.

Additionally, my status as a good and successful student would be shaken up. I would no longer be able to see myself as a good student in my own right as gender, sexuality, class, and racial privilege helped me along the way. Going even deeper, my conception of myself would be thrown into question, to say the least. I had always viewed myself as a good, kind, loving person, but how could a person be these things when they contributed to and defended the oppression of others? My colorblind racist perspective that previously prevented me from seeing racism as anything but overt, individual displays of bigotry (Bonilla-Silva 1-4) prevented me from understanding myself as an individual operating within and benefitting from a society built on white supremacy. It prevented me from recognizing and understanding the more subtle forms of racism that I perpetrated as an individual and those inflicted by institutions at the structural level from which I benefitted (2, 8). Beginning to shed this colorblind perspective would require reckoning with the truth and impact of my actions and my place in the social world. Being wrong would mean that I had truly hurt both Jessica and other people from marginalized backgrounds directly or indirectly whom I reached with my language. It would mean that I hurt them now and many other people in my past through overt and subtle forms of oppression I carried out, perpetuated, or helped legitimize. I would need to come to terms with the harm I caused and benefitted from, explore possibilities to remedy this harm, and contemplate how to help challenge and hopefully dismantle the harmful ideologies built into my perspective and society at large.

Being nice and polite to the racialized, gendered, classed, and sexualized "other" while presenting a full smile would be insufficient in a society that favored people like me at the expense of members of this "other."

A Counter-Hegemonic Education and Apology

With a summer's worth of time to occupy my mind with other things, my run-in with Jessica regarding the morality and utility of violence as a political tool disappeared from my focus. It was the first summer where I did not have homework and I was going to take advantage of it. Work and having ample fun with my friends were my primary concerns for the summer leading up to my first semester of college.

I took an Ethnic Studies class as a senior in high school, but it was a pretty weak class as it was unable to prevent or correct my problematic political evolution from my freshman to senior year. Still, I enjoyed the class enough to mark Critical Race and Ethnic Studies as a possible minor I would be interested in on the academic interest survey sent to all incoming freshmen by the Registrar's Office. Today, I see this as one of the best/most impactful decisions of my life. The Registrar's Office enrolled me in Introduction to Race and Ethnic Studies for my first semester and formally set my minor as Critical Race and Ethnic Studies.

Introduction to Race and Ethnic Studies was unlike any class I had ever taken. It presented critical perspectives and the most complex analysis of society that I had ever been exposed to as a student or person. From learning about how race is socially constructed in Omi and Winant's "Racial Formations" (Omi and Winant) and the specific historical process of establishing the Black-white color line in Howard Zinn's "Drawing the Color Line" to discovering intersectionality, institutional-level analysis of socioeconomic status and inequality, the history of slave patrols as some of the first police forces, and color-blind racism, my entire worldview began to crack and shift.

At the end of each week, I would talk with my mom on the phone about the eye-opening things I was learning that explained so much of the world that previously confused me as the exclusively individual-level explanations I received had gaping holes in their logic.

I would say to my mom, "Did you know that racial profiling is codified in Supreme Court case law as a legal practice? Did you know that Black and Brown communities are disproportionately affected by pollution? It is called environmental racism. We just read an article about how toxic waste dumps and landfills are overwhelmingly placed nearby or in communities of color."

All the things I was learning about were things I should have known all along if education was meant to provide a genuine understanding of the world. Instead, I and others like me are denied access to this knowledge in the service of power while those being victimized by injustice are all too aware of its realities from their personal experience.

With each new bit of knowledge I acquired in Intro to Race and Ethnic Studies, my argument with Jessica crept back into my mind. Over the semester, I slowly began to grapple with my ignorance and the harm I had caused to Jessica and any other Black-identifying people who saw my story or were affected by the ideas my posts promoted. A sense of guilt developed alongside my growing understanding of my transgression. I never will know what it is like to experience the harm and violence felt by people with marginalized identities, but I knew I had been wrong and had harmfully exposed my ignorance to others. I felt ashamed and remorseful for exposing Jessica to my self-righteous ignorance in our argument. For all these reasons, I wished to apologize.

After the semester concluded, I sent Jessica a message on Snapchat to apologize for my ignorance. I expressed deep gratitude towards her for calling me out directly as it was incredibly brave and unnecessary for her as it is not the job of people of color to educate stubborn, color-blind racists. I let her know that every objection she raised to my post was correct. I explained that I had come to understand that violence against the oppressor on behalf of the oppressed is self-defense, as there is already a relationship of violence being inflicted on the oppressed by the oppressor. It was not right for me to adopt the Missionary face of whiteness (Warren and Hytten 321) and sanctimoniously critique the violent rebellion against continued police brutality and white supremacy as an ineffective and immoral mode of resistance. With my rhetoric, I established myself as a part of the great stumbling block in the Black stride toward freedom that Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. described fifty-seven years prior. When I reached out to Jessica, I did not expect forgiveness as I did not believe I was worthy of it. I invalidated Black struggle against oppression and defended white supremacy and the violence it perpetuates with my violent rhetoric. Nonetheless, Jessica was reservedly kind, thanked me for my apology, and directed me towards additional educational information. I am forever grateful for and indebted to Jessica and everyone else who has challenged my hegemonic understanding of race and racism.

My mind frequently returns to my argument with Jessica and the resulting apology. Each time, I contemplate the power of hegemony in shaping the violent potential of individuals with privileged identities like me, and the power of counter-hegemonic education in fighting against this construction of violence. I will forever be grateful for my exposure to Critical Race and Ethnic Studies and other counter-hegemonic departments in college whose courses have radically shaped my perspective for the better.

The ultimate harm of hegemony is inflicted upon marginalized communities whose oppression is sanctioned by dominant ideologies as "normal." These narratives do not mean to center my story as a sappy tale of a white victim. I was and continue to be the oppressor. Hegemony and my desire to maintain the power conferred on me by my identity shaped and motivated my contribution to the oppression of others. Hegemony and my investment in power structures warped the love and compassion for others that I carry as a human being—enabling me to further the oppression of marginalized people and dismiss the concerns and demands for justice like those issued by Jessica. Promoting counter-hegemonic education can prevent other people with privileged identities like me from perpetuating violent systems of power and instead enable the expression of the love that exists between all humans.

As I continue to move beyond this regrettable moment, I wish to adopt a critical approach to whiteness. I must carefully balance dialogue and active listening, action and reflection, and guilt and agency as it relates to understanding whiteness, racism, and structures of power. I want to always be conscious of my implications in the perpetuation of racism without obsessing about my actions and creating a self-centered worldview. I aim to use the power of my guilt to change my actions and achieve more self-reflexivity (Jones 122) that gives way for guilt to transform into something productive.

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Between the Sheets

Invisible Labor Amongst Young Women in Sexual Encounters

SAGE STEELE

Years ago, I swore to myself I would never fake an orgasm. I was fucking naïve.

I've kissed my fair share of people. But I am drawn to three stories: Tom, Robert, and James.[1]

First is Tom, the only boy I've loved. When we kissed, we would get closer and closer until our bodies were pressed against each other and even that wasn't enough. I wanted to merge with him, like the Sharon Olds poem "Topography" in which she describes two lovers lying face to face like two maps. I wanted "my Kansas burning against [his] Kansas [his] Kansas burning against my Kansas" just like the poem depicted. Kissing him was idyllic... until he used tongue. Suddenly, kissing him was awkward and uncomfortable as he stuck his tongue down my throat, and I didn't know what to do. Wondering if this is what it's like to kiss anyone with tongue or just him, I timidly told him I preferred less tongue, but it didn't make an impactful difference.

Robert made me feel comfortable. I got a sense of non-judgment from him that made me excited to explore my sexuality. But when we had sex, I didn't tell him my needs. The first time we met, I didn't climax. The second time we got together I was determined to, but again, I didn't say anything. I was mute. I didn't fake it, but I considered it. After he left, I wondered how this man could so easily ask me for oral sex, and I didn't even utter a word about reciprocity.

James was a failed hookup. He barely kissed me, and I didn't feel confident enough to ask him to kiss me more. He was preoccupied with his own pleasure and the night ended quickly as he left my room, us having never gone through with sex.

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[1] **1.** Names have been changed for privacy purposes. In addition, only stories from non-Gonzaga students have been used in this essay.

Sexual encounters, whether they be within the confines of relationships or as spontaneous hookups, are common on college campuses as young students with budding sexual desires all get clumped in proximity with each other. This conglomeration of emotionally immature teens and early-twenty-year-olds upholds the system of sex that privileges men's pleasure and identifies women as passive participants. The pleasure gap, the circumstances by which men orgasm at higher rates than women, is prominent across different demographics in the United States,[2] yet college can be an especially difficult time as young men and women are still growing in their sexuality and learning how to communicate with each other.

The cultures around sexual encounters on campus have long been described as better connected to broad cultures around masculinity and femininity. Traditional gender roles pre-determine (heterosexual) sexual encounters as they define these relationships through a lens of power; men act out their power by exercising their ability to focus the sexual encounter only on themselves while women must service the man and uphold the male power. This idea is observed by feminist scholar Luce Irigaray, who describes the societal construction of the anatomical proceedings of sex:

> Woman, in this sexual imaginary, is only a more or less obliging prop for the enactment of man's fantasies. That she may find pleasure there in that role, by proxy, is possible, even certain. But such pleasure is above all a masochistic prostitution of her body to a desire that is not her own, and it leaves her in a familiar state of dependency upon man. (Irigaray 25)

Irigaray is pointing to the intersection of psychoanalysis and anatomy and using it to construct a feminist critique of sexual relationships. Under Freud, the woman is in a state of lack, of penis envy, and her desire to be "available to appropriate the organ" determines what sexual acts are completed (23). This returns to the power dynamic of men, where women are positioned as desiring the phallic, the source of power, even if the reality of women's personal desires does not reflect this.

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[2] The pleasure gap exists across the world, but I cite the United States because the gap ratio differs across different countries. For example, Japan has a lower pleasure gap than Russia (Wade 159).

Women's pleasure is an inconsistent by-product while men's pleasure is the goal. This cultural value is reflected in the experiences of women, especially those on college campuses, and the phenomenon of the pleasure gap. In *American Hookup*, Lisa Wade, drawing from the experiences of college students across the United States, argues that "if women deprioritize their own orgasm, it might be because they suspect that it's pointless to do otherwise" (Wade 169). Wade's argument describes how women have internalized the belief that their sexual work and desires are to be neglected, not seen — invisible. In fact, it is best to describe this toll as form of invisible emotional labor in which women are constantly processing these internalized feelings and monitoring their actions to ensure they are functioning appropriately within their roles. As established, one of these actions is to deprioritize oneself in sexual settings.

Invisible labor is understood as unrecognized work often performed by marginalized groups. A common example is women and domestic work, but the principles of invisible labor extend beyond this. Emotional and mental labor is a sub-category that affirms the toll that constant inter- and intra- personal engagements can have on an individual. One such example is women's pressure to always present as peppy, often met with phrases such as "smile more" when not fulfilling this stereotype. This need to self-monitor when in public is mentally draining and this work often goes unacknowledged. It is in this context that women in sexual encounters perform invisible labor.

This labor takes two forms: self-devaluation and self-advocacy. Devaluing of self is seen in the examples I provided about my own experiences. There, I was unable to communicate my needs, trapped under the gendered conditioning that prevents me from thinking I'm deserving of pleasure. This resulted in self-loathing as I felt utterly inadequate both in my inability to communicate and in my sense of self. There is an inclination to resort to self-devaluation because women subconsciously may not want to critique the performance of masculinity and harm their male partner's ego so, they critique themselves instead. This inability to upset the male performance is seen within man-woman interactions both during sex and outside of sexual encounters. For example, I don't wear heels on first dates so that the man will be taller than me and feel validated in his masculinity. Sex and relationships become about staging a static scene. A diorama of gender roles in which the man is prioritized.

The process of heterosexual sexual encounters often fails to recognize women as autonomous subjects. This gets internalized and I, and other women, devalue ourselves believing we are not an active participant in sex. This boils women down to masturbation objects for men, as objects circulated rather than persons seen. Irigaray says that "the circulation of women among men is what establishes the operations of society" — the system of capitalist hetero-patriarchy (Irigaray 184). Patriarchal narratives stem from these actions, which use women as objects for exchange, with their personhood devalued to the exchange of their vaginal sex.[3] This self-devaluation, drawing from the patriarchal system, results in women's mental exhaustion, therefore acting as a form of invisible labor, their labor as sexual beings being strictly entwined with their internal thoughts.

The second form of invisible labor is self-advocacy. In the bedroom, to meet sexual needs, women must speak up for themselves. Men simply follow what feels good to them, and orgasm without grief. To understand the extent to which this is laborious, we must understand how women function outside of the bedroom as well. Passivity is a gender role that women actively work to overcome. This means women must advocate for themselves in medical situations, the workplace, academically, etc. They are constantly speaking up for themselves at the grocery store, Thanksgiving dinner table, staff meetings, school events, the bar—everywhere. College women spend their time advocating for themselves throughout the day, so when they return to a situation where they should be allowed vulnerability—spending time with their partner—they shouldn't have to feel like they need to continue this constant advocating for their every need within their own spaces. While self-advocacy may result in the desired sexual outcome, the steps to get there are excessive when compared to men's process in coming to climax. This mental exhaustion from advocating for oneself goes unacknowledged, therefore women are going through the toll of this process and the toll of still not being seen and recognized for their hardships.

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[3] Specifically vaginal sex is coveted by men as an "end-all-be-all" of sex rooted in a history of procreative sexual ethics.

The relationship between self-devaluation and self-advocacy is not mutually exclusive; they are both tied into the same heteropatriarchal ideology that frames women as invisible. Women may work within the frames of self-devaluation and self-advocacy: I've practiced self-advocacy for years and feel comfortable speaking up for myself, except in bed. A woman may feel comfortable self-advocating with long-term partners but devalue themselves in short-term encounters. Thus, these concepts are tied together, representing a continuum where women can both self-advocate and self-devalue rather than binary where women fit singularly into one of the two categories. This recognition of these forms of labor as fluid complicates our understanding of how women fit into a culture that upholds a heteropatriarchal system. Women are multi-dimensional, and their actions and behaviors cannot so easily be categorized.

I've known about the pleasure gap for a long time, hence my statement that I would never fake an orgasm. I thought that if all women in heterosexual relationships rallied together and stopped faking it when our partners weren't meeting our needs, we could slowly change the culture. Yet I said this having never been in a relationship and having never had sex. I had no understanding of what I was talking about. While I still haven't faked an orgasm, I don't know how long that resolve will last, because having sex with men is mentally exhausting.

Gender roles embedded in our culture still perceive men as dominant, ambitious, and confident and women as modest and unselfish. Staying trapped in these gender roles—self-devaluation—or upending the gender roles—self-advocacy—is a labor sexually active women are forced to engage in. There is no ability to defer the choice; women must self-devalue, self-advocate, or fall within the continuum. What happens between the sheets is a greater reflection of society and changes that need to occur. Women determining their pleasure must be careful to not let those restrictions take away what they deserve.

It might be a continual process, but I won't let myself get tangled up in these sheets.

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Home: Navigating Space, Place, & the Passage of Time

An Interview with Dr. Rebecca M. Stephanis

INTERVIEW BY AMISA RAMADHANI

What is your field of study and research?

I am a professor in the Modern Languages and Literature Department and hold a Ph.D. in Latin American literatures and cultures. My current research looks at the ways in which the rainforest space is represented in literature and film and how we can see these representations as mirroring issues surrounding political conflict and cultural identity. I began to research the rainforest space and its role in the construction of national identity in Argentina, but currently work with rainforest in Colombia and recently have become interested in Bolivia as well.

How did you become interested in this field?

My academic trajectory has always reflected my interest in the ways in which identity interacts with political, social, and cultural practices. While I was born in the U.S., I grew up in Costa Rica, so I had the opportunity to experience two cultures during my formative years. I saw the important role that language and cultural context played in communication when I would accompany my father on several interviews with political leaders in Central America in the 1980s. I became fascinated with the way that these leaders would construct their cause and define their role with respect to their constituents and opponents. As a direct consequence of those experiences, I decided that I wanted to pursue a career that would somehow enable me to bridge cultures and foster healthy communication between people from opposing viewpoints. As an undergraduate, I pursued a degree in diplomacy and world affairs with an emphasis in Latin America, and minors in economics and Russian language. Post graduation, after spending a year working as an investment advisor at a large mutual fund company, I decided I wanted to return to academia. I pursued a M.A. in Latin American studies, another in education, and finally, my Ph.D. Throughout my studies and my teaching, I came to realize that the common thread in my classes is an interest in having students identify their preconceptions regarding Latin America, provide experiences that invite them to question these preconceptions/stereotypes, and then to re-construct their understanding of identity in the Spanish-speaking world. One of the ways that I accomplish this is by asking my students to consider the multiple ways that we approach cultures different than our own. How have we and how do we continue to adopt different gazes (touristic, economic, historical, etc.) to attempt to understand these cultures? How do each of these gazes interact with and reflect relationships of power? How do our assumptions and preconceptions help us to move toward, but also keep us distant from, others? Through an examination of literature, film, and history throughout Latin America's history, students in my classes are invited to discover and examine the ideas that they have held (sub)consciously as a result of the media and stories that they have grown up with. In this way, I attempt to create a safe environment in which they can reflect on their beliefs and co-construct a new understanding and approach toward Latin America.

How would you define home or how you encounter this concept in your field of study and research?

For many years, I thought of home as a physical space, both in my personal and professional life. "Home" was the space that I returned to at the end of my workday to spend time with my family, and on campus, the Department of Modern Languages and Literature was my "home." However, recently, I have come to understand home differently. I find that home, instead of a noun or a thing, is a feeling or emotion. When sharing a teaching success or challenge with a colleague at GU, the act of permitting myself to be vulnerable and/or to celebrate with someone in an authentic and open way allows me to feel "at home" with that person. That colleague does not have to be from my own "home" department but could be someone from a discipline very different from my own, or, could even be a colleague at another institution within and outside the U.S. Outside of campus and in my personal life, I also have several different communities that I move in and out of, and each one provides me with a sense of being "at home". The liberty that this new conceptualization—from physical to emotional space—has provided me with much more agency in determining who I want to be, what values are important to me, and how I want to present myself to the world.

With respect to my research, the rainforest space has always called to me. I had the opportunity to spend six weeks in the Bolivian rainforest last summer, where I worked as a volunteer at an animal sanctuary. It was a transformative experience in many ways, but with respect to my research, it enabled me to come to know this place in an intimate way. I was able to combine my prior experiences, my research in literature and film, and exposure to the contemporary rainforest to form an entirely different concept of the rainforest.

What systems, practices, and values contribute to the construction of what home is? How does this construction shape the experiences of home that different people encounter? How does it draw in some people and cast others out?

In my case, when I orient myself with respect to nature instead of place, I have experienced home. When I arrive in some places in Latin America, when my feet touch the ground, I feel almost as if the earth rises to hug them, while simultaneously the touch of the air, smells, and sounds caress me. I feel embraced by the space, regardless of my familiarity with it. These moments, I feel that I have arrived and have been welcomed "home." Again, this can happen even in places that I have never been before and know very little about.

In my experience, societal constructions of home have been very alienating. Oftentimes, I encounter people who make a whole series of decisions around my identity, background, experiences, and attitudes solely based on where I live or how I look. In my case, the way that I interact with language, U.S. culture, my research, etc. does not always reflect the essence of who I am. In many ways, I have been pressured to conform to what people expect of me, without regard to who I consider myself to be at my essence. Over the course of the last 30 years, I have been forced to adopt the U.S. as my home, which makes sense because I was born here, but when I think about home, it is not here.

This discomfort with adopting the U.S. as my home has led me on a path of travel. I have travelled throughout Latin America (Argentina, Bolivia, Colombia, Cuba, Costa Rica, and to a lesser extent Mexico and Honduras). On each of those trips, I try to reconnect with the feeling that I had when I felt truly "home," my years growing up in Costa Rica.

I guess to most, the simple solution would seem to be "go back to Costa Rica." However, Costa Rica has changed dramatically since I left. I had the opportunity to reconnect with my classmates from middle and high school last November, which was incredible, but at the same time I had to face the fact that I did not recognize the physical space at all. At one point, because it was rainy season and I could not orient myself with respect to the mountains, I literally had to close my eyes and feel the road so that I could orient myself in the city. I remembered so vividly driving that road growing up that I knew where I was according to the curves, hills, time from downtown, etc., but every time I opened my eyes, none of the landmarks were the same. Everything was different. It was entirely disorienting. It was at this point that I definitively realized that no matter if I returned to Costa Rica and reconnected with all of my friends and classmates, I would never be "home" again.

I would invite people to be sensitive to this when encountering others. It is truly disorienting at times to feel that "home" will always be elusive to me. I sometimes admire those who have been born and raised in one area and have a true sense of grounded-ness that I associate with "home." That being said, I also would never give up the experiences and people I have met through moving from the U.S. to Costa Rica and back. Reframing home more as an emotion than a place has been helpful, but there is a sense of loss – a feeling that I will always be standing on a rocking boat and never on land as I navigate through my life.

To anyone in the audience who has never felt like they belong, what words of comfort or advice would you offer them?

When I was an undergraduate, I had a difficult time finding my people. Eventually, I ended up finding the other students who had grown up abroad and were having difficulty with re-entry to the U.S. culture and lifestyle. We all had missed out on the tv shows, movies, etc. that our peers had grown up with, in other words, all of the cultural references, and struggled to make sense of the college landscape. It took a while, but eventually we all found each other.

Once I removed the concept of home or belonging from place and reconceptualized it as more fluid, a feeling, it made it a lot easier to feel at home. I could take "home" with me wherever I went and for short or longer periods. I guess my advice would be to look for home in the connections that you make with others, and to be attentive to how a space makes you feel. Keep exploring, and eventually, you will arrive home.

Determining the Self across Multiple Multiverse Selves: *The One*

CONNOR MAHONEY

A recent theme that has been represented in film and television and has gripped the imaginations of the viewing public, is the 'multiverse'. Either movies utilize the 'multiverse' as a concept, or studios utilize the financial lucrativeness of what could be an endless mine from which to draw profit. A 'multiverse' in a film and television series can mean characters can die in one universe but not another, innumerable smaller name characters can have their own shows, and it seems to be a way for some interminable film and television series to justify their continued existence. Popular examples are the DC-universe, the Marvel-universe, the Star Wars-universe; but one could argue that if a series has both tv shows and movies, along with video games, then it is marketable as a "universe." From its recent popularity as a theme, one cannot help but think of the implications of the possibility of a 'multiverse'.

A phenomenologist or psychoanalyst might wonder why the collective consciousness has made this theme so popular—in the sense that the pervasiveness of the theme is connected to strong interest from a wide audience. I, however, am left to wonder what the implication of a multiverse would mean for a 'sense of self.' Many of the multiverse movies have characters with slightly different variants of that character in other universes. If one were suddenly made to know that they are not the only version of themselves, but rather there are many or endless versions of oneself, what are the implications for that individual in their own life? Furthermore, what would interaction between variants mean? To determine oneself means to define, within and against one's context, who one is in that opposition to the whole of which they are a part. Within this reality, this single universe, I am this particular 'Connor,' no one else is me. But say I am presented with the multiverse, and the different versions of myself (Connor-variants) were to interact, or be made aware of all the other versions, the question of who is most authentic (most Connor) could arise?

There is a multiverse movie that precedes the 'multiverse boom' by close to two decades, called *The One* and starring Jet-Li (in, technically, 125 roles). In *The One*, there is an interaction between different versions of a 'self' in the form of fatal special-effect ridden kung-fu fights; it is a multiversal battle ground of selves. Because a self-variant is trying to determine itself as the most powerful version, it seems appropriate to apply a Hegelian analysis to the movie. Hegel's philosophy, as especially seen in *Phenomenology of Spirit*, is concerned with the development of human self-consciousness in the world. Since self-consciousness and reason (that is, thought) are what distinguish humanity from other life (so what makes us what we are), it is concerned with the development of the self. More importantly, it is concerned with how the self determines itself with and against the world. From *Phenomenology*, the 'Master-Slave Dialectic' from the earlier chapters is utilized because it is the moment in Hegel's account where the human self emerges as unique from the state of nature, or otherwise put when humanity becomes distinguished from pure animality. More precisely this is the moment that (reflective-circular) self-consciousness emerges from pure (direct-linear) natural consciousness. Both *Phenomenology* and *The One* make the battleground the element in which the self determines itself as what it is, a 'self.' Furthermore, both works answer the question of what self-hood means when presented with the possibilities of an endless series of self-variants; self-hood (true individuality) is achieved through reconciliation with the particular. This means that when presented with the interminable panoply of self-variants, it is not the universal aspect (that part of us which makes us what we are despite the differences of each particular variant—the universal quality of 'Connor-ness'), but it is rather our context, our particular attachments, that makes us who and what we are. In an answer to the hypothetical question as to how a self responds to the multiverse, the antagonist of *The One* is indifferent to his own context, and all other contexts in his hostile quest to become the One. What this essay sets out to show with its Hegelian analysis of *The One* is that when presented with a multiverse, one should be more reconciled with their home than antagonistic to it. By 'home' I mean the context in which we, as individuals, live and function, as opposed to the contexts of others. As both the film and philosophy will show, the rejection of the 'particular' has dire consequences.

The movie opens with a CGI animation of universe-containing spheres connected to one another playing on screen and a narrator telling us:

> There is not one universe, but many. A multiverse. We have the technology to travel to other universes. But travel is highly restricted and policed. There is not one you. There are many. Each of us exists in present time, in parallel universes. There was balance in the system, but now a force exists who seeks to destroy the balance so he can become The One. (*The One* 00:01:10)

With this opening, the movie invokes arguably the most important category of Hegel's' speculative logic—being-for-self,[1] the moments of which are the One and the Many. It also drops us squarely in the middle of the most essential transition in his *Phenomenology of Spirit*—the movement from the realm of universal, non-anthropomorphic physical Forces, false infinities, and apparently 'scientific' Laws to the world of Life, and Self-Consciousness, which at first appears as the most powerful force in both the natural and human worlds—i.e., Desire. As Hegel emphatically states: "self-consciousness is Desire" (Hegel 109). What does this mean for Hegel and *The One*? In a word, Violence, not gratuitous accidental violence, although *The One*, true to the spirit of Hollywood, certainly seems to contain its fair share of gratuitous violence. It is necessary violence, central to the birth and development of the pure self, or 'I' (Kalkavage 109). In Hegel, this violence first takes the limited form of animal desire, or incipient being-for-self, which maintains itself through a cyclic process of consumption and satisfaction. It eats the object or Other and feels no need to go beyond this process, until its hunger, thirst, or need to breed returns. It then simply repeats the process as part of the cycle of Life. For Hegel, this cycle is a circle of life and death from which there is never an internal impulse or need to escape. It simply goes on indefinitely.

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[1] 'Being-for-Self' is the category that leads to the sub-category of the 'One and the Many' in Hegel's thinking. Within his *Phenomenology*, the self begins as 'Consciousness' undistinguished from animal mind in its linear thinking, and so merely 'Being-in-itself', when it begins to distinguish itself from others (and itself) in a reflective mode of cognition, thus emerges 'Being-for-Self'. These terms were established in the *Phenomenology*, but categories in his two books of *Logic*.

However, as any of us who have even a passing acquaintance with Hegel, or his excellent commentators and critics, like Jean Hyppolite or Alexandre Kojeve, are aware, there is an animal in Nature whose desire knows no immediate satisfaction by objects or Others. Its desire is Absolute Desire. Its only fleeting satisfaction comes from the consumption and destruction of everything outside or other than itself, everything that contradicts its feeling of being absolute, independent, free of limitation, that is its feeling of Self-Certainty. This is the Inhuman Self, pure being-for-self, or the pure "I."

It would seem to be in poor form that a conclusion for a paper be announced somewhere at the beginning of the paper, but because of the slight disparity between the schema of the master-slave dialectic and the plot of the film, this violation is necessitated. While the inhuman pure-being-for-self is an essential movement in the development of *Phenomenology*, it fails to achieve the absolute recognition it is after in its war with everything because this very activity prevents the reconciliatory movement that will lead to its growth. At the stage of the inhuman abstract self-consciousness, it seeks to be the absolute "I," the ultimate individual that proves its absoluteness to itself by means of combat; it knows itself as its activity, which is negativizing-negativity (Kojeve 8). This is the master in the dialectic. It is through the slave that self-consciousness realizes through reconciliation with the particular, by means of work on the object, that it realizes the essentiality of life to itself. This is the double-movement of self-consciousness, where it differentiates itself to know itself, and so both moments are the development of the one self-consciousness. In the movie, the antagonist represents pure being-for-self, the master, while the protagonist represents the slave that is the reconciliation with life through the particular. This is accomplished through an act of mercy rather than the subjugation of the protagonist. The conclusion of the film, despite the difference from the development as seen in Hegel, is the same as that of the paper, in that individuality (real selfhood) is through the synthesis of the universal and the particular.

Self-Consciousness, or pure being-for-self first appears in the characters of 'Lawless' and Gabe Yulaw (which, if you translate the Chinese prefix 'Yu' turns out to be the ancient word for 'I,' meaning Yulaw ironically translates as—'I' Law). Lawless is a notorious career criminal and murderer on death row. Yulaw is a former Multi-Verse Authority (MVA) agent, a kind of federal law enforcement agency responsible for policing travel and crime in the Multi-Verse, who expertly kills Lawless while in the custody of the heavily armed local police force. He kills Lawless not for the cause of justice, but for his own very instrumental personal reason, namely, to steal or consume his 'life force' in order to strengthen his own in pursuit of becoming the One. It is what Hegel would consider an 'abstract negation of negation,' that is, one without any qualitative change or transcendence. It is a purely quantitative, indifferent act aimed at the possibility of a future qualitative change or transcendence. A greater evil kills a lesser evil in the pursuit or hope of becoming absolute—the pure, exclusive, only One. It turns out that Lawless is not Yulaw's first or final victim. In fact, he has already killed 123 versions of himself, and only has one left—Gabe Law.

After the murder of Lawless, Yulaw is captured by MVA agents. While in the custody of the MVA, his personality, actions, and statements indicate why he is the representative of the inhuman moment of Being-for-Self, or self-consciousness as absolute Desire. One of the agents named Rodecker visits Yulaw in his cell. They were partners before Yulaw went rogue. In the cell Yulaw is doing a kind of shadow fighting—it is called Xingyiquan, a linear style of one of the three internal arts of Chinese Gung Fu—where he says amidst his movements, "the shortest distance between two points will always be a straight line." Although, in the realm of human reality, the inhuman desire of self-consciousness is just emerged from the animal realm where the immediate negation of the other is a satisfaction of that feeling (Sentiment) of self that is hunger, it has not completely overcome its aggressive linear direction forward (Kojeve 4). This is seen to be true in his final statements before being unsuccessfully sent to the Stygian penal colony in the "Hades Universe." He is charged with 123 counts of illegal quantum tunneling, and 123 counts of murder. When asked if he had a parting statement, he says:

> The multiverse is irrational and sloppy, I just try to make it rational, I just try to make it neat. You call it murder, but how could I murder myself 123 times? I just took those wasted energies and put them into one container…me. It made me faster, smarter, stronger. What if that is our fate? To unite with our other selves. To be unified forever. To be one. I will be the One. (*The One* 00:16:25)

One could argue that the despairing road to Reason taken by consciousness in *Phenomenology* is not dissimilar to his ambition. That this unification is achieved by means of murder (abstract negation) is what makes Yulaw the embodiment of pure being-for-self, or Desire at the stage of the "Truth of Self-Certainty" (the very beginning chapter to the section on Self-Consciousness in Hegel's *Phenomenology of Spirit*). It (self-consciousness) acknowledges the object as the immediate negative, meaning that it defines itself by exclusion of otherness (Hegel 168). Desire, which is Self-Consciousness, is the movement from the other back into itself where it realizes itself as absolute negativity—the positive result of the negating action is that being-for-itself comes to know itself as what excludes otherness (Hypolite 171). As pure being-for-self, or pure "I," self-consciousness realizes itself as a universal since it mediates the immediately given, which is the absolute negation of otherness. In a sense, Yulaw dismisses the Law-variants as unworthy vessels, and so does not recognize their particularity. At the same time, he recognizes the particular in the sense that it is what needs to be destroyed for him to accomplish this goal. His goal is the elimination of all otherness, to be the One—this is determination by exclusion, thus characteristic of Desire. However, as Hegel states of Desire at this point in the development, it will learn through experience the independence of the object (Hegel 167). Self-Consciousness as Desire is itself by its exclusion of another, but in order for it to be what it is for-itself, there must be a for-another that is for-itself—the other has independent existence because the reflection self-consciousness makes from the object back to itself happens also with the object, and so since it (the object) is for-another it is for-itself. The *Logic* illustrates this with the qualitative determinations of "something" and "other": something is what it is, and is not what it is not, and what it is not is other, but other is something and the initial something is other to it (Hegel 136).

The protagonist, Gabe Law, is a local law enforcement officer with no knowledge of the multiverse, or his other selves; he is the last the Law-variants Yulaw needs to kill to become the One. Yulaw escapes from the MVA before being sent to prison and attempts to assassinate Gabe Law (Good Law) in the same way that he killed Lawless—the attempt is in the very same bunker in a different universe where Gabe and his fellow officers are attempting to transport another death row criminal to his place of execution. However, it ends up that whenever a Law-variant is killed, all of the other Law-variants share in the power increase from the Life Force of the killed Law. It is because of this conceit of the movie that it was chosen, because it is representative of what Kojeve calls the 'battle for recognition', where pure being-for-self can only assert itself by the elimination of other pure being-for-selves (Kojeve 7). Since Gabe Law has shared in the power benefit he is not so easy to kill for Yulaw. There is a moment in the initial fight where Gabe Law sees Yulaw, and is literally 'shocked' to see himself. This seeing of the self in the other (but in this case by the other) would be the disquieting effect of Desire, for it is through the difference that the recognition of sameness occurs—from the 'Not-I' the 'I' is reflected back into itself. Put differently, the 'I' realizes itself in the alien 'I.'

Much pandemonium occurs, as a multiverse agent (played by Jason Statham with hair) on the hunt for Yulaw teams up with Gabe Law after his partner was murdered by Yulaw. He catches Gabe Law up on everything about the multiverse, about how there is a line or string of energy that connects all the different selves across the Multiverse. According to the agent there is a theorized possibility that if all the selves are murdered by a variant, then the whole system would collapse. Initially, Gabe wants nothing to do with this, but teams up with the agent after Yulaw murders his wife. From this is provided a critical insight into why Gabe Law is the suitable representative of the bondsman in the battle. He tells the agent: "Without her, I am him [Yulaw]. My grandfather told me the energy of life goes in a circle, in a perfect flow, balanced. He said until I find my center, my circle will no longer be whole." As Kojeve characterizes the distinction between Master and Slave, it is a struggle between Universality and Particularity, the slave being the representative of the particular (Kojeve 60). The Master, or Yulaw, has no attachments to anything aside from the drive to dominate and negate, this is his way of affirmation; the slave affirms the self through attachment to another—however, in Hegel, this is work on a natural object, but as stated before there will be some disparity. It should be further noted the style of gung-fu Gabe Law practices is Baguazhang, a style characterized by circular motions.

A brief summary of the plot's conclusion will suffice for this paper. Gabe Law decides upon revenge. The multiverse agent that he has teamed up with says that if he kills Yulaw, then he will have to shoot Gabe Law as well, because they cannot risk Gabe becoming the One. Gabe Law accepts regardless of this, and so he enters the battlefield with the risk of life essential to the realization of self-consciousness (Hegel 114). As he fights Yulaw, he tells him: "I will not be the One, but neither will you."

Yulaw is defeated and teleported to the Hades colony. Gabe Law is nearly sent back to his own universe by the multiverse agency, where he will be imprisoned for the crimes committed by Yulaw, but the agent he teamed up with sends him to a similar universe where there is a version of his wife.

It is more with Yulaw, as the Master, that the analysis works, because his irony is that of the master. As Kojeve explains, the battle for recognition is necessary for the master to be recognized as what he is, viz. independent, free, absolute, but all he can do is either destroy the competition (another-potential master on the field of battle) or subject them to slavery. The Master realizes himself as universal by means of exclusion of the particular. It is only by an equal that he can be affirmed as a universal—but by his own method, this becomes impossible to accomplish, he cannot be universally recognized by what he forever regards as inferior (Kojeve 50). In a similar way, Yulaw can never become the One that he desires to become because even if he were to kill Gabe Law, his assertion of self is by means of negation of the particular, and he would not be able to negate his own particularity unless he were to end his own life.

The slave is left to the particular, and this is the work on nature which the master eschews. The ideal of freedom is realized as universal in the master, but because of this he cannot form an idea of it as a non-realized ideal, and so cannot form an idea of absolute freedom. The master is always seeking to satisfy his universal desire, while the slave is forced to suspend desire for the sake of the work—and what this work does is satisfy the master, but also leads to the realization of freedom in the slave when the slave realizes that the master's satisfaction depends on the work on the particular. The slave will eventually come to realize himself as an individual, which is the synthesis of mastery and slavery, that is also the synthesis of universality and particularity (Kojeve 58). From the (little) *Logic* can this be expressed as the transition from the bad infinite to the genuine infinite. The bad infinite is the "negative infinity" that is "only a negation of the finite"; this is the interminable series of something and other. It is only when something and somewhat reveal themselves to have the same attribute of "be[ing] an other" that the genuine infinite arises (Hegel 139). True infinity is the reconciliation of the infinite with the finite in the specific.

To conclude, what does a multiverse mean to the individual, and to self-determination? At least in this multiverse of parallel universes, from the Hegelian point-of-view, it would seem that it means exactly the same thing as it does for my existence in this universe. Aside from the power boost that I stand to gain, so a quantitative change does not really change anything in so far as self-hood is concerned. Here in the world that I live in, all selves are the same in that they are unique; almost anything that can be said about me, could be said about any human. However, this also means the difference is just as real. In the passage on the axial rotation of life, the infinite fluid substance of life is a supersession of all distinctions; however, this negativity needs something to negate, and so all particular distinctions have independent existence (Hegel 107). The master is made free by the realization of negativity, but this infinite that is realized is a finitized one since the particular or the finite is denied. I am because I am not everyone else, but then I am because everyone is. If there are many versions of myself, my individuality is gained by the recognition that they are who they are.

In the beginning of this paper, there was concern that a multiverse might lead to indifference or dissatisfaction with one's own context, their home. Yulaw's drive to become the universal 'I' (the most Law of the Law-variants) depends on a rejection of the particular, and so a denial of his own (and all other) contexts; this is the drive of the Master in Hegel. Gabe Law's only desire is for the particular, for his context, his home. In light of that, the fact that he was sent to a very similar universe and not his own, and the interaction with a variant of his recently murdered wife, seems rather morbid. But *The One* was selected for its conceptual depth, not really its cinematic merit. The story shows nonetheless that it is through the reconciliation with one's context that true self-hood is achieved.

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Original and Copied Selves and Realities in *Ready Player One*

LOUIS CHARBONEAU

Artists have always copied art. The Metropolitan Museum of Art has run a copyist program since 1872. "The program celebrates intensive technical study, deep observation, and encourages sustained engagement with a diverse range of media, including, but not limited to, drawing, painting, and sculpture" (Hollein). In contrast to the esteem that the copyist enjoys in the world of fine art, copying another's style or imagery in film has varying results. Brian De Palma's mimicry of Sergei Eisenstein's *Battleship Potemkin* in *The Untouchables* is widely considered a triumph of cinema. In both films, the pivotal scene consists of a woman struggling to drag a baby carriage up a tall, broad set of stairs when shooting begins around her. De Palma employs the same cinematic language as Eisenstein to emphasize the tension, uncertainty, and violence of the conflict between Elliot Ness and the Chicago Outfit. Peter Segal's *Naked Gun 33 1/3* imitates the same scene. However, in Segal's rendition, there is a second, then a third, baby carriage careening down the steps. This tripling of the stakes re-contextualizes the same actions as comedic. It is unclear if Segal ever saw *Battleship Potemkin*, and he wouldn't have needed to do so. De Palma's copy effectively replaces and supersedes Eisenstein's original. Copies, therefore, can become more real than that which was copied. Copying, when taken to extremes, can interfere with the sense of self and the sense of reality. Culture can become mired in self-indulgent nostalgia. Individuals can become mere copies of another. What, then, does this mean for society when it is not films that are copied, but people, locations, and even homes?

This copying dynamic occurs on many levels in Steven Spielberg's *Ready Player One*. Spielberg copies Stanley Kubrick's *The Shining* in a style that is much more direct about its inspiration. Meanwhile, within the text of the film, protagonist Wade Watts seeks to copy, often word for word, the life of virtual reality game designer James Halliday. Halliday proves himself to be a formidable copyist. He programs virtual reality copies of other video games, the entire fictional world of *The Shining*'s Overlook Hotel complete with its ghosts and torrents of blood, as well as substantial portions of his own life. In this regard, Halliday's skills make his game the most popular and make him the wealthiest man within the world of the film. Halliday's magnum opus, however, is not the game itself but is instead an irresistible challenge programmed into the game. A challenge, which if completed, changes the challenger into a continuation of Halliday's will, a copy of Halliday himself. The film never relents from its torrent of references to and copies of other media, but a careful analysis of the process of copying within the film reveals a process that is simultaneously more subtle and more complete than any other copying. It is that process which will be examined here.

The inciting incident of the film is Halliday's death. He delivers a postmortem video will to the game's worldwide player base of billions, in which he promises control of both his company and his fortune to the first player to find a hidden Easter egg he has concealed within the game world. In the context of video games, an Easter egg is a secret feature within the world of the game. Often, it is an area of the game world that players can only access by means of a specific, esoteric set of actions. In order to access Halliday's egg, players first need to acquire three hidden keys, which can be found only by following clues left by Halliday. To even understand the clues, players must meticulously examine the life of James Halliday using the virtual reality copies of recorded scenes from Halliday's home and office that the real-world Halliday inserted into the game. The clues lead to a series of challenges in which the players complete Halliday's favorite video games, watch and re-enact his favorite film, and experience memories from Halliday's perspective. The nature of the quest pushes the players to become as much like Halliday as possible in order to succeed. The final challenge consists of playing the 1980 Atari game *Adventure* in a specific way. Watts realizes that the designer of *Adventure*, Warren Robinett, was the first designer to place an Easter egg in his game. Watts must find Robinett's Easter egg to find Halliday's. Halliday copies Robinett, and Watts copies Halliday.

The copying and repetition that recurs throughout the film demonstrates the importance of copying not only within the film, but in art as a whole. Halliday demonstrates his mastery as a copyist first by producing copies of other's works in his game. His masterwork, however, is copying himself. Not content with the holographic recordings of his life and work, he designs a system by which he can select and train a successor, a true copy. Watts becomes a marble blank, sculpted by Halliday. By offering his fortune and control of his game and company to the winner of the challenge, Halliday creates enormous incentives for Watts to comply with his scheme. Watts willingly and enthusiastically sets about imitating Halliday.

Philosophers have long considered the nature of repetition and originality in art. Jorge Luis Borges, an Argentine polyglot, poet, author, and philosopher, was especially interested in the relationship between copying and creation. In 1939, Borges published *Pierre Menard, Author of the Quixote*. In this philosophical short story, the titular Menard, a twentieth-century French writer, attempts to recreate Cervantes' *Don Quixote*, word for word. Borges, writing in the persona of a literary reviewer, wrote of Menard's task, "...his goal was never a mechanical transcription of the original; he had no intention of *copying it*. His admirable ambition was to produce a number of pages which coincided—word for word and line for line—with those of Miguel de Cervantes" (Borges 91). To complete this task, Menard makes himself into a copy of Cervantes. "Initially, Menard's method was to be relatively simple: Learn Spanish, return to Catholicism, fight against the Moor or Turk, forget the history of Europe from 1602 to 1918—be Miguel de Cervantes" (91). Borges effectively argues that each instantiation of a work of art could be considered a unique work, as the circumstances of its creation are so different. Menard's recreation of *Don Quixote* in the 20th century is unique because his life and world are so different from that of Cervantes, differences he must overcome to accurately reproduce the novel. Menard had to adopt the mindset of the centuries-dead Cervantes and become at home with an external persona, language, and culture.

In *Ready Player One*, Watts takes on the role of Menard, Halliday is his Cervantes, and Spielberg as Borges tells their story. The challenges Watts faces are similar to Menard's. He must assume the mindset of a dead creative by studying his life and consuming his works. Within the story of Cervantes' *Don Quixote*, the original narrative is itself a piece of metafiction. Cervantes claims he discovered the story in the archives of La Mancha when it is, in fact, a piece of original fiction. Readers should also note that the main character, Alonso Quijano, is a man whose life is dominated by trying to copy the exploits of fictional medieval knights he has read about in novels. As stories of medieval chivalry inspired Quijano, tales of digital wizardry inspire Watts. Quijano and Watts are both modeled and eventually controlled by older works of art they seek to emulate.

A comparison of Borges' work to Spielberg's offers several insights into the meaning of the film. The philosopher Gilles Deleuze wrote of *Pierre Menard*, "Borges, we know, excelled in recounting imaginary books. But he goes further when he considers a real book, such as *Don Quixote*, as though it were an imaginary book, itself reproduced by an imaginary author, Pierre Menard, who in turn he considers to be real. In this case, the most exact, the most strict repetition has as it correlate the maximum of difference" (Deleuze 1). Spielberg recreated significant portions of *The Shining* and the game *Adventure for Ready Player One* while simultaneously giving the audience no indication that these are real-world pieces of media that exist outside of his film. Since both were released in 1980, thirty-eight years prior to the release of Ready Player One, it is conceivable that some viewers would not realize the referents exist outside the film. Meanwhile, the world of the film must consider the fictional developer James Halliday as real. When Wade Watts enters the virtual recreation of *The Shining* and when he plays the virtual recreation of *Adventure*, these actions diminish the reality of the world outside the film and heighten the sense of reality within the world of the film. For the film's protagonist, virtual reality becomes more real, and for the audience, Halliday becomes more real than Robinette or Kubrick, at least for the film's duration.

The process of copying has the ability to either diminish or increase the perceived reality of a work. To both Watts and the audience, Halliday's recreations of other works in the digital world of the game make them less real. For example, Halliday's Overlook Hotel is explorable, manipulable, and changeable by the players and is thus less real than Kubrick's, which can only be observed. This seems counterintuitive at first, but consider that *The Shining*, when seen in a theater, starts unbidden by the audience at its prearranged screening time. The audience cannot stop the film, and it will play through to its credits. The director and cinematographer set the viewpoint of the audience. In contrast, the version of *The Shining* created by Halliday begins anytime the players choose, and they are free to not only change their perspective but also to interact with the film and change its ending. Even if the players are unfamiliar with *The Shining* as a film, they know it has a true ending. Each result other than that true ending is a counterfactual and, therefore, less real.

As Watts delves deeper into the virtual simulation of Halliday's game, he also commits further to his imitation of Halliday's person. The French philosopher Jean Baudrillard wrote at length about simulation and imitation. Among his most enduring contributions to philosophy is the concept of the simulacrum. A simulacrum is a copy without an original referent. Baudrillard uses Disneyland as an example. Disneyland is certainly a copy; it is a recreation of Disney's various intellectual properties in the mediums of animatronics, sculptures, and costumed performers. However, the referents of these copies are not real; they are films and television shows rendered on paper or with computer animation. Even when not explicitly referencing Disney's corpus, the referents are no more real. There is no real Space Mountain or Splash Mountain. Even when the subject matter of an attraction seems to be explicitly real, such as Soaring California, it is important to remember that the "California" of that ride features a Humboldt County that is a four-minute hang glider flight from Los Angeles, which in real-life is a journey of over 670 miles. It is an image of California not drawn from the matte pages of an atlas but from the glossy spreads of advertisements (Baudrillard 14-17). Perhaps the most troubling aspect of Baudrillard's interpretation of Disneyland is that it serves to convince the public at large that because of Disneyland's obvious unreality, that the rest of America must be more real. In Baudrillard's reckoning, prisons serve a similar purpose: to convince those outside their walls that the rest of America is free to conceal the true carceral nature of society (15).

It is useful to consider Baudrillard's commentary on simulation in relation to Watts' journey: "Simulating is not pretending: 'Whoever fakes an illness can simply stay in bed and make everyone believe he is ill. Whoever simulates an illness produces in himself some of the symptoms' (Littre). Therefore, pretending or dissimulating leaves the principle of reality intact: the difference is always clear, it is simply masked, whereas simulation threatens the difference between the 'true' and the 'false,' the 'real' and the 'imaginary.'" (Baudrillard 3). Watts cannot complete the tasks Halliday has set before him by merely pretending to be Halliday. Watts begins his process like Menard before him. As Menard read the Quixote, Watts watches Halliday's recordings. Both Menard and Watts memorize facts about their subjects' lives. Watts must diminish the contrast between the real and imaginary and produce in himself another Halliday. Halliday presents the players with several challenges they must overcome to claim his fortune. The solution to each of the challenges involves studying Halliday's life, reflecting on what he considered to be his greatest failings, and then acting as Halliday believes he should have acted. This is exemplified most in the penultimate and final challenges Watts completes within the game world called the Oasis. The second to last obstacle is a recreation of the 1980 Atari game *Adventure*. Players who merely complete the game are shown being dumped into a freezing lake and forced to restart.

By this point, Watts has studied Halliday thoroughly enough to understand that Halliday loves hidden secrets. Watts eschews beating the game in a straightforward competitive sense and instead pursues a hidden level. Watts is only aware of the hidden level because of his intense study of Halliday's favorite media. Watts doesn't just emulate Halliday's media consumption; he engages with games instinctually in the same way that Halliday did, in a way that would not have been possible for him without studying Halliday. As Watts discovers the hidden level in *Adventure*, his avatar is transported to a private meeting with an AI copy of Halliday. In this way, the initial secret level in *Adventure* gives way to a series of secret levels, both in terms of game levels, and in terms of meanings. The AI Halliday offers Watts a contract, saying, "Now you just sign these papers, and the Oasis is yours. You will be its sole proprietor!" (*Ready Player One* 1:57-1:58). Watts is about to sign the contract, but hesitates, as he realizes that the contract is intended to symbolize Halliday's ouster of his friend and business partner, Ogden Morrow, from the company which created the Oasis virtual reality game. The contract was the final challenge; only by refusing to sign can a player actually claim Halliday's fortune. Halliday regarded the feud with his former friend as his greatest mistake; by training Watts to become his replacement, Halliday can now correct his mistakes and reconcile with his former friend by using Watts as his proxy in the real world.

Halliday effectively reproduces his person in Wade Watts. By the film's conclusion, Watts loves what Halliday loves and acts as Halliday would act. By this act of reproduction, Halliday is able to engineer a second version of himself, a second version that he uses to soothe his deathbed regrets. Watts reconciles with Halliday's estranged friend Ogden Morrow and achieves the romantic success that eluded Halliday.

Significantly, Watts is an orphan who becomes a clone of another man. On the subject of cloning, Baudrillard wrote, "The Father and the Mother have disappeared, not in the service of an aleatory liberty of the subject, but in the service of a *matrix* called code. And it is the matrix, that of the genetic code, that now infinitely 'gives birth' based on a functional mode purged of all aleatory sexuality." What Halliday has accomplished goes even further. He has no need for genetic code but instead accomplished his cloning through computer code. His virtual reality programs have converted Watts into his clone, and at the film's conclusion, he reveals to Watts that he has also created sentient virtual copies of himself in the world of the game. To quote Baudrillard, "Each fragment of a hologram can again become the matrix of the complete hologram." Halliday has thus transcended biology; he is no longer subject to biological constraints such as sexual reproduction and death.

Consider Watts' journey through successive simulations. Baudrillard identifies four successive levels of simulation. The first is a reflection of reality. This level corresponds to the character Wade Watts outside of virtual reality; this character reflects a real-world person. The second masks and denatures a reality. Watts passes through this level as he adopts a new identity, that of his avatar in the game, Parzival. This name is another reflection of *Quixote*, as Watts assumes the name of a grail knight. Baudrillard's third level masks the absence of a profound reality. Watts reaches this level as he becomes Halliday's duplicate in the game world. He is not Halliday, but he has the characteristics of Halliday. He is, therefore, no longer Watts. The reality that was Wade Watts is no more, and the Halliday/Watts clone masks that change. The final image, according to Baudrillard, is that which "...has no relation to reality whatsoever; it is its own pure simulacrum" (Baudrillard 9). When Wade leaves the virtual reality game world, he exists in the real world of the film as a hybrid of the deceased, virtual James Halliday, and the physical body of Wade Watts. This being is neither fully Wade Watts nor James Halliday; he is a novel simulacrum.

Baudrillard defines a simulacrum in various ways; in describing the creation of simulacra, he states, "It is no longer a question of imitation, nor duplication, nor even parody. It is a question of substituting the signs of the real for the real" (2). That which possesses the signs of the real is said to be real or is presented as real, but is not necessarily real itself. Recall the Disney ride Soaring California. The ride's fictional California has the signs of the real, video footage and a professional presentation. He also contends that a simulacrum is a construct that goes beyond merely concealing the truth, and is actively hostile to the concept of truth. He demonstrates this point by opening his book, *Simulacra and Simulation*, with a fictitious quote from the Biblical book of Ecclesiastes, "The simulacrum is never what hides the truth—it is truth that hides the fact that there is none. The simulacrum is true. -Ecclesiastes" (1). Baudrillard does not give a chapter or verse. The quote uses language, particularly the word simulacrum itself, that is not common in Biblical translations. The sentiment could fit with the message of Ecclesiastes, which calls for a radical revaluation of human priorities, but the forgery is unlikely to convince most readers who are familiar with the Hebrew Bible. Despite the clues that the quote is not genuine, it is presented in authoritative print. Its place of prominence at the beginning of the first chapter in an edited, published book strongly suggests that it is a real quote. By presenting the reader with a quote inspired by the real Ecclesiastes, even one that weakly resembles the real book, Baudrillard demonstrates the fragility of reality. If Baudrillard can make the reader question their knowledge of religion, or accept a false quote with mere words on a page, then Halliday can surely exert a much greater influence with the immense and immersive power of the Oasis.

The ending of *Ready Player One* is deeply ironic. Halliday counsels Watts that reality is preferable to the virtual world of the Oasis, saying, "I created the Oasis because I never felt at home in the real world. I just didn't know how to connect with the people there. I was afraid for all of my life right up until the day I knew my life was ending, and that was when I realized that as terrifying and painful as reality can be, it's also the only place that you can get a decent meal. Because reality is real. You understand what I'm saying?" Watts dutifully answers, "Yes." (*Ready Player One* 2:01-2:02). This exchange happens after Watts has completed the quest, destroying his relationship with reality and turning him into another Halliday. The original Halliday not only created the most compelling possible virtual world, but put aside his entire fortune as a reward for the person who engaged most thoroughly with that virtual reality. Halliday, in real life, feuded with his sole friend and became a recluse by the end of his life. He had constructed for himself a new home comprised of lights and electricity. If Halliday truly believed in the superiority of reality to the virtual world, then the challenges could have been placed in the real world, or Halliday could have shut off the game entirely. Instead, he made engaging with the virtual world the precondition for completing his quest. By creating the Oasis, he established himself as an idol and object of emulation for an entire culture. While Halliday may proclaim in words the superiority of reality, his actions show a clear preference for virtual, a preference that he replicates in the mind of Wade Watts and all other players of his game.

The nostalgic worship of culture shackles us to a mythologized past. It demands that we regard a constructed image of the past as our true home. Karl Marx noted the difficulty of trying to self-actualize and access one's true self in spite of centuries of history: "Men make their own history, but they do not make it as they please; they do not make it under self-selected circumstances, but under circumstances existing already, given and transmitted from the past. The tradition of all dead generations weighs like a nightmare on the brains of the living" (320). Our collective nightmare grows ever more vivid as the increasing fidelity of recordings, and the accessibility of those recordings makes this process of worship and repetition easier and more effective than it has ever been. Every copy and repetition of *Battleship Potemkin* or *The Shining* that is produced entrenches these references deeper into our media landscape. While copying others is a natural and necessary human tendency, it also has the potential to override our own personalities and thus make us into mere copies.

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PART TWO

COLLECTIVE

Black Consciousnesss & The White Mask

An Interview with Dr. Charles Athanasopoulos

INTERVIEW BY AMISA RAMADHANI

FROM "FANONIAN SLIPS: THE RHETORICAL FUNCTION & FIELD OF THE WHITE MASK" BY DR. CHARLES ATHANASOPOULOS

> Further demonstrating the judge's Fanonian parapraxis, the judge made a comment that she was especially comfortable with my mother's decision to change my surname because having a distinctly Greek surname would offer me opportunities in life that I might not otherwise have. Whereas my father is Afro-Puerto Rican on his paternal side and Irish on his maternal side, my mother is Afro-Puerto Rican on her maternal side and Greek on her paternal side which resulted in her inheriting a distinctly Greek name from her father despite being the spitting image of my abuela (grandmother). This is how I, after the judge's decision, would come to inherit this distinctly Greek last name from my pappou (grandfather). While it is hard to offer you the exact language of the judge given that I was just a child, it is quite clear when looking at my last name, or the stereotypical Greek surname "Papadopoulos" for example, that anyone looking at a job application would immediately mark me as Greek before ever seeing me. It is also quite common for police officers who pull me or my loved ones over for "routine traffic stops" to be taken aback by the Greek last name on our driver's licenses. This might result in them being nicer or interrogating us on how we came to have this name and trying to make us prove we can even pronounce the name (as if to imply we are using fake IDs). The judge knew that this shift in rhetorical presentation would thus offer me the opportunity to seem more familiar to white people, whether on the job market or when interacting with police officers, increasing my chances at mutual recognition,

and thus potentially lessening the intensity of the anti-Black violence I would encounter over the course of my life. Again, this is what is so interesting about the Fanonian slip; on one hand, this Black female judge strategically attempted to help my mother change my surname as a way to disconnect me from the legacy of a violent man who might otherwise forever more try to lay claim to me. After all, this decision served a pragmatic function: the immediate context is that my biological father was attempting to check me out of school by using the fact that we had the same surname so that he could run away with me and force my mother to come back to him.

On the other hand, the judge mobilized anti-Black rhetorical tropes adjacent to her intended action to help my mother and I navigate this violent situation. While offering this name change, she couched her standard of good parenting through the ability of parents to integrate their family unit into the rhetorical ecologies of the white mask. In doing so, she adopted the values and desires of the white mask as her own while simultaneously rationalizing that decision as being good for the survival of a Black mother and son. Instead of being "mama's baby, papa's maybe," and the son of a welfare queen, this last name would rhetorically gesture toward white kinship that would offer a better chance at mutual recognition and survival, perhaps allowing me to become a judge like her one day. This difference in signification has, for example, saved family members of mine from being thrown in jail. In one instance, an officer almost arrested a loved one for possession of marijuana; as they were about to be taken into custody, the officer looked at their driver's license and proclaimed, "get the fuck out of here, you're Greek?!" before letting them off with a warning. Metonymically, the signifiers of "Black," "drugs," "prison," and more clash with the Greek surname that gestures toward "family values," "innocence," "deserving of a second chance." These are the inter(con)texts that the judge picked up on; paradoxically, the judge's Fanonian slip enabled her to compartmentalize this rhetorical distancing from Blackness as a means of integration into the white mask as somehow being pro-Black. What the judge never considers is how this only imparts a directive to continue the Sisyphean task

> of having Black people attempt to integrate themselves into the rhetorical ecologies of the white mask. The steady drum beat of social death continues regardless of how one chooses to adorn themselves with these various rhetorical tools. (14-15)

What is your field of study and research?

I am an Assistant Professor of Communication Studies, but my primary research interests lie at the nexus of Black studies, cultural studies, and media studies.

I engage scholars from the Black radical tradition, including most notably Frantz Fanon, and then I also engage Sylvia Wynter, Hortense Spillers, and Édouard Glissant. I engage those thinkers to think about the legacy of slavery and anti-Blackness and how it affects American culture. Related to that, I study American culture through thinkers like James Carey and Stuart Hall, Antonio Gramsci, and Louis Althusser. In relation to media studies, I consider how film and television shows reflect ongoing issues/discourses within our society. At the same time, I also consider how film/television can be an avenue through which Black people or other oppressed people can challenge dominant discourses of those ideas as well.

Relatedly, I also study street art (graffiti/muralism). I study Black Lives Matter (BLM) street art, and their defacement, to consider how these pieces of art reflect arguments about the larger BLM movement. Generally, those are the fields that my research broadly engages in, but I'd say the research question that drives my research is: What opportunities does Black radical disruption offer for radically changing our society? That's the broad question that I'm thinking about. The secondary question is when Black radical thought starts to threaten society, how does society respond to stifle it, deform it, and constrain its possibilities? So, that is the dual focus of my scholarship.

How did you become interested in this area of study and research?

This started a long time ago. It starts with my personal experience as an Afro-Puerto Rican and Greek-Roma man from Queens, New York, and how I grew up. Yet, it was in high school that I met some mentors in an extracurricular activity I was in (debate) for a few years who would inspire me. I met Rashad William Evans,[1] Shanara Reid-Brinkley,[2] and Daryl Burch,[3] and these three mentors introduced me to this kind of literature when I was around fourteen years old.

It was around the ninth grade that I was introduced to Charles Mills' *The Racial Contract* (1997) and, later in high school, Audre Lorde's "The Master Tools Will Never Dismantle the Master's House" (1984). In fact, I just finished teaching Lorde's "Master's Tools" in my COMM 210 "Understanding Meaning Making" course. You know, they were introducing me to some of my favorite authors, and I would eventually stumble onto the writings of Frantz Fanon, who is probably my favorite writer. So, when I was a kid, I fell in love with reading this literature, and I was there because I was in debate. I was in debate because I was trying to avoid what was going on at home. It was during this time that I luckily found my passion for reading and writing, which would eventually become my passion for being a teacher who could similarly inspire students like Rashad, Shanara, and Daryl inspired me.

Having said that, our theme for this year's edition of* Charter *is Home. How would you define home?

The only way that I would define home is wherever your heart tells you that home is. I know it sounds cliché, but seriously; home for me is my wife and my cat. It cannot be defined by a physical location nor a biological relationship. Home is what you feel drawn to; home is a space of refuge where you can be vulnerable. At the same time, I know that home isn't always that; for many, to quote the title of a famous Gil Scott-Heron song, *Home is Where the Hatred Is* (1971). Home can be a space of violence; it can be a space where people don't feel comfortable. So, ideally, home is a space where you can feel safe and loved, but I know the reality is that home isn't often that for many people. If people prefer to move beyond the metaphor of "home" for some other way of imagining their space of refuge, that's fine too.

Let us discuss your paper. "Fanonian Slips: The Rhetorical Function & Field of the White Mask." Could you briefly talk about this piece to an audience who has never had a chance to interact with it?

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This goes back to me engaging Fanon in my work. I'm working with Fanon's theory that, in a white colonial society, Black people are socialized to want to be white. One of his most popular books is thus aptly titled *Black Skin, White Masks* (2008). It is the idea that Black people try to live up to this icon, this image of the white mask: the proper white family, the proper white man, and the proper white woman. You internalize that image, and in internalizing it, you also internalize the shame and guilt that you're not enough, that there's something wrong with you. So that's his basic theory of internalizing white colonial values. I use that theoretical frame to think about how people talk about race to smooth over moments of racial tension. So, in the context of the article, I begin with the 2020 Atlanta Uprising, which prompts the city government to create a press conference to soothe tensions. In that moment, the discourse of the mayor, law enforcement, and Atlanta-based rapper Killer Mike, is something we can dig into and analyze in context of Fanon's theory. Here, I deploy Sigmund Freud's famous concept named the "Freudian slip" in popular culture. For Freud, it is a linguistic slip that occurs accidentally during one's conscious speech. For example, it could be a simple as trying to announce one's love for their sibling, and they accidentally say "hate" instead of "love." According to Freud, we can dig into that slippage to think about one's relationships with their sibling and see if there something below the surface that is worth attending to. I take this well-known idea and place it in context of Fanonian theory.

In the context of Fanonian theory, I'm interested in the things people accidentally announce about their thinking on race, even as they attempt to smooth over racial tensions. Rather than focusing on overt racist statements, I find it far more interesting to consider how ostensibly liberal discourses reveal themselves to be rooted in what Fanon calls the white mask. The most evident example I can give you is when then-candidate Joe Biden was running for President, gave a speech to the Hispanic-Asian coalition: "Poor kids are just as bright as *white* kids." It's a slippage where Biden meant to say rich kids, but he said *white* kids instead of rich. That moment reminds me of Fanon's quote, "The cause is the consequence; you are rich because you are white, you are white because you are rich" (40). In that moment, his Fanonian slip announces to you that the white mask operates through his psyche: when he thinks of rich kids, he thinks of white kids, and by contrast, when he thinks of poor kids, he thinks of Black, Asian, and Latino kids. So, even though he is there to speak to his

Asian and Latino constituents to seem progressive, that moment, that slip says something about how he thinks about them.

Would you speak a bit on what systems, practices, and values contribute to the construction of what home is? How do they impact the experiences you discuss in this paper?

I understand the construction of home in a white colonial world through Fanon's theory of the colonized psyche. If we think about family and home, what happens is the white Colonial structure says, '*Well, if your family doesn't look like the white nuclear family with two parents and a Suburban home and heterosexual, then you do not have a proper home, you do not have proper home training, which means we should not trust you, which is why we think that you're a criminal, savage or you know the improper woman*' or something like that, right? The family is imagined as almost the original site where you're supposed to be trained into the white mask learn how to act out there in the world. So, if your family doesn't look like that, well, then it's seen as a *broken* family.

In "Fanonian Slips," I engage Hortense J. Spillers' essay, "Mama's Baby Papa's Maybe" (2003), where she talks about the discourse of the family structure as one that demonizes Black women as illegitimate mothers who produce "thugs" and "Jezebels." In her essay, Spillers interrogates the discourse of New York Senator Daniel Patrick Moynihan who writes "The Negro Family: The Case for National Action" (1965). Moynihan argues that the reason why Black people are not doing well is that '*economically they don't have as much wealth, and they don't have as much wealth because their families are broken, and so if we can fix the family, we can fix the money issue, and we can fix the race issue.*' And so that discourse is still very popular with conservatives in the US. So, you look on Fox News to this day, and they are running stories about the "broken" Black family, absent Black fathers, the "welfare queen" Black mother, and Black-on-Black crime to frame the issues in the Black community as a cultural problem with Black folks rather than an issue of systemic anti-Blackness. All this to say, the construction of the home through white colonial values is something that demonizes Black communities and makes us internalize the sense of shame and guilt. There's always this idea that if we just fixed our families, things would be better. That's why in the piece, I talk about the process of changing my last name when I was younger because I come from one of those families that would be considered a broken family by people like Moynihan. When the judge in the court case affirmed the legal surname change to Athanasopoulos, she said to my mother: I am especially comfortable because the Greek name will give him opportunities he wouldn't otherwise have. So, that moment is a Fanonian slip. On one hand, there is this Afro-Latina judge who sees an Afro-Latina mother trying to do something for her son, so the judge wants to help this Black woman survive better in a white Society. On the other hand, in saying this thing about my surname, the judge internalizes and acts out the values of the white mask by basically re-affirming that I should try to avoid seeming like a "mama's baby, papa's maybe" by having this Greek last name which gives the appearance of a stable nuclear family. There is a particular reason why the Greek last name signifies family and perhaps even wealth that my former last name wouldn't. It is similar to the reason Biden would say something like poor kids are just as bright as *white* kids; whiteness is tied to construction of home and wealth in a white colonial society and these slips reveal that the white mask functions in the deepest level of our psyches.

Fanonian slip is not necessarily intentional; it's just that when you think through the white mask all the time, it just becomes so natural, and you don't even realize what you're doing anymore. That's what is so interesting to me about Killer Mike during the 2020 Atlanta Uprising. Killer Mike gets up to speak while wearing this shirt and says, "Kill your masters," but the contradiction is that he is at the police press conference working with the mayor to *stop* protesters from engaging in an uprising. His shirt says, "Kill your masters," which invokes a metaphor about slavery—presumably, the protesters are the rebelling slaves, and the masters are the police and the government, right?—but his discourse is very much like "Don't burn down the master's house." Yet, I don't think Killer Mike recognizes this contradiction, and part of how that happens is his use of a familial metaphor which frames the city of Atlanta as home and Black Atlanta as being one big family. This family metaphor becomes clearest when he calls the protesters children, and basically tries to act as this paternal figure who is going to get the kids to act right. If Atlanta is Black, then you aren't killing your masters in his mind, you are simply burning down your own house. So, Atlanta police are no longer the masters, they are family. Moreover, his reactive metaphor feeds the idea that we just need stronger Black families and communities to guide the protesters-rendered-children. In this way, against his best intentions, Killer Mike's vision of Blackness and Black liberation turns out to be triangulated by the white mask.

How does this construction of home draw in some people and cast others out?

This construction of home casts certain people as outside in the sense that Black people in the United States are seen as people severed from Africa, severed from their culture, severed from their homeland. On another level, Black people are seen as people who do not have properly functioning families, and from there, you can say that these children, when they grow up, coming out of these broken homes, are not going to be good people. It contributes to this understanding: *it's a cultural problem with them that they need to fix*. It mystifies that not only there's a structure of oppression that is causing these things in society, but that society holds up these ideals, like the nuclear family. There's no reason why family must be understood through the nuclear family.

My scholarship uses the metaphor of racial icons and Black iconoclasm. Racial icons refer to the social values (e.g., race, gender, class, sexuality) of Western Man and the corresponding rolodex of public symbols (positive or negative) that reflect those values. Black iconoclasm refers to an orientation that seeks the destruction of Western Man's racial iconography to create space for new forms of Black radical imagination. It's kind of what I've been saying already, which is that we have this image of what a family is supposed to be; it is an icon, and we try to live up to it, but people often don't look like that thing that they're trying to live up to. On a basic level, when people look at a magazine of a model, they want to look like that model, but they know deep down that they don't look like that model. And so, in that way, what it does is it allows a white colonial society to say, *'We are better than you because we do fit that image, and you represent the absence of all those values. You're the enemy of those values; if we acted like you, there would be no family, there would be no home,'* and so there's that, and then the other side of it is, you keep trying to live up to it, you try to be what you can never be, and it just leaves you in this psychologically demoralizing place.

The point of Fanonian slips, then, is, how do we see where those icons are literally popping up in our heads and we are conjuring them in our speech? How are we using them? And if we can find where we are using them and how they pop up, well then, we have the opportunity to smash that image, and that is what I call *Black iconoclasm*. It is this idea that when there is this universal standard icon established by white colonial society, we should smash that thing so we can create different spaces or ways of imagining home, family, and what it means to be Black, and I don't mean like literally just like destroying a statue, though it could be that, rather it is more of a conceptual iconoclasm that intervenes whenever the white colonial world establishes a universal image of what you should be.

Those universal standards in a white colonial society are generally always bad. I try to do that in my classes, too. I think students come in, and they're like, this is what it means to be a good student; this is what my professor should look like and how they should act. I try to come in and throw all that up into crisis, just like take a hammer to that. Then, students look around, and they're like, 'How am I supposed to do classes? This does not feel like what class should be like'. They must work through that discomfort before allowing themselves to try something new. Similar thing, whether it is home, classroom, or the workspace: Black iconoclasm means breaking apart the icons established by a white colonial world and creating space to imagine something new when you realize you don't have to live by those icons and you let go of your white mask.

On that note, in what way do you anticipate your research to deconstruct this construction, thus reforming it so that it does not draw in some people while alienating others?

Fanonian Slip is an earlier version of the chapter that is in my book, and the book is called *Black Iconoclasm: Public Symbols, Racial Progress, and Post/Ferguson America* (advanced contract, Palgrave Macmillan). In that book, I do what I had mentioned. The whole frame of it is around racial icons and how Black iconoclasm disrupts those icons. So, that's the frame of the book, and I laid it out across different parts of the society.

Chapter one is about Black Lives Matter. Black Lives Matter is originally iconoclastic. It criticizes the Obama administration as well as American law enforcement. It scandalizes the idea of a post-racial America. In doing so, BLM threw America into crisis; but slowly, after mainstream America rejected the idea of BLM, they began to take it on, to deform it from what it originally was. So, now, it is no longer abolishing the police; it is no longer this anti-capitalist movement. Now, every Democrat, even Republican, will say Black Lives Matter, and you can put it on the NBA court as a logo. BLM has been transformed into a new icon of racial progress in the United States. So, this chapter considers, how does that transformation happen and how can we avoid it in the future? How do you go from being in the streets of Ferguson to the Black Lives Matter Global Network being critiqued by local Black activists, saying you are taking money from them, and you are not accountable to them? How does that happen? Where does the iconoclasm end and the new icon begin?

The second chapter is about Fanon and his theory that decolonization is "a program of complete disorder," and so I argue his theory provides insight into what it means to constantly undo those constructs without creating yet another icon that holds people in.

The third chapter then applies that theory to communicative situations. It is the revised version of Fanonian slips. Slips show you how icons work in your head and how you're acting it out, whether as a politician or when you talk to somebody in the street in front of a bar. How do racial icons show up in communication, and how can we use those slips to say, "Oh, that's where the icon is now, let's break it up?"

The next chapter is the film chapter, which examines how icons appear in the narratives we tell in film. I analyze *Judas and the Black Messiah, Antebellum*, and both the *Black Panther* films. How do these films challenge racial icons, and then how do they try to image Blackness outside of it? And in doing that, what's the good part so what are the parts that replicate the thing they are trying to get rid of?

The last chapter is the street art chapter. So, how does Black Lives Matter street art show us both the breaking up of racial icons and the ways in which the street art gets taken up by the city officials to stifle protests. I focus on a particular mural in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, and how city officials warped the original message, leading to the erasure of much of the BLM-specific discourse on the mural, and turned it into part of their culture and arts district as a general celebration of Black people from Pittsburgh.

Finally, the project contains a three-part fictional short story, Black Icarus which radically re-imagines the traditional Ancient Greek tragic myth of Icarus beyond the narrative that Icarus' death could have been prevented if he didn't fly too high or low. Instead, I consider how icons of Black liberation (Icarus' wings) are crafted from the conceptual resources of the anti-Black world (the labyrinth) and doom Black radical imagination (Icarus' flight) from the very beginning.

In all levels of society—activism, theory, communicative situations, film, art—racial icons exist and need to be broken apart to create space for new ways of being and meaning-making.

Your passion and dedication to your work is inspiring. To anyone in the audience who has never felt like they belong, what words of comfort or advice would you offer them?

I guess I'd say that, when you realize there is something deeply wrong with this society, then there is no reason to internalize shame and guilt because you don't fit their racial icons. Ultimately, why would you want to fit the image of a white colonial society? So, my push is to take a hammer to all those constraining images we try to live up to. Every time they are like, '*You have to be this, you have to be that, and this is what family looks like, and this is what a social movement should be like,*' those things are confining, and it's okay just to invent something new that other people haven't done yet. That's where it's really at. That's what usually happens on the streets, you know—while politicians are saying to do X thing, people do something else that these politicians didn't think of. That's where the magic happens, in those spaces of chaos. The push of Black iconoclasm is throwing white colonial values into complete disorder. As one of my good friends and mentor, Louis M. Maraj (2020), would say, you have to "mash up de place." Maraj is from Trinidad, and in soca music, there is this line that is often repeated "mash it up," which he calls to as a symbol of how Black radical disruption pulls apart, shatters, remixes, and invents. Similarly, Black iconoclasm is a call to mash up de place, to institute Fanon's program of complete disorder on the level of everyday lived reality.

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Deconstructing & Reconstructing Home

An Interview with Dr. Jessica Maucione

INTERVIEW BY DELANEY SOUSA

How would you define your field of study and your niche or preferred areas within it?

When I was in graduate school, whenever anyone asked me about my interests, and I would answer, they would say, "I think you might belong in a different department." My field is an intersectional feminist approach to critical race studies and space and place studies as applied to literature. That's how I think of it. My reasons for being interested in it that I would always communicate are not all artistic. They are about sociological and psychological realities of how literature communicates experiences of space and place, race, gender and sexuality, class, ability—everything intersectional. It's also about how reading literature changes our experiences of and perspectives on those things.

Was there a moment in your burgeoning career when you gravitated toward your field of study?

There are a couple things that happened. First, I had Mary Jo Bona as an undergraduate here at Gonzaga. On the very first day of her Women in 20th Century American Literature class, she started speaking about women writers, and I remember thinking, "I want to be her." Today, I just got invited to speak at a celebration symposium for her career, it's fantastic.

Another thing that happened was when I was in undergrad, three African American law students were driven out of Gonzaga Law School. Frankly, the university failed to respond meaningfully in my experience as an undergraduate observing things unfold. For me, that was very disappointing because I was so inspired by all my classes. We were asking all these ethical questions about how to be in the world in difficult situations, and then this difficult situation occurs, and I was waiting for the university to show me what it would do! At that moment, I realized this is the thing that people don't know how to talk about, don't know how to address, and it's hurting all of us. It's silly for white people to think it's not hurting them or they're not haunted by it. That's ridiculous to me because white supremacy implicates Whites and whiteness in all kinds of dynamics that contribute to cycles of violence and shame.

I decided at that time I had to address this in my life, I wanted to. I kept trying to start conversations, but I wasn't in a position of power, so they didn't go very far because of all the resistance I met. When I applied for my job here, I said that I will be pushing this topic, this is what I do. The department that asked me to come here said that was what they wanted me to do. That showed a lot of growth in the institution, and it surprised me a lot to be able to be hired here after I did a lot of activism.

In order to get to critical race studies, I felt I had to start with my own sense of my own race. It's very clearly, unarguably white privilege on one hand, and on the other hand, the history of my family's race is not enitrelly summed up by that because my father and his father were racialized as Italian Americans. I became interested in tracking how Italian Americans had been racialized, how they made a claim on whiteness, and what kind of rhetoric was utilized to invite them into that claim on whiteness and what motivated them. I made some Italian American studies scholars uncomfortable in doing that, but it felt really important. It felt like I needed to do that work first before I could responsibly take on the larger realm of critical race studies, so I spent a lot of time on that.

Moving to this idea of home, it seems that your background and what drew you to this field of study has a bearing on how you think about home. Could you talk a bit about what our theme "Home" means to you, and how it comes up in the course of your work?

I feel very strongly that most 21st century human beings are displaced in some way. I feel that all people are displaced. Indigenous Americans are culturally displaced even if they inhabit their ancestors' homeland. All other settler Americans are displaced too. I don't mean that in the sense of capital T Trauma, necessarily, and yet I do mean trauma lowercase t because I do think it affects us. I think that humans are inclined toward place-based identities, and we've manufactured (especially Americans) this hyper-mobile, non-place-based identity formation that, in my mind, is mostly consumer-based. I find that traumatic as well. That's why I think it's important to delve into it, particularly through literature. Literature does a good job of communicating a desire for belonging in a place and having readers and literary analysts come to terms with their own unmet desires that are often glossed over by dominant and popular culture. I feel like a lot of writers are resurrecting lost places in some sense, and they're registering a loss that in some sense most of us have experienced in one way or another.

I grew up very conscious of how they portray Italy on television—it's so romanticized. Little Italy was also romanticized to me via television and movies. I remember always thinking that I have this Italian last name, but I don't have any of the Italian things: the good food, the big family, and all the things Italians seemed to enjoy on television. I felt cut off from something that would have been or could have been my birthright. That stuck with me and formed a lot of my thinking about home. I do think that "Where do I belong?" and "Where is home for me?" are questions that people keep asking themselves, even when they seem pretty settled. I think because Americans are invited to think of homes in terms of houses and other consumer products, we are encouraged to be out of touch with our real desires of belonging, really feeling at home and the kinds of fulfillment and security that would come along with it.

I was invited to a trustee luncheon one time. I was a little nervous to go, as I was the faculty member at the table, while everyone else was a trustee. It ended up being lovely. They asked me what I do, I told them the same as I told you. There was a man there that had inherited a real estate agency from his father, and before that his grandfather had run it. He told me that he really resonated with what I was saying because his grandfather and father's job as realtors was to find the family home for a family one time in their lives that was close to other family. But his job is to get someone in a bigger house, no matter where it is, the second they can afford it or even before they can really afford it. That's what the market looks like now. He said, "I sell the same client eight houses whereas my dad sold them one." I was really shocked that he already had that understanding of what I'm doing, but from that perspective.

That dynamic is really interesting, particularly in that it's not just about commodifying space, but space also being synonymous in a lot of cases with identity. How do you navigate those dynamics in your research, of identity, in many ways, having a price tag?

I think literature does a great job of implicitly critiquing that dynamic, and in that way, literature also offers a reprieve from it and a distance from it, so that the reader can determine what choices they could make. The reader has to participate in a capitalist system, but could they participate in it differently? Such that they're in touch with their own desires instead of just responding to the whims of the market or the desires projected onto them that aren't really theirs? That's what I think literary studies is partly about: discovering what your true desires are and blocking out the noise of the surrounding culture that's constantly telling you that you have other ones.

***It sounds like there's a reimagination implicit in all of that. I'd love to talk about that reimagination as it relates to your research in conjunction with Toni Morrison's* Paradise.**

I could talk about *Paradise* all day; I love it so much. I think Morrison is brilliantly capturing this particular minoritized community's transition into capitalism, and registering that transition as a severe loss. It's a transition from belonging and security to real fragility and vulnerability.

The novel surrounds the formation of two Black towns. The first one is called Haven because it was, in many ways, a haven. Morrison talks about it as a place where you were always going to be okay, because if your crops failed, everyone else's crops that survived would be afforded to you, and you would be in that position the next year to share. There was an expectation that any of your surplus was community property, and any other people's surplus was yours. I think that is such a powerfully positive way to live in a way that really affirms belonging, your own sense of importance to other people, and their importance to you. They moved from Haven to begin a new town called Ruby, which is named after a woman who died from the journey, but she may not have needed to die. The leadership had considered it more important to move Haven's Oven brick by brick, that would no longer be used as a community oven that brought people together to share but as a symbol of power and history since the new houses would all have their own appliances. Morrison is tracking this transition to capitalism as also a transition to individuation, fragility of the community and fragility of the individual, even as they become individuals in a new way. She is really counting it as a great loss to the members of that community. I think a lot of literature does that work. Writers in some ways are most in touch with those kind of losses. It's a solitary engagement to write a novel, and as you reflect on what you want to communicate, perhaps you have more ability to get in touch with those real desires like belonging. Maybe a lot of members of Ruby would have thought they wanted to be more individuals and less implicated in terms of responsibility and connection to others. Maybe they might have thought that was attractive in some ways. But that's not how humans thrive. I think that's what Morrison is suggesting over and over again in a lot of her works, that we need each other, and the more that we pretend we're not or capitalize on other people's diminishment, the lesser our lives are and the lesser we are.

With these ideas of turning back to community, what might Morrison's commentary on this idea of home mean for us as a society going into the future? It might be a bit reductive, but I can't help but wonder what we do in our current reality.

I think that's an important question. It's interesting because we are faced with increasing numbers of disasters of many kinds, all of them of our own making. I'm really interested in Rebecca Solnit's work on when a community responds to a disaster, the people who live through it and are interviewed about it often talk about the disaster as a highlight of their life. It seems a bit bizarre because they've often lost *a lot*, but they're forced into a situation of real intimate collaboration with neighbors because of the disaster. Their connectedness and their interreliance with others become so acute that they suddenly feel more alive. Some people talk about it in terms of the disaster being an experience of living in color, and when they are back to a relatively stable life with a home but don't know their neighbors they are back to living in black and white. Their whole life feels muted, not because of excitement or thrill from the experience, but because humans helping each other survive something brings out the best of us. I think what we should do is somehow recognize that we are in a bit of a state of crisis, even if it doesn't necessarily feel like it on a daily basis for some of us, and live in a way that we have the capacity to be there for each other. Right now, it's hard to convince someone that another person's crisis is their crisis too, but it is. Someone's homelessness is my problem and your problem, in my opinion, because the radical disparity that we have is the source of all violence, including any kind of violence that may visit any one of us at any time. The things that we're most afraid of happening to us is a product of a system we're complicit with most of the time. It's hard to know exactly what to do, but I think one of the things that reading can open up for people is where we actually are and what our current context actually means. Especially contemporary literature is really important in that way. These authors are saying really meaningful things about the lives we're all living in the context of this planet right now. If we were to actually face the situation we're in, I think it could motivate us to live more counter to what the individualistic mores of capitalism with more of a sense of interconnectedness with others. I never have a specific actual plan, but I do think we're sleeping on the job as a society.

At the core of that sentiment seems to be hope, which I think our generation and our readership is looking for as burgeoning scholars ourselves. In your own thinking about home and everything going on in the world that deconstructs home, do you have any advice for our undergraduate readers on how to think about home as they move through the world?

As a precursor to my answer, I will say that I am happier than most of my friends my age, and I know it's because I'm in constant conversation with college-generation people. I have sources of hope that a lot of folks my age probably lack because they don't have insight into who our future leaders are as people, but I have so much hope for them. I really trust them. I was just helping someone with their personal statement for medical school, and I was thinking if they were my doctor, I would be so happy. This person will respond to the whole person and bring cura personalis to medicine that sometimes isn't there.

I guess my advice would be to refuse to lose hope. As much as I think many post-college experiences, all the different ones (labor, grad school, etc.), can promote cynicism for different reasons, I would encourage everyone to hold on to hope. I think it's a political commitment to be hopeful. As soon as we give that up, we become apathetic in the way that the 1% wants us to be, and I refuse to do that. I couldn't manage that refusal if I did not have my students. My other piece of advice is to try to do something that brings that to you, whatever that is in your life, because I've witnessed too many people my age and older who are beaten down in many ways. As our time on earth gets shorter, they're getting less and less out of their opportunity to be here. That has not happened to me. At least I don't feel that way. As much as I am critical of many things that I don't have individual power to change, I see the changes that are coming. I see a whole generation of people who are invested in balanced lives. I mean balanced in every way: not just work-life balanced, but also sustainable. I'm excited that my children will have you all to look up to. I think there are things that are improving, even as I can list things that are not.

As much as I think it's part of the current human condition to be displaced, I also think we can be at home anywhere. I think that travel is really important. At the same time I think place-based identity is important, and I also think one of the commensurate experiences to reading in terms of growing empathy is travel. This is especially the kind of travel that is not tourism so much but more feeding curiosity about other ways of living in this world and honoring other ways of living in this world, so that you can make your own decisions about what you value the most. Sometimes it's really painful to experience… I've been to a few places that have been really difficult to leave. It was really great to be there, and in leaving I realize I can't recreate that whole way of life in another place. But it's still really valuable to know that there are these other ways of being. I think maintaining openness to new experiences and new places is important. It's especially important to know that you actually can belong anywhere; it depends on your own openness to the place. It will hopefully become open to you in response to your own capacity to be present in that space.

Which Side Are You On?

How Jericho Brown's *The Tradition* Restructures Faith and Home[1]

LUCCA SHIELDS

In the last fifty years, Americans have been going to church less. Political scientist Dr. Robert D. Putnam notes this in his book *Bowling Alone: The Collapse and Revival of American Community.* In the chapter "Religious Participation," Putnam analyzes this prominent membership decline, making the argument that while "the United States has traditionally been [one of] the most God-believing and religion-adhering, fundamentalist, and religiously traditional country in Christendom," this foundational pillar of the American community is fracturing (65). This not only has potent consequences to the social value of churches, but also to the prominent identity markers and modes of connection for milieu of American people no longer publicly proclaiming themselves followers of the Christian faith.

There are dozens of social and cultural ingredients that play into this phenomenon, from the succession of one generation by another and the inevitable rearrangement of social priorities, to the inability of church leadership to allow the institution to engage in a natural evolution. A major reason for the American decline of faith, argues critic Arielle Greenburg, is viscerally political: "In an era in which notions of faith often seem co-opted by fundamentalists and social conservatives, how can poets—a field and community comprised primarily of cynical progressives—confess their spiritual beliefs and attachments?" (39). When the loudest conversations related to Christianity are nationally represented as fundamentalist, overtly prejudiced, and painfully exclusive, members of younger generations who once followed their parents' faith are faced with that seems to be a binary decision. One must either reject the church entirely—which often involves renouncing a central piece of familial identity—or accept the institution's monumental failures and attempt to contort oneself into belonging.

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[1] This text is an excerpt of the full work, omitting several detailed analyses of individual poems, critical cross-examinations, and an exploration of the title for the Brown's collection.

By and large, organized Christianity is not afraid of loudly condemning the queer community, but research shows that the general population is witnessing a shifting of attitudes towards same-sex marriage. This may be a significant factor for the decline of religious participation. In 2004, 60% of U.S. Adults reported being opposed to same-sex marriage; in 2019, over 60% reported their support ("Attitudes on Same Sex Marriage"). It comes to no surprise that there are consequential changes in church attendance if Americans are adjusting their social prinicples while the church staunchly isn't.

At this point, the Coronavirus pandemic of 2020 hit, leaving lingering impressions on the engagement of already-fraying religious communities. During its reign, COVID ensured the absolute disintegration of community connection, social engagement, and physical congregation. Churches closed, in some cases permanently. Even as the world reopens, lingering damage is prominent: a survey conducted in 2023 found that 25% of U.S. Christians reported attending services in person less often than before the pandemic (Nortey and Rotolo). This represents a meaningful loss of engagement, community support and passion, and social relationships founded through this mode of social organization. With this, we lose the fulfillment of deep relationships and connection with like-minded people, perpetuating the American tendency towards isolation so entrenched within this capitalist structure through which we are socialized.

America is the largest economy in the world: being bred, educated, and politicized in the core of the capitalist empire has deep implications for the spiritual and psychological health of the populace. Traditionally, Americans fall back onto faith as a means for creating rich spiritual and civic lives, and without a significant replacement for this keystone of deep imaginative connection, the collapse of religious communities is a social casualty that cannot be understated. In this environment, in the middle of this isolationist tension, we encounter Jericho Brown.

Jericho Brown and the Black Southern Baptist Church

Jericho Brown, winner of the 2020 Pulitzer Prize in Poetry for his newest poetry collection *The Tradition*, is perhaps the most prominent American poet of the modern day. The collection interrogates American capitalism, lost connection, God and justice, and the fragility and complexity of living in the United States as a Black and queer man. *The Tradition* explores Brown's complex relationship with the church and God through a serious of experimental and intricate spiritual poems, many of which collapse boundaries between the sacred and the profane to subvert and reimagine not only theological traditions, but also traditions of American violence against black bodies, traditions of sexual violence and silent complacency, poetic traditions of form and structure, and traditions of exclusion within the American literary canon. Importantly, *The Tradition* is a product of this modern crisis of community; but rather than falling into the comfort of cynicism, Brown instead endeavors to reimagine meanings of belonging and home, offering alternatives for established Christian practices. Having been raised in a Black Southern Baptist Church in Shreveport, Louisiana, Jericho Brown professes the impact of the Black church service upon the tonal quality, language, and themes pervading his poetry. Church sermons were a great influence upon Brown's own rhetorical voice and aesthetic mission; as an homage to what was once his spiritual home, *The Tradition* contains the resonant lexicon of the Black church throughout.

"Deliverance" contains a combination of cultural language with biblical allusion: "When black vocabulary heralds home- / Made belief: *For any kind of havoc, there is / Deliverance!* She means that even after I am / Not listening" (ll. 12-14). The Black voice awakens the scripture and connects the speaker to the Word beyond his own awareness. Brown adopts a heavier dialect in "After Avery R. Young," turning his attention to a Black collective. "Blk is not a country, but I live there / Where even the youngest call you baby," he writes, "Sometimes you ain't we. Sometimes you is / Everybody" (ll. 1-4). This rhetorical tone within sophisticated form asserts the marginalization of the Black voice while reaffirming its aesthetic importance. It also presents a culturally significant method of conceptualizing God and the soul as energy that connects people together. By collapsing race and religion, "After Avery R. Young" leans into Brown's exploration of the continuous spirit and embodied Black mind. The erasure of the individual is what makes the poem so powerfully radical.

The Mount Canaan Missionary Baptist Church where Brown grew up was headed by the Reverend Harry Blake, who had served on Martin Luther King Jr.'s staff and is thought to be one of the key players in ending segregation in Northern Louisiana. Under his leadership, this church was extraordinarily active in the social and political movements of the

1960s and through the 1990s. The civil and social centrality of Black churches, particularly during the civil rights movement, was crucial to the survival of Black communities. The church is the longest-lasting social establishment in Black America, being that it "was traditionally the only Black-controlled institution of a historically oppressed people" and provided an opportunity for deep interpersonal relationships, community support, leadership, and the exercise of civic skills and engagement (Putnam 68). The same survey conducted by Nortey and Rotolo found that 35% of Black Protestants in America report attending church services less often than before the pandemic, which is higher than the national average. Black churches became fundamentally crucial to their communities for social, physical, and spiritual survival. Being a part of this energetic and especially active community as a child had a massive impact on the development of Brown's meaning-systems and values that inform his purpose as an adult. The Black church initially provided him with a sense of home and purpose, despite his eventual exile. His childhood love for its culture and community is still runs through him vigorously, but "I'm afraid that someone behind the pulpit will at any moment attempt to erase or degrade my existence as a gay man," he confesses (Kaminsky 83). The complex relationship between love and fear of the church is a sentiment that many individuals in the LGBTQ+ community can relate to deeply. Having a profound rooting in faith and spirituality becomes complicated by the threat of an authority figure—representing the teachings and moral values of the church (and for many, God himself)—who might use their position to invalidate or degrade one's very core identity. This tension reflects the deep longing for acceptance and community from a place and people that should offer unconditional love, but who, in this context, will likely deliver an acutely painful rejection.

This uncomfortable position in which Jericho Brown and countless queer individuals across the United States stand is not observed in much of the dominant conversations relating to contemporary faith culture. Putnam asserts that "the country is becoming ever more clearly divided into two groups—the devoutly observant and the entirely unchurched" (75). While this may follow political trends, Putnam makes a classic oversight in forgetting the huge swathes of people, especially young people, who fall somewhere in the middle. This in-between realm is where Jericho Brown lives and works brazenly.

Rejecting the Polar Axis

Brown is profoundly critical of the Christian institution, of its ardent followers, of its absolute nonbelievers, and of himself for his inconsistent credence. He stands in the middle of Putnam's axis between the "devoutly observant" and the "entirely unchurched" and makes a point to oscillate between these polarities in his work. He cannot (and refuses to) categorize himself as one or the other; in doing so, he addresses the consequential duplicities that exist in his presentation and ideology. By unequivocally claiming this dual nature (in part through his creation and dexterous naming of his poetic duplex form), Brown refuses to allow himself or his faith to be categorized or limited, and he does so with such fervent honesty that it becomes clear how essential doubt is to the nurturing one's personal spirituality. Faith without doubt is blind, ignorant, and promotes more pain than it does healing.

With "Foreday in the Morning," Brown presents a sophisticated emotional scene containing a conflict of several attitudes, examines the root of sentimental discord, and introduces a unique approach to connecting with one's emotions. The speaker's mother represents someone who subscribes to the capitalist conflation of hard work with devotion. She tells her son he can have "whatever [he] worked for. That means she was an American. / But she'd say it was because she believed / In God" (ll. 3-5). The God in this poem fulfills the mother's need for a higher purpose for achievement, but this God cannot complete the same function for her son. "I am ashamed of America / and confounded by God. I thank God for my citizenship," the speaker admits (ll. 8-9). These lines highlight the complexity of feeling gratitude for one's existence and upbringing to a fixed God who hasn't grown or developed alongside the follower. The concept of "God" requires adaptive modification to maintain relevance and value throughout one's life. Without an interrogation of one's God and a renovation of personalized faith, the believer experiences dissonance from their—or their family's—God. By accepting the discomfort of this position, Brown is able to ask questions without judgment, granting unequivocal permission to readers to consider where and why their own dissonances exist.

Brown refuses to turn his back on the institution or his faith. He has been denied, excluded, and violently condemned, but his refusal to retaliate exemplifies a dedication to more honest Christian philosophy. In doing so, he creates a new approach to faith. This unabashed and public contemplation is essential to his work—for those struggling in similar ways, this is a powerful affirmation of open safety and acceptance—which is, truly, at the heart of the Christian mission. By refusing to dismiss the church, and acknowledging where faith traditions help and where they hurt, Brown effectively includes *everyone* in his conversation. This creates a more open and accepting dialogue than most mainstream conversations, refreshing the assertion that American Christianity is still valuable and has great potential for good. Brown sees his experiences of exclusion from the Church as rooted in misunderstanding, and through *The Tradition*, he works to erode the boundaries that perpetuate isolation and fear. He is Black, queer, grew up in poverty, suffers from HIV, and affirms that it's okay to believe—in fact, we must believe. This is how we come home.

Iterations of God

There are many forms of God that unfold within *The Tradition*. These various Gods allude to the countless methods by which American Protestantism characterizes God though ever-dissenting definitions. The gulf between communities of faith remains substantial, and (as Putnam argues) continues to grow, with Western Protestants and Southern Evangelicals often standing on opposite ends in their impressions of God. It is rare to witness a conversation that bridges the gap between these oppositional theologies despite worshipping the same Bible and (theoretically) God. Brown makes a point to acknowledge these many iterations of God within *The Tradition* while accepting that he will never fully understand them.

Brown's speaker in "Hero" struggles to accept a God that created a world with such immense suffering and callousness: "Gratitude is black—/ Black as a hero returning from war to a country that banked on his death. / Thank God. It can't get much darker than that" (ll. 17-19). The speaker of "Foreday" is "confounded by God" (l.14). In the first "Duplex," Brown's speaker expresses the desire to "raise a building above the grasses, / A building of prayer against the grasses," reflecting the traditional human desire to develop the natural world in an instinct to protect oneself (ll. 10-11). The speaker longs to build a physical temple wherein they can pray for the repair of their body, "a temple in disrepair" (ll. 12,13). Hell in the fourth "Duplex" is a construct that forces people "to be good" (l. 7). Heaven in "A.D" and "Turn You Over" is not gentle nor comforting: "A man goes to heaven, you suffocate below the weight" ("AD" l. 16), and "though even the doctor who / Shut your eyes swears you're somewhere / As close as breath…/ You don't have breath," and that is terrifying ("Turn" ll. 9-11, 12). When breath equates life, Brown's speaker can't understand a life beyond it. HIV haunts "The Virus," whispering: "If I can't leave you / Dead, I'll have / You vexed" (ll. 14-16). Confusion and fear of death cannot be overcome by many of Brown's voices, especially when they attempt to intellectualize a greater power or a world beyond their physical plane. Nearly every poem in *The Tradition* interacts with one or another heady rendition of God, a life of sin, or a grim death—with each word, Brown further develops his spiritual world, which acknowledges and interrogates every iteration of God he's ever known. He discloses: "[T]he God in my poems is often referred to by speakers who... have him mixed up with a being that could inhabit, know, or possess anything but the best, so they are afraid of him" (Kaminsky 87). Brown uses many of his poems to further maintain that God—and in true believer's nature, he stands firm that his God is the true God—should never be feared.

Affirmation of Love Under the Christian God

For Brown, "belief and freedom are inextricably tied" (qtd. in Greenburg 40). While this could be read to mean that belief is a prerequisite for freedom, Brown may also be suggesting that a deliberate interrogation of one's belief systems brings about a freedom in one's identity. An investigation of central values and assumptions allows for a deeper understanding of one's narratives, creating the freedom of adjustment and expansion. *The Tradition* certainly engages in this kind of work, posing questions and presenting antithetical ideas to reach the root of complex spiritual problems. "I don't know what the issues are if they are not spirituality, sexual identity, and race," he discloses in interview (Kaminsky 87). For Brown, it seems that these issues are also inextricably tied: there can be no freedom of spirituality without racial and sexual freedom. This would be a highly controversial statement in the church.

A central building-block of Brown's recreation of home is the ardent affirmation of queer love within Christian doctrines—its beauty, complexity, violence, and tragedy are part of the inherent human experience of love and desire, and deserves the right to be recognized. The notion of sex under God is explored in "Of the Swan," as an extension of the story of Ganymede. In this poem, Brown's speaker wrestles with the sense of being emasculated through intercourse with a powerfully masculine God. At first, the speaker prays "like a woman / Ruined / By an ever-bitter extremity" before succumbing to the Lord, shedding his feathers, and becoming "a woman" through rape (ll. 9-11). The feathers can be seen here as the armor of masculinity, or perhaps the societal indicators associated with accepted maleness. "Immortality requires worship," the speaker asserts, and after completing this right of passage, he—or she—transitions into a state of femininity.

The poems "Rabbits" and "Ganymede" further assert sex and desire as truths of living. "At some point, I stopped thinking that desire was evil," Brown says (Kaminsky 84). His assertion that spiritual doctrine should not pose moral judgement upon the ways someone lives and loves—but that it should instead serve as a guide for living with abundant love—is by no means a radical statement, but by making this claim and applying it to this context, Brown exposes a massive inconsistency between core Christian values and traditions of church condemnation for loving 'incorrectly.' Brown has "learned what little difference / God saw if God saw me" ("Microscopes" ll. 14-15), which most likely alludes to both sexuality and race. By radically accepting what the church considers to be sinful and asserting the organic essences of being human, *The Tradition* refreshes the image of a righteous relationship, and celebrates a life of honesty.

The Duplex

The duplex form, Jericho Brown's own invention, is where imaginative space collides into the physical. A simultaneous evolution and grotesque disembowelment of the sonnet, Brown's poetic duplex is an extraordinarily self-conscious subversion of the literary canon. In her essay "'A poem is a gesture toward home': Formal Plurality and Black/Queer Critical Hope in Jericho Brown's *The Tradition*," Kaitlin Hoelzer points to Brown's decision to center queer and racialized love within the most famously canonical literary form, exposing the significant absence of such voices in academically accepted literature. By demonstrating his mastery of conventional form while methodically unravelling it, Brown "assert[s] Black/queer belonging in the traditional canon while also underscoring the limitations of that canon" (6). While echoing the formal tradition of the strict Eurocentric, heterosexual library of influentially 'superior' literature, the duplex does so with a certain keen realism and unfiltered violence. In this way, it disturbs the canonical tradition by asserting the equal sophistication of a different sect of voices.

To annex the sonnet is to make clear the systems of oppression that inform the regulations of the canon. “While the duplex critiques [the literary tradition], it does so not to abolish it but to expand and re-create the canon,” Hoelzer reminds us there is more to Black art than resistance and critique (10,11). While the duplex certainly does both, it also creates something entirely new; as Brown pushes further into himself, he pulls us into a physical duplex of our own.

In his first “Duplex,” Brown starts with the line: “A poem is a gesture toward home” (l. 1). Within the collapse of physical and emotional places of belonging, Brown uses his poetry to reach toward, or even manifest, imaginative places of belonging and safety within his literary world. This duplex then continues with a subversion of home, recalling “Steadfast and awful, my tall father / Hit hard as a hailstorm,” and the “sound of my mother weeping again” (ll. 7-8, 10). Whether or not *home* refers to something safe or violent—or both—, it comes tied with a sense of nostalgia, grief, and longing. There can be no return to the remembered home in this “Duplex” because “None of the beaten end up how we began” (l. 13). With the inclusion of “we,” Brown’s speaker alludes to a collective shifting of a community wrought in destruction (l. 13). The final word, “home,” has a different tone than its first iteration: now there is a formed collective, and they “gesture toward home” with something more powerful (l. 14). The first “Duplex” introduces us to one home, reminds us of the pain it bore, and concludes by inviting us into the beginning of a new tribe.

The second “Duplex” brings about a different kind of pain: the trauma of sexual assault and a victim’s desire to burn everything down and start anew. “The opposite of rape is understanding,” Brown begins (l. 1). Desperate to be seen and acknowledged, he expresses an intense instinct to “obliterate” a literary landscape filled with beautiful “flowers called paintbrushes” (ll. 8, 3). The field is blind to the speaker’s hurt, welcoming the “Men [who] roam shirtless as if none ever hurt me” (l. 6). Those who walk unprotected in the ecosystem are those who exert systemic power over others. The speaker’s rage toward an environment that permits such pain is a reminder that this poem exists in (and was produced from) the real world. It parallels the sociopolitical climate of modern America, wherein leaders of religious institutions, politics, and law enforcement facilitate exclusion and violence against marginalized people. Police brutality against Black civilians runs unchecked by justice, homophobia spurns religious hate against LGBTQ+ people, and victims of sexual cruelty are silenced into submission. As frustration, heartache and hurt boil over, the desire for retaliation against systemic violence explodes. “I want to obliterate the flowered field,” Brown writes, before correcting himself and adding, “my need for the field” (ll. 8, 9). This addendum is crucial: though it may seem that the only solution is to incinerate the entire system and start over, Brown reminds us that we rely on our traditions and histories for survival. We have this ecosystem to thank for our existence, and there is still good that blooms within it. So, instead, Brown’s speaker decides to “raise” a “building of prayer against the grasses” (ll.10, 11). He creates a place of his own for safety and worship.

While form is crucial to the work that Brown does, it engages in conversation with content in a way that makes it even more powerful. Within the canonical disarray of Brown’s literary interrogation is his disturbance of accepted content. Particularly within this form—where Brown seems to unleash himself entirely within the freedom of his own invention—queerness collides head-on with God. This is most poignant within the third and fourth duplexes.

Both the third and fourth duplexes deal with love: “I begin with love, hoping to end there. / I don’t want to leave a messy corpse,” Brown writes in the third (ll.1-2). He begins by presenting two possible outcomes, one violent and one beautiful. He concludes with: “I grow green with hope. I’d like to end there” (l. 14). The fourth duplex acknowledges the precarity of Black/queer life but also emphasizes pleasure and love of the now. “I was too young to be reasonable,” he writes, so “You can’t accuse me of sleeping with a man” (ll. 6, 14). The speaker speaks of love and death simultaneously, of “dipp[ing] weed in embalming fluid” and “mak[ing] love” all over “the city” (ll. 8, 10, 13). This duplex is face-paced and breathless, generating speed and passion as it goes. It’s defensive, but proud.

The duplexes within *The Tradition* are the most radical of the collection. They make their own claim to Heaven, occupying “that far terrain / Between Promise and Apology” (“Ganymede” ll. 18-19). They build themselves up among the rubble of the kingdom of fundamental Christianity, offering a new place to build connection within oneself, with others, and with God. They join inside “Duplex: Cento” and complete Brown’s invitation into his allegorical house of community. The continuous “juxtaposition of tradition and progress” pushes readers to this final duplex, “as if it were a physical destination to which Brown has driven us one auspicious night,” writes critic Bryan Byrdlong. Each poem contributes some nail, some wood, some shingle to a house that we weren't aware was being assembled around us.

The fifth and final poem is a duplex entwined with the cento, which is a poetic form traditionally made up of lines from other poets. Here, Brown uses his own lines from his previous duplexes, further collapsing the form—and the collection—into itself. Even while introducing and welcoming another poetic tradition, Brown only utilizes it so far as it remains productive, asserting the value of the formal tradition while reinventing it into something deeply radical. "Duplex: Cento" dismantles the other duplexes, forcing them side-by-side and generating new meanings from echoed lines and phrases. "My first love drove a burgundy car," from the first duplex (l. 5) becomes "my tall father / Was my first love. He drove a burgundy car," in the last (ll. 13-14). The "messy corpse" from the third (l. 2) is left in the "field of flowers" of the second (l. 2), "obliterated" and "obliterating lilies of the field" in the final (ll. 8, 9). This final poem becomes a duplex of duplexes, effectively creating a literary structure that acknowledges the simultaneous existence of many narrative voices and the possibility for those voices to come together to create a different story. There's something inescapable and spiraling about this, but Brown doesn't attempt to get out; rather, he pushes further in and drags us along with him.

This is Brown's final assertion to us: we are already here together. We are and will always be connected, regardless of our awareness or acceptance of it. Individual community members or subgroups may live a wall away from others, and therefore miscommunicate or misunderstand, but we cannot deny the existence of this larger body holding us together. We have a need to commune with things that are bigger than us, and Brown gives us the opportunity hold everything—everything that we are and experience—as one in this imaginative space with the possibility of revising the stories and traditions we already have. With the duplexes and the rest of *The Tradition*, he creates a literary guide for revisioning new kinds of community. We do not have to resign ourselves to the spiritual void of Putnam's polar axis; Brown imagines a new home for us, providing us with the possibility of a way out. If he believes, then so must we.

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No Home for Black Theatre in America

Examining Criticism and Reception from *A Raisin in the Sun* to Now

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MIA TORRES

Unfortunately for fruit lovers, *A Raisin in the Sun* is not about the dried fruit; rather, it is a play about the withering dreams of a Black family in 1950s Chicago. The title of the play is derived from Langston Hughes' 1951 poem "Harlem." The play, written by Lorraine Hansberry, opens using the poem as an epigraph. The poem considers the ways that dreams could go to waste, particularly the dream for racial equity. However, although Hansberry set out to make a play about racial inequity and the dreams of a Black family, her intentions were overlooked by critics. Even so, Hansberry's play sent waves through the theatre community. *Raisin* was wildly successful, but years later, the play's positive reception has been called into question. Scholars ask about the validity of the play as a piece of protest art when it had such widespread appeal. A number of plays have followed in the footsteps of *Raisin* since its debut, and they face the same issues that Hansberry faced. How can a play be a protest piece and make a cultural impact but still have wide appeal and enough critical success to continue its run? This paper will examine the reception of *A Raisin in the Sun* and compare it to the reception of a number of contemporary plays to understand the difficulties Black theatre-makers have continued to face since *Raisin*.[1]

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[1] For the sake of brevity, the published version of this paper has removed the examination of the reception of the following plays: *Lysistrata* (a 1936 play produced by a Negro Repertory Company and sponsored by the Works Project Administration, but shut down by the WPA after its opening night for its portrayal of sexually empowered Black women), *Some Like It Hot* (a well-received contemporary Broadway musical that recentered Blackness and queerness in the Jazz movement), *Ain't No Mo* (a contemporary Broadway musical that was criticized by white audiences for trying to cover too much ground, and praised by Black audiences for showcasing various walks of life), and *Jaja's African Hair Braiding* (a musical depicting West African immigrants and their clients in a hair salon, celebrating the diversity and beauty of Black women; its overt political themes led to its closure on Broadway after seven weeks). The original version of this piece also includes a discussion of broader challenges that all Broadway artists face and how these challenges are more significant for Black theatre makers.

Lorraine Hansberry and *A Raisin in The Sun*

Lorraine Hansberry's *A Raisin in the Sun* made its Broadway debut in 1959 and received widespread acclaim and praise for its universal appeal. Despite the play being centered around a Black Chicago family, it made its way into Black and white audiences' hearts. The play follows the Younger family as they await the arrival of an insurance check that could potentially change their lives. When the money arrives, the family's matriarch purchases a home in an all-white neighborhood. The family members express concern about the neighborhood's racial makeup, but she reveals that she never intended to cause a social upheaval when she says, "I just tried to find the nicest place for the least amount of money for my family" (Hansberry 93). All the same, the neighborhood sends a representative to buy their house from them to prevent them from moving in. In addition to this narrative arc, the eldest son embarks on a risky business venture, jeopardizing the family finances, and the younger daughter explores her African heritage. The play concludes on a hopeful note as the family decides to move into the white neighborhood.

The political ethic of *Raisin* is centered on the obstacles Black people face in America's racist and sexist socio-economic structure. The themes of female empowerment, racial segregation, classicism, and racism make up the core of the play. Hansberry was politically and socially minded, with ideas about racism, gender inequity, and homophobia. Before *Raisin*, she wrote about the African struggles for liberation and their impact on the world. She worked with other Black intellectuals such as James Baldwin and W. E. B. DuBois. Her diaries reveal that she was a lesbian and deeply concerned with gay rights and sexism. Her background and focus on racial and gender inequality are clearly at play and present in her work which has been compared to the work of Britain's "Angry Young Men." She uses her characters to voice her personal opinions, and she also uses them to subvert popular opinion. Dr. Sarah Orem, a faculty member at the University of Southern California, writes that Hansberry herself referred to "Angry Young Men" to explain the Black rage she aimed to express with *Raisin* (Orem).

Orem argues that while the character Walter Lee Younger is widely regarded as the "Angry Young Man" in the play, Hansberry uses the character Beneatha Younger as a Black feminist revision of the "Angry Young Man" trope. Beneatha refashions Walter's anger by ironically mimicking his anger to critique and undermine him. Hansberry's portrayal of Beneatha's double consciousness is an example of how Hansberry uses satire to empower the women in the play by demonstrating that the women are aware of social expectations and can maneuver around them without the men realizing.

Furthermore, Hansberry subverts the genre of the "well-made" play by mimicking it to make a point about theatre as a form. She effectively uses the archetypal structure, but in the final scene, Walter reveals that he has lost the family's money, the play continues instead of ending as a tragedy. No Deus ex machina resolves the conflict; instead, the family perseveres. The family is knowingly moving into a hostile neighborhood that took drastic measures to prevent them from moving in, and the family will not be welcomed or accepted. Given this hopeful yet doomed ending, Hansberry departs from the "well-made play" and gives the audience something unexpected but altogether more grounded in reality. Thus, through the subversion of the theatrical genre and Beneatha's character, Hansberry positioned *Raisin* as a political mouthpiece and piece of protest art.

In general, the original 1959 production of *Raisin* was incredibly well received and nominated for four Tony awards. It was a monumental moment in theatre history, being the first play by a Black female playwright and Black director to be produced on Broadway. With an almost entirely Black cast, who were represented as real people and not caricatures, mass Black audiences were drawn to Broadway. According to the director Lloyd Richards, it was the first time a play had reached such a wide Black audience (Corley). Years after the play closed, Frank Rich wrote for the New York Times that *Raisin* "changed American Theatre forever" (Rich). It resonated with audiences and has been reproduced hundreds of times. It had two revivals on Broadway in 2004 and 2014, respectively. In 1961, Hansberry was commissioned to write a film adaptation produced with the original cast and received several accolades. It was adapted for TV, radio, and as a musical. *Raisin*'s success secures Hansberry's legacy as one of the greatest American playwrights.

Even with all its success, the reception of the play reveals a racial divide and the issues that Hansberry faced as a Black theatre-maker. White critics praised Hansberry for writing a play that was not about race. Instead, it was a play about a family "that just happened to be Black."

In fact, Hansberry was repeatedly misquoted, saying, "I'm not a Negro writer—but a writer who happens to be a Negro" in addition to a misquotation[2] that echoed the praise of the white critics (Bernstein 23). Yet, while pleased with the play, Black critics and audiences felt it did not go far enough in its politics. They called it "assimilationist" and argued that it appealed to the white gaze and was not truly intended for Black audiences.

But, as revivals and reimagined versions of the play have revealed since the 1959 premiere, much of Hansberry's politics were erased from the original production. Just before the show premiered, the producers removed scenes that perhaps were at the political heart of Hansberry's play. They claimed that they did not contribute to the plot's forward motion and prolonged the play which was unfitting for an unheard-of playwright's debut (Hansberry 6). In one scene, a discussion between the family's matriarch and her neighbor explicitly reveals Hansberry's concern with racially segregated neighborhoods. Another scene depicts Beneatha receiving backlash for sporting her natural curls and expresses Hansberry's interest in Black aesthetics and a return to Africa.

Decades later, audiences of the most complete version of the play with the reinserted scenes and other additions Hansberry made post-premiere can see that Hansberry envisioned an explicitly political play aimed at white and Black audiences. Robert Nemiroff, Hansberry's husband and the producer of her plays, commented, "When Lorraine Hansberry read the reviews—delighted by the accolades, grateful for the recognition, but also deeply troubled—she decided in short order to put back many of the materials excised" (Hansberry 11). Evidently, although the scenes had been removed by necessity, Hansberry wanted her work to do more. The show's producers likely identified that the removed scenes would have created too much critical distance between the play and white audiences and feared that it would be poorly received; after all, until *Raisin*, there had never been a commercially successful Black play.

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[2] In an article for the New York Times, Hansberry was quoted saying, "I told them this wasn't a 'Negro play.' It was a play about honest-to-God, believable, many-sided people who happened to be Negroes." However, in her scrapbook, beside a clipping of this interview, she wrote, "Never said NO such thing. Miss Robertson [the interviewer] goofed—letter sent post-haste—Tune in next week." The letter of correction was never printed and has not been located, and we cannot know what Hansberry really said. (Bernstein 22-24) Even so, the frequent use of these "quotes" to back up their distinction between race and the Younger family's obstacles illustrates that white critics were willing to go as far as to invent "quotations" to defend their racist ideologies and reject intersectionality.

The History of Black Theatre in America

The producers' fear was not unfounded. Although Black artists have played a crucial role in shaping theatrical entertainment since the inception of American theater, the history of Black theatre is not without its difficulties. In the 19th century, when Black artists were not inventing new forms, such as jazz music or tap dance, they were on stages performing in vaudeville and minstrel shows. Minstrelsy was originally an art form intended for lower-class audiences, but eventually, it became such a sensation that it made its way into opera houses, and it was the first uniquely American entertainment. Although minstrel shows were undeniably a degrading representation of Black people, Black theatre artists participated in this popular theatrical form and were appreciated and celebrated by white audiences (Wilson 348). Without them, American theatre may never have evolved beyond the popular European melodramas of the late 18th century. Black artists pushed the theatrical form in many directions, and despite the dark history of minstrelsy in American theatre, for the performers, it was a chance for creative expression and a step toward upward class mobility. Furthermore, the New Deal led to the formation of the Federal Theatre Project, which sought to continue developing American theatre. Although the FTP was short-lived, it led to the formation of numerous all-Black theatre troupes across the country called "Negro Theatre Units" (Becker). Even with the development of these theatre troupes, Black theatre artists dealt with censorship when the material challenged the status quo.[3]

Therefore, Hansberry's producers reasonably sought to avoid provocation, and they changed the play so that it *was* assimilationist and *did* appeal to the white gaze. They succeeded; Raisin received numerous accolades and ran for several months. Hansberry made a name for herself in the theatre community and wrote two more very successful plays until her passing in 1965.

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[3] The 1936 production of *Lysistrata* by the "Seattle Negro Repertory Company" serves as a compelling parallel to the challenges faced by producers of Hansberry's *A Raisin in the Sun*. Despite high demand and critical acclaim after its opening night, the production was abruptly shut down by the Works Project Administration (WPA), citing immorality and excessive sexual content. However, scholars argue that this was a pretext for censorship, as other forms of entertainment in Seattle were more sexually explicit. Theater scholar Ron West suggests three main reasons for the shutdown: the portrayal of sexuality by Black performers challenged social norms, it allowed Black individuals, particularly women, to break free from stereotypical roles, and it intensified power dynamics in the original text, which was perceived as a threat to societal order by conservatives. (Guthu; West, 103)

The Racist Reception of *A Raisin in the Sun*

Moreover, scholars who have studied the reception of *Raisin* have noted the paradox of the play's "universal" appeal and its focus on particular [minority] issues. Even though the most politically vocal scenes were removed from the original production, *Raisin* is undeniably about the Black experience and has an underlying political message. Dr. Robin Bernstein, a cultural historian specializing in the United States' racial formation, has written at length about this paradoxical reception to *Raisin*. She argues that the white inclination to separate the Younger family's racial identity from their strife and argue that they are "just like any family" is a racist argument because it implies that a Black family is not "just like any family" with the implication that Black people are disqualified from being human. Furthermore, she writes:

> The desperate creation and maintenance of the appearance of the paradox—which in turn created and maintained a static boundary between universal and particular, white and Black—white people created the illusion that they could collect minority experiences without being collected themselves. (25)

Essentially, white audiences enjoyed *Raisin* because consuming Black culture alleviated white concerns about being racist. Moreover, the original production did not sufficiently challenge white hegemony, so they did not feel threatened. Therefore, they could argue that racism was a non-issue because of their consumption and appreciation for *Raisin*. Additionally, theatre scholar Margaret B. Wilkerson writes, "Because the humanity of this family was so brilliantly exposed, white audiences could see themselves reflected in those Black faces" (441). Thus, seeing a Black family dealing with such "human" issues was so surprising that instead of recognizing the family as human, white audiences recognized them as non-Black.

Although Black critics paid attention to *Raisin*'s political ethics, white critics avoided the topic in reviews. By ignoring the racial themes of the play, white critics demonstrated their prejudiced belief that a Black female playwright could not possess the ability to be interested, form an opinion, or argue about racial issues. Moreover, Dr. Diana Adesola Mafe, a professor of postcolonial, gender, Black studies, and English at Denison University, argues that white critics argued against intersectionality. They not only insisted that the Younger family's problems had little to do with race but that the gender-related issues the female characters faced were separate from race. The white critics' persistent misquoting of Hansberry to support the distinction between Blackness, the play's universality, and Hansberry herself as a Black writer exemplifies their outright refusal to accept intersectionality as a concept. However, the success of the play, brought on by the characters' complexities, is due to the intersection of race, gender, and class.

The Impact of A *Raisin in the Sun*

Raisin has inspired theatre-makers to continue Hansberry's work. Plays following *Raisin* centered around race and gender are popular but receive mixed reviews. Immediately related to *Raisin* was a theatrical event marketed as "The Raisin Cycle." It was composed of the plays *Clybourne Park* (2010), written by Bruce Norris, and *Beneatha's Place* (2013), written by Kwame Kwei-Armah. The event received national attention and occurred in Baltimore in 2013, and all three plays were shown together (Gohn).

Clybourne Park, written by white playwright Bruce Norris, takes place during and fifty years after the events of *Raisin*. The action takes place in the house the Younger family moves into. In the first act, the white neighbors express their displeasure about a Black family moving into the neighborhood. In the second act, a white couple moves into the now all-Black neighborhood. This play does not concern the Younger family or the obstacles they face as a Black family. Instead, it transforms the sole white character from the source material into a sympathetic character. The play does discuss the racially restrictive housing codes that still exist in the neighborhood but fails to make a clear argument for racial justice. It deals with other issues, such as PTSD and homophobia. Overall, the play concerns how white people react to changing spaces. The play was incredibly well received by critics, winning the Pulitzer Prize for Drama in 2011 and Olivier and Tony awards for Best New Play in 2011 and 2012, respectively (Gohn).

However, scholars have criticized *Clybourne Park* for deviating from Hansberry's political message. In an article for the Hopkins Review, theatre critic Jack Gohn writes that the plot concludes that white people build and repair, but Black people destroy. Norris essentially confirms the all-white community's fears about Black people in Act One when, by Act Two, the now all-Black neighborhood is seen by whites as a place in need of fixing and gentrification. Furthermore, Norris fails to recognize the importance of race in the neighborhood. In an interview with the *New York Times*, he said, "Poorer neighborhoods, be they white, Black, brown, or whatever, look different from rich neighborhoods. It's about money, not about race—except indirectly" (Weinert-Kendt). Norris's comment is another example of white audiences' inability to see the importance of intersectionality, as argued by Bernstein and Mafe. There is a clear correlation between race and wealth, and Norris's failure to recognize that (even in his own play, through the way Clybourne Park's property values decline once it becomes an all-Black space) demonstrates an incredibly willful ignorance of racial injustice.

As a response to the political failures of *Clybourne Park*, Kwei-Armah wrote Beneatha's Place. Like *Clybourne Park*, it takes place shortly after the conclusion of *Raisin* and then jumps forward in time. *Beneatha's Place* follows the titular character after the conclusion of *Raisin*. As in the original play, she is concerned with understanding her African heritage, reflecting the playwright's own journey. She decides to follow her romantic interest to his home country of Nigeria and contribute to the Nigerian struggle for independence. However, the fight for independence results in brutal violence and the death of her husband. In Act Two, she makes her way back to the US as a professor of Black studies. Beneatha is outnumbered in the department, as she is one of the few Black people in the program. Her white colleagues propose to turn the program's focus into "Critical Whiteness Studies." Thus, the question that Kwei-Armah seeks to answer is also about white people occupying what should be Black spaces, but unlike Norris, he concludes that any destruction is the fault of whites, not Black people (Gohn).

This play was well-received and had a much more hopeful ending than *Clybourne Park*; however, it was criticized for not making much sense as a sequel. Technical issues in the writing take away from its political message and make it difficult to believe the characters. The play inaccurately represents how long it takes Beneatha to start or change careers and depicts Beneatha's character differently from the source material (Gohn). Few reviewers comment on the politics, as the errors in the writing distract them from Beneatha's obstacles.

Reception of Contemporary Black Plays

On the other hand, last year, majorly successful Black theatrical productions on Broadway received incredible reviews and were positively praised for their political statements. For example, a very successful play that had critics raving about its politics is the meta-theatrical play *A Strange Loop*. The musical won a Pulitzer Prize for Drama and two Tonys (Best Musical and Best Book of a Musical). Inspired by the life of the playwright, Michael R. Jackson, the show follows Usher, a "fat, Black, queer man" and theatre usher in the process of writing his own musical about someone just like him who is also writing a musical about a man just like him. Critics call the play funny, edgy, and brilliant. It embraces meta-theatre, plays with genre, and embraces pop culture with numerous references to Tyler Perry and frequently name-dropping other popular Broadway musicals. The play deals with Usher's various struggles brought on by his intersectionality. He faces homophobia, body-shaming, and racism, as well as incessant comparison to other Black creators. Critics praised the musical for keeping its themes and Usher's struggles at the forefront after the move from off-Broadway to Broadway. However, there was criticism that the play's "hot takes" about Broadway felt hypocritical because the production had subverted its own criticisms by successfully making that transition (Phillips).

Despite receiving some minor criticism, *A Strange Loop* achieved significant success and appeal and held considerable importance within the musical theater landscape. Nonetheless, it concluded its run before the end of 2023. The brief runs of masterpieces of Black theatre demonstrate a problem in American theatre as a whole. Dr. David Savran, a musical theatre professor at Cornell University, wrote that *A Strange Loop* would not last long because he considers it "the kind of intimate masterpiece that too easily gets lost in a Broadway house" (221). Savran has located an issue with the Broadway industry. Pieces like *A Strange Loop*, which have strong political themes, are appreciated and praised. But unless they are a smash hit that does not challenge audiences head-on, is supported by a huge company, or is headlined by huge stars, then the production will not last long enough to reach a wide audience. This is a problem that, since the COVID-19 pandemic, has become an increasingly important issue. With rising ticket costs, audiences are less likely to see a new, experimental, or challenging show. Rather, they prefer to see the Broadway mammoths that have kept their shows going for several years, as those shows guarantee a “good time” (Smith). Therefore, it is becoming increasingly difficult for Black theatre-makers to feel encouraged to be political in their work because even if it succeeds, the priority in American theatre is commerciality.

Even so, several other Black plays have not sacrificed their political message despite the pressure to be commercial and have wide appeal. For example, the choreopoem, *For Colored Girls Who Have Considered Suicide / When the Rainbow Isn’t Enuf*, written by Ntozake Shange, premiered in 1976 and is a combination of choreography set to poetry and music. The musical, produced by and intended for Black women, had a positive reception from Black audiences and continues to garner praise in Black feminist thought. The play focuses on seven women and the oppression they face in a racist and sexist society. It is adamant in its intersectional feminist politics, explicitly naming men as the enemy of women. In a review for *Theatre Journal*, theatre critic Josephine Lee writes, “Although the play does feature memorable diatribes against male abusers and oppressors, it idealizes women’s relationships with other women in an equally compelling way” (Lee). Black audiences felt the production was empowering and embraced it for effectively capturing the life of Black women in America.

Yet, it was not as critically acclaimed as other productions mentioned so far. The 1976 Broadway production and the 2022 revival received multiple Tony nominations but only walked away with the award for Best Actress in 1977. Tony’s define what critics find representative of “excellent live Broadway theatre.” The snubbing of *For Colored Girls* demonstrates how critics do not see politically provocative pieces of the Black female experience as important as *Company*, for example (the 2022 Stephen Sondheim revival, which beat out two musicals about the Black experience in America), or other pieces of theatre with unchallenging wide appeal.

The 2010 Tyler Perry film adaptation of *For Colored Girls* departed significantly from the source material and received horrible reviews. The critical consensus is that the film fail failed to portray the intersectionality of Black women, which was so important to the original production and appreciated by Black audiences (Reed). The film felt incomplete to many critics, including the playwright. Mafe attributes this to the fact that the musical’s success was due to the intersectional qualities of the production. The choreopoem was invented by Shange and praised for its blending of American and African art (dance, music, and oral poetry). Yet once again critics rejected intersectionality as a concept by insisting on the distinction between Shange's African and American identities.

There was a positive white reception to *For Colored Girls*, and Mafe calls attention to how the satisfaction of the White gaze must be noted when the gaze's object and the intended audience are "colored girls" (Mafe). Bernstein and Mafe write about the white audience's "impulse to access perceived authentic Black culture" (Bernstein 18). She argues that the white gaze's attempt to label Black plays as "authentic" leads to a static and flat understanding of Blackness, eventually resulting in a racist reading of any text focused on the Black experience.

The reception of *For Colored Girls* demonstrates the complications that Black artists face. Making art about Blackness exposes it to the critical white gaze. If the art is too challenging, then it will immediately be rejected. It will not be seen as about Blackness if it deals with universal themes. If it is intersectional, then it will be read as being about one issue. Finally, and most unfortunately, if the play "authentically" portrays Blackness and is specific about the issues facing Black Americans, then white audiences will see it as the only way Blackness can exist. This perpetuates frequent unfair comparisons between the work and reception of different Black artists. Thus, Black artists are limited by the need to challenge and appeal to the white gaze. This results in many obstacles that nearly make producing a "successful" play impossible.

The Resilience of Black Theatre

Yet, despite the difficulties Black theatre-makers face, there is a massive effort from the Black community to continue telling stories that redefine what Black theatre can be. New Black plays are constantly produced nationwide. For example, in Hansberry's hometown of Chicago, the Black Playwright's Festival is produced by the Black Playwright's Initiative for the Black Ensemble Theatre (Taylor). There is a clear trend in new theatre to discuss intersectional issues. *A Strange Loop* and other contemporary Black plays demonstrate that young Black queer people are passionate about making theatre about their lived experiences. *For Colored Girls* continues Hansberry's work of empowering young Black women. Furthermore, revivals of other important Black plays from the 20th century continue to see success. Recently on Broadway, a revival of the 1961 *Purlie Victorious* has received rave reviews for its prevalence

(Green, "Purlie"). In early 2023, the revival of the 1991 *Ohio State Murders* was praised for its poignant themes (Green, "Who Commits"). Notably, both plays were called "timely," further evidence that the issues Black people faced in the last century are no less present today.

Additionally, Black theatre-makers have always used classic works to argue that—contrary to what white critics would like to believe—the universal themes also apply to Black people. For example, there was a 1936 production dubbed *"Voodoo" Macbeth*, directed by Orson Welles, with an all-Black cast and set in Haiti. It ran in Harlem for 10 sold-out weeks before having a phenomenal run on Broadway and on tour (Clifford).[4] This play was pivotal in the history of Black theatre, and marked the moment when white audiences finally recognized the talent of Black artists beyond the caricatured roles they tended to play before this production. Orson Welles declared that this production was the best work of his career (Estrin 180). It is worthwhile to point out that this production had a largely Black audience. While most theatre audiences are made up of a white population, it would be remiss to say that Black people do not go to the theatre. There has always been a space for Black audiences, and new productions are making an even larger and more intentional space for them today. For example, following in the footsteps of "*Voodoo*" *Macbeth* was the recent three-day run of *The Tempest* in Manhattan, which was another all-Black adaptation of a Shakespeare classic (Green, "In Central").

The Future of Black Theatre

Ultimately, there is no denying that Black artists make up a large part of American theatre-makers. Since *Raisin*, many Black playwrights have continued writing stories of Black characters facing intersectional issues, such as queerness, gender inequality, and socio-economic injustice. Yet, with the richness and density of these characters, white audiences continuously have difficulty seeing how these issues are interrelated. Black audiences continue to ask Black theatre-makers to do more in their work and cover every aspect of Black life. However, the necessity of having wide appeal to have a (financially) successful show prevents Black artists from satisfying the desires of Black audiences. Therefore, although white reception to challenging pieces of Black theatre has improved, they are not yet awarding them, and the challenge of balancing the Black and white gaze persists. Unfortunately, examining the reception of Lorraine Hansberry's original production of *Raisin* and multiple contemporary Black works reveals that little has changed since 1959.

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[4] The play was produced by the "Negro Theatre Unit" of New York as part of the same Federal Theatre Project that led to the production of *Lysistrata*.

Critics and white audiences today must recognize their failure to appreciate the intersectional issues that Black people in America face. They are responsible for the historical neglect and prevention of Black theatrical success by refusing to award their work. The responsibility for a Black play's ability to be a protest piece, make a cultural impact, have wide appeal and critical success to continue its run ultimately lies on white Americans; Black theatre-makers are doing good work, but it is unacknowledged. White critics and audiences currently control the theatrical landscape, and they must transform it so that Black artists do not have to sacrifice their political message to achieve critical and financial success. Furthermore, commercial success and wide appeal should not be seen as a nullification of political relevance—as it was for *Raisin*. Black playwrights should feel encouraged by the increased appreciation for the amount of new Black theatre and continue to produce challenging work. They should not feel limited by the pressure to appeal to white audiences. Instead, they must continue to create work that draws Black audiences to Broadway. Lorraine Hansberry opened a door for white audiences to see into Black America, and Black theatre-makers have kept that door open. It is now up to white critics and audiences to go through it and redesign the theatrical space so that it is not untenable for Black artists.

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Not So (Afro-)'Surreal'

Toni Morrison's Uses of the Literary Imaginary, Anti-Capitalism, and Afro-Surrealism to Create a Future for Racialized and Gendered Subjects in *Paradise*

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New York Times critic Michiko Kakutani famously wrote a review of Toni Morrison's 1998 novel *Paradise*—which Morrison herself alluded to as an "eleventh-grade book report,"—where Kakutani calls the novel, "a contrived, formulaic book that mechanically pits men against women, old against young, the past against present" (Kakutani). Later in the review, Kakutani remarks that "this novel remains an earthbound hodgepodge … It's neither grounded in closely observed vignettes of real life, nor lofted by the dreamlike images the author has used so dexterously in the past to suggest the strangeness of American history." Where this hasty reviewer sees a lack of familiarity with past texts by Morrison, the devoted reader is invited into an alternate reality. When the audience accepts the invitation, Morrison creates the path toward an imaginary transcendence of binaries begging to be brought into the material world. Though Kakutani may be unready for the request, it is there nonetheless; Morrison's polarizing words cannot be ignored, for better or for worse.

Ultimately, I wish to outline how Morrison's *Paradise* engages in radically anti-capitalist and decolonial work through absurd yet lived realities. Using Kimberlé Crenshaw's work on intersectionality along with feminist theorists Helene Cixous and Luce Irigaray, I will be able to dissect what Morrison does by muddying the role of the Convent women in *Paradise* by creating surreal images of their afterlife. I'm using some historical backing to make this claim through Robin D.G. Kelley's explanation of racial capitalism and the role that race has historically had when the creation of capitalism and its perpetuation were at stake. An intersectional approach me sense, as D.G. Kelley and Irigaray posit that racial bodies and feminized bodies are the foundation of capitalist society respectively. Crenshaw already argues that once Black women are free, then all will be free, but what role does this have in dismantling a capitalist system? And how do we get out of that? I argue that Morrison engages in liberatory imaginative fiction to create very concrete and real solutions out of a racist, patriarchal, heteronormative capitalist society. By citing D. Scot Miller's Afro-Surreal Manifesto and application of this theory woven into *Paradise*, I hope to illustrate that perhaps the novel is not really "surreal" at all. Rather, her imagery and the reader's understanding are the only ways Morrison can conceptualize the decolonization of marked bodies through language. Once we open our minds to her ideas, perhaps we will be able to transcend what we know as reality, just like the women of Morrison's Convent.

Capitalism's Roots

"'Here', he said. 'This is our place.' Well, it wasn't of course, not yet anyway" (Paradise*, 98*).

Theories surrounding capitalist origins and subordination tactics have facilitated my deduction that Morrison is an anticapitalist writer who uses literary imagination to create futures for the marginalized.[1] Feminist theorist and philosopher Luce Irigaray's chapter "Women on the Market," discusses women's historical role in capitalist society. She explains how the exchange of women's bodies has been the foundation of capitalism and accumulation while insisting that the commodification of women is the underpinning of society as we know it. She argues, "It is because women's bodies—through their use, consumption, and circulation—provide for the condition making social life and culture possible, although they remain an unknown 'infrastructure' of the elaboration of that social life and culture" (171). The female body is a bearer and utility to be used and exchanged by men, and the exchange value is created by the extended use and reuse of men within the same community (175). Irigaray also highlights relationships between men and women in what she deems "sociocultural endogamy", which intrinsically "forbid[s] commerce with women" (172).[2] Under capitalist rule, women must not know their use-exchange value or be able to interrogate what their value would mean. If women were able to do such a thing, they would be aware of the power they possess and aware of their necessity as reproducers and subjects—thus, “shattering of the monopolization of the proper name (and of what it signifies as appropriative power) by father-men” (Irigaray 173). Allowing sociocultural exogamy would permit women’s liberation. No longer would there be a binary of producers and subjects. And for Irigaray, the binary as we know it between men and women would disappear. She does not provide her readers with a way out; yet for an audience seeking to problematize and revolutionize the way capitalist ideology functions through her lens, release from the structure is imminent.

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[1] In addition to Irigaray, also see Hélène Cixous' "The Laugh of the Medusa" for further explanation of women's writing dismantling ideals about capitalist production.

[2] Endogamy here is the exchange of women as sexual partners within one community, whereas exogamy would mean that women exit their community to "trade" themselves with members of other economies. An exogamy would rely too heavily on the production and exchange between women and men in varying locations, and would not fit into Irigaray's conception of capitalism.

Another thinker who wishes to demystify capitalist regimes through historicizing colonial projects in their racial origins is historian Robin D.G. Kelley. As a student of Black Marxist Cedric Robinson, Kelley has expanded on what Robinson deems as “racial capitalism” to create a broader picture of what racialized bodies have meant for the accumulation of land and labor. In a keynote speech at the University of Washington, Kelley breaks down that, “Racial capitalism is not merely a type of capitalism, say as opposed to non-racist capitalism; you don’t have non-racist capitalism, it doesn’t exist … The term simply signals that capitalism developed and operates in a racist system, or a racial regime” (“What is Racial Capitalism”). He moves to lay out the factual origins of ‘racializing’ as we know it. As he notes, “capital didn’t begin with money ... Money is just a medium of exchange. Capital begins with seizing control of natural resources; there's land, water, fuel—and creating cheap labor to turn these resources into commodities” (16:46-17:07). This process began with the European shift from feudalism to capitalism; the only other element of capital accumulation needed was violence.

Kelley asserts that the next steps for landholders to create and solidify the white supremacist capitalists to come were, “conquest, colonization, dispossession, slavery, and environmental destruction” (“What is Racial Capitalism” 19:27). He highlights that this violent process begins in Europe, not during the Transatlantic Slave Trade. Irish, Jewish, Slavic, and Roman peoples began to be othered through Anglo/Germanic ideology about the racial purity of certain sects of people (12:55-13:25). Illegitimate race science began to back up these claims, and land that was once held as commons was violently stripped from local people. Private property became a natural right, “when for centuries it’s the other way around. Access to the Earth and its abundant resources was the natural right” (18:20-29). This loss of the commons is something many theorists, like Silvia Federici, have outlined in their work. Here, Kelley does the work to link this communal land deprivation to the racializing processes of European colonizers.[3]

Morrison's Linguistic Agitation

"[T]he words evoke memories neither one has ever had... the ease of coming back to love begun" (Paradise, *318*).

Toni Morrison often expands on her major works post-publishing, and two pieces that have helped to situate what Morrison is getting at when she writes Paradise have been her essays, "The Trouble with *Paradise*" and "Home". In "Home", Morrison reflects on her novel Beloved and on what language has meant to her as an author. Her main focus in this essay is how to use language as a subversive tool to transcend racial boundaries. She describes that fiction writing has provided her with sovereignty that she has not been able to find elsewhere ("Home" 3). She discusses how race is intrinsically tied to this world, and thus her writing. Morrison explains that language can be confining while also allowing her to find ways to create magical spaces that exist outside of the world we know (3). Morrison details that African American authors are often not allowed to be anything outside of their racialized existence, reducing literature written by authors of color to be a sociological research inquisition, forcing their labor into a box rather than allowing it to belong within universal genres or categories. Many critics reduce the work of nonwhite authors to something to be read only as something a racialized author has written. What goes unsaid is that radicalization takes place in all texts written today, as capitalist production is always racialized.

Morrison's project in *Paradise* is to deracialize her work—and later, systems of language and knowing the world—by taking racial verbiage out of her stories and creating worlds where race matters, but is not character defining.[4] She severs the inextricable, exclusive ties between whiteness and humanness, rebuilding who can write about the human experience. In an interview with Charlie Rose, Morrison was asked if she will ever not write about race, she answered, "The person that asks that question does not understand that he or she is also raced. So to ask me, 'When am I going to stop?' or if I can, it's to ask a question that, in a sense, is its own answer" (Toni Morrison Interview). She's insulted by this question's implication that her writing is not complex enough, and that she must break into the mainstream by taking race (or the African American experience) "out" of her writing. This question completely undermines the project she undertakes in her novels. She goes on,

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[3] In a longer version, I include Kimberlé Crenshaw's theory of Intersectionality to connect Kelley's conception of racial capitalism with Irigaray's gendered capitalist hierarchy. I explore how the devaluation of women of color's bodies and production is one of the most important functions of our current capitalist economy. With this, I also include Cixous' work on women's writing as a resistive tool.

[4] The term "racialized" in this context can be taken to mean inscribing race into a text through language or subtextual metaphors. Morrison has argued in many interviews that all texts are racialized as all bodies and writers are. A reader assumes whiteness when reading fiction, because whiteness has been historically constructed as the default race of writers and audiences.

> In other words, it's not a literary question, it has nothing to do with the literary imagination … I remember a review of Sula in which the reviewer said, … "One day she (meaning me), will have to face up to the real confrontation for Black people," which is white people. As though our lives have no meaning, and no depth, without the white gaze. And I have spent my entire writing life trying to make sure that the white gaze was not the dominant one in any of my books … I didn't have to be concerned by, or be consumed by the white gaze. That was the liberation for me. It has nothing to do with who reads the books—everyone I hope, of any race, any gender, any country. But my sovereignty, and my authority as a racialized person, had to be struck immediately with the very first word … The problem of being free to write the way you wish to without this other racialized gaze is a serious one for an African-American writer. Very serious. (Morrison, 28:04-31:52)

The literary imagination is a powerful place. This imaginary space is often what Morrison cites as her sovereignty. Translating the imagination into language is where the fiction author is born, and this place exists when the author gains the ability to express themselves freely. The literary imagination is deeply tied to whiteness in the American literary canon; this is the precise reason that nonwhite authors experience trouble truly expressing their imagination through language given by and through whiteness. Most authors today see that to deconstruct that notion successfully, there must be a purposeful explanation, or a sort of hand-holding for the audience to conceptualize a nonwhite author and narration. For this line of thinking, once the race of the character has been noticed and explained, then the story can move forward. This is what Morrison means when she says, "But my sovereignty, my *authority* as a racialized person, had to be struck by the very first word." There is no true liberation for the nonwhite author within this framework, as they must always operate as a cultural bearer for the assumed white reader. Morrison then refuses to engage with the white gaze and a racialized gaze in general. In doing so, she liberates herself as an author to write about whatever she pleases. By denying the white gaze its power, she produces explorations of what race can look like in a world without racialized or racist language.[5]

Morrison sees paradise, home, liberation, and race as deeply tied to the project of creating language. She constantly grapples with how language functions in perpetuating racist and hierarchic structures of power. She brings this to the forefront of her plan:

> I am deeply and personally involved in figuring out how to manipulate, mutate, and control imagistic, metaphoric language to produce something that could be called race-specific race-free prose: literature that is free of the imaginative restraints that the racially inflected language at my disposal imposes on me. The Paradise project required me first to recognize and identify racially inflected language and strategies, then deploy them to achieve a counter effect, to deactivate their power, summon other opposing powers, and liberate what I am able to invent, record, describe, and transform from the straitjacket a racialized society can, and frequently does, buckle us into. ("The Trouble with Paradise" 272)

Morrison has detailed that many found her process "disturbing," and futile ("Trouble" 274). She has found immense liberation in the practice of writing her mind without the constraints of gendered, racial language. She continuously expands the imaginary powers of popular culture. Artistic production by authors of color is not usually seen as "successful" unless there is an exceptional quality in their output. Toni Morrison is an outlier within the American authorial canon, but this is not simply because she is a successful Black fiction author. She exists as an exception because of her staunch loyalty to opening the literary world for writers who come after her. Through eliminating racial language from her texts, she envisions liberation for herself. Then, she wants to share how she freed herself by exposing the racial and gendered constraints of fiction writing. By revealing this repression, she illustrates how to get out of capitalist thinking through linguistic techniques.

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[5] Not included is another connection of "Home" with what Morrison deems "the concrete thrill of borderless-ness" (9). She intricately designs a landscape for linguistic resistance after her writing is concluded and allows us to revel in the possibility of life without linguistic constraints.

Morrison's Anti-Capitalist Imagination at Work in *Paradise*

"Not women locked safely away from men; but worse, women who chose themselves for company" (Paradise *276*).

So, what is "paradise"? This question is not easily answerable, as Morrison has extensively written about and explored in the novel. The story begins at the end, with some of the most infamous words from the novel's legacy: "They shoot the white girl first. With the rest they can take their time" (Morrison 3). Men are infiltrating a convent outside of their small town of Ruby, Oklahoma. For the purposes of my argument, I will mostly explore the relationship between the fictional town of Ruby, and a property outside town limits, the Convent. Ruby is developed post-World War II when the old town of Haven is no longer sustainable.[6] This new town is made up of fifteen families, nine of which are deemed "racially pure," untainted by whiteness. The endogamy produced is essential for the survival of their small state. The families develop a bank (owned by the Morgans), a grocery/hardware store, and households that produce new members to continue Ruby's legacy. The Convent lies a few miles outside of town, causing it to be seen as independent from Ruby's limits. These two sites are in opposition and a sort of competition. Ruby is a place where limited forms of Black flourishing can take place, as it remains somewhat successful in its goal of self-sufficiency, but the Convent also exists autonomously. The two spaces operate in extremely different ways, yet each can survive—albeit one does so with a more sustainable, but dangerous-to-naturalized-order method. The main difference between these two is how they each obtain capital and how each exists. Ruby sustains itself through patriarchal rule, headed by the Morgan family, and capitalist ideals around the reproduction of familial systems. Women stay at home to maintain the raising of children while men converse with each other, run the bank and stores, and decide who remains in town or who is excluded. The townspeople see no issue with this, as the order they know is kept intact by living this way. No other reality has been imagined for them yet.

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[6] In a longer version of this essay, I discuss Haven's role in the novel as the foundation for capital accumulation and colonial rule over Native American land required for capitalist survival.

The Convent is engaged in a new way of existing—a way free from patriarchal, racialized, and capitalist society. Five women reside and maintain the Convent. Power hierarchies and capital accumulation/commodification are nowhere to be found here. The women—Connie, Mavis, Gigi, Seneca, and Divine—are engaged in the act of decolonizing their bodies and minds. As the beginning of the novel references, one of these women is white, but that is never the focus of their stories. Each has troubled histories which led them to the Convent that are explained with care and consideration by Morrison. To take their stories seriously, the reader cannot just wonder what race the women are. Morrison's writing forces us to care for them as people, not just as racialized or gendered subjects. Each member of this small society has something in their past that exhibits that they have gone against American and Ruby's capitalist patriarchy. For example, Mavis has left her children and family in search of a new life when she stumbles upon the Convent. Or Seneca, who was abandoned by her mother as a child, enters into and escapes an abusive relationship, and ends up at the Convent after she's dumped at a bus station by a wealthy woman who has been using Seneca for sex until her husband returns. Each woman embodies different resistance strategies against the "natural" order of capitalism. They refuse to play by the rules, which is their first step towards liberation.[7]

Lone DuPres, a seemingly inconsequential character, is the catalyst for discovering magical powers for the leader at the Convent, Consolata. Connie first finds herself in a deep depression after her mother-figure dies, drinking heavily and secluding herself for days on end. Lone enters the Convent to deliver Connie from her rut. Lone has a reputation as a midwife who may practice witchcraft, but Connie welcomes her and eventually follows Lone's instructions. First, Connie accepts the salty, unknown concoction Lone has made her to quench her thirst. Then, Lone gives insight into her "mystical" nature; she believes that the earth has everything she needs, "Don't separate God from His elements. He created it all. You stuck on dividing Him from His works. Don't unbalance his world" (244). Lone senses a car crash happen down the road from the Convent, which the two women rush to. At the scene where a boy lies lifeless on the ground, Lone tells Connie to “Step in. Just step on in. Help him girl!” before Connie begins to enter a dreamlike state upon touching his body (245). Connie revives the Morgan boy by expanding the light she sees inside of his consciousness. She uses this gift on the four women in the Convent and allows them to learn from her mysticism. As Lone suggests though, this witchcraft may be closely linked to being in touch with the body and our Earthly presence.

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[7] Additionally, Morrison frames the women as witches within the first pages of the novel. She tasks the reader with decolonizing their minds to allow the Convent's inhabitants their full humanity, something no one else affords them.

Connie begins to guide the other Convent members into becoming a full spirit and body, marked by a shift in writing style from Morrison, changing to a more poetic and less linear plot description. Connie begins the battle call, which the women willfully accept,

> “If you have a place,” she continued, “that you should be in and somebody who loves you waiting there, then go. If not stay here and follow me. Someone could want to meet you.” No one left. There were nervous questions, a single burst of frightened giggling, a bit of pouting, and simulated outrage, but in no time at all they came to see that they could not leave the one place they were free to leave. Gradually they lost the days (*Paradise* 262).

Connie preaches to the women, sometimes with structure and other times in language that follows no scrutable form. They lie on the floor and sketch their bodies, creating life-size dolls that they can decorate and enact violence onto. Connie dreams aloud of places with impossible realities, which leads the group to share their wildest fantasies of another life (263-4). These intense group therapy sessions go on for days and nights as truths come to light. The women work through these nightmares together for months until “the Convent women were no longer haunted” (266). Now their minds and souls have been freed of the traumas of the past. The women no longer feel the need to harm their physical bodies or their spirits with inhospitable ways of thinking. Decolonization has been achieved. In the epilogue to the novel, after the potential slaughter/release from physical reality, the women finish their final business before entering paradise. Each visits a person from their past and reconciles their demons from past relationships. Then, they live together on a different plane of existence, alone together relishing in their progress before returning to the labor of creating paradise (318). Now, they thrive without being bound to capitalism, racism, and sexism. Liberation was found for the women who extracted themselves from known reality; and somehow, they live on.

Morrison is entirely in conversation with Irigaray and Kelley through her writing of *Paradise*. Many of the points made by Irigaray are in direct contrast to the narrative points in Morrison's novel, while Kelley's notions of racial capitalism are thoughtfully evoked and almost replicated in *Paradise*. It's almost as if Morrison sought to respond to how capitalism was developed for these theorists and flip it on its head. A huge element of this call-and-response with Irigaray's text is the rather obvious endogamic system of reproduction in Ruby. Morrison is unambiguous in creating the utmost of exclusive societies—an incestuous one. Ruby resident Pat Best discovers the town has remained "racially pure" for generations, made possible through incestuous marriages between the main eight families of Ruby (215). Pat discovers that there have only been eight families counted as the in-crowd, the 8-rock, families intermingling for decades now: "Unadulterated and unadulteried 8-rock blood held its magic as long as it resided in Ruby. That was their recipe. That was their deal. For Immortality. Pat's smile was crooked. In that case, she thought, everything that worries them must come from women" (217). By noting that this would intrinsically create a fear from men that there will not be enough women reproduced—both enough bodies themselves and women that are willing to continue incestuous family trees—she is constructing a male economy that embodies Irigaray's theory. Morrison does not treat them as villains though, but asks the audience to acknowledge that acting this way is a survival technique. Morrison identifies them as cogs in a capitalist machine, but does not call them the machine's makers; they've acted in the only way they know how to for survival in America.

Racial purity and its maintenance is a major cornerstone of capitalist hierarchies. Kelley details that the bourgeoisie and proletariat classes were initially decided through racializing bodies. Whiteness was the standard then, but the Black capitalist society created in Ruby functions in the same way. Pure Black families remain in control of the town's capital; the descendants of Big Papa Morgan run the bank and own two homes in Ruby. This prosperity has only been allowed because of the intermingling of family trees and the violence associated with suppressing women who act against the created order. Kelley notes that "the imperial imagination envisioned a world of savages … the whole world are deemed savages whose labor and land were there for the taking, sanctioned by God" ("What is Racial Capitalism" 17:17-45). This point calls back to the Convent women being Othered as witches. When Ruby's men are in conversation with each other, they say (Morrison writes this as one collective voice), "Bitches. More like witches…The others before them at least had some religion. These here sluts out there by themselves never step foot in church and I bet you a dollar to a fat nickel they ain't thinking about it either. They don't need men and they don't need God" (*Paradise* 276). The few angry men who've begun policing the Convent women enforce colonialist violence on those who do not need them for survival. Ruby's men harken back to the same capitalist notions of order that are required to perpetuate the economy. This misplaced rage does not change the fact that the town is crumbling to pieces, but serves as an ideological weapon conceived from white supremacist thought to pit minoritized individuals against each other—again, for the conservation of capitalism.

In another instance, Irigaray points out that women's bodies function as "an unknown 'infrastructure' of the elaboration of … life and culture" (171). Morrison responds with a Convent of women detached from any outside force, willing to leave their door unlocked and ready to heed what the world may offer them. They refuse to be infrastructure for a town that rejects and scapegoats them. And, not only is their role in infrastructure known, but it is actively a threat that Ruby men need to attack and rid themselves of. The very existence of the Convent members' changed souls is a warning to men of what will come with the liberation of the female consciousness. Irigaray points to the fact that women, "have the form of commodities, only in so far as they have two forms, a physical or natural form, and value form" (175), but Morrison has created transcendent and bodiless forms who live on between what the reader must conceptualize as living and dead. The first hints of the "magic" in store for the Convent begin around page 265 in *Paradise*, "They had to be reminded of the moving bodies they wore, so seductive were the alive ones below." The women have become so in touch with their souls through Consolata's decolonizing techniques that they begin to forget their very existence on Earth. This is only the beginning of their willing bodily erasure as they continue in their journey toward formlessness. At the end of the novel, the women visit family members in what the reader may interpret as "from beyond the grave." Though Morrison carefully chooses to refrain from dividing the bodies from the women's souls—at first she strays from creating the women as racialized commodities, but now she allows them to exist outside of tangible reality altogether—the only way a reader can conceptualize their existence may be to see them as in between life and death.

Afro-Surrealism and the (not so) Absurd

"Now they will rest before shouldering the endless work they were created to do down here in Paradise" (Paradise *318*).

Surrealist theory has been long used by African American scholars in creating resistive space for radical love and freedom. Surrealism as a framework has been used as a weapon against hierarchical identity-based violence permitted by nationalist states around the world, "with no birth date, no expiration date, no trademark," (Freedom Dreams 4).[8] Though many surrealists were also feminist and antiracist, none truly combined these schools of thought so concretely until Miller's Afro-Surreal Manifesto in 2009. His piece, "AFROSURREAL MANIFESTO Black is the New black—a 21st-Century Manifesto," published in the San Francisco Guardian lays out the guidelines for what is and is not an Afro-Surrealist framework: "Afro-Surrealism is drifting into contemporary culture on a rowboat with no oars, entering the city to hunt down clues for the cure to this ancient, incurable disease called 'western civilization'" (116). Playing on the legacy of surrealism, Afro-Surrealism exists as a uniquely Black framework for conceptualizing the absurdity of a post-colonial world (Kelley, "A Conversation"). As Miller and Kelley offer, absurdity is no longer strange or foreign to imagine an apocalyptic world with genocide and cultural upheaving. This has already happened to so many colonial subjects in the post-imperial era. "Absurdity" is a term of particular interest to the Afro-Surrealist, as it's a tool to seek definition for a new way of existence (Miller 117). Absurdity is understood as the excessive, the unnatural, the inexplicable, and the invisible ideology that surrounds us in our everyday lives. Absurdity is an abstract concept that is inconceivable for a reason; because the world we live in today is completely abstract to what was known before the racialized and patriarchal capitalist economy. It is absurd to find oneself completely isolated from the natural world, especially when:

> We haven't even come to terms with what it has meant to be the body and soul of the Modern era. When you have ledgers,

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[8] For a deeper exploration of Surrealism, please see Freedom Dreams: The Black Radical Imagination by Robin D.G. Kelley, which highlights a history of imaginative resistance through surrealist theory. The text is foundational for Afro-Surrealism and D. Scot Miller.

> when you have centralized banks, when you have advanced technology that move people across the Atlantic Ocean. And they're still property as human beings. It's that absurdity that is still with us today. Globalization begins there. When you think of the factory, the modern factory begins on the sugar plantation. That's where socialization of labor is taking place. (Kelley, "A Conversation")

Nations and peoples affected by the diasporic processes of imperialism know the absurdity well. Once a subject can see and place themselves within the absurdity, they are no longer detected on the inside—now abstracted by the lens of ideology which exists to keep subjects in their places. This process is surreal for many colonized bodies. Thus, imagination and exploration are the only tools a colonized person can use to make sense of a surreal existence.

An Afro-Surrealist framework is essential when reading much of Morrison's texts. The Manifesto itself cites Morrison as one to help find, "rococo: the beautiful, the sensuous, and the whimsical" (Miller 116). As I've detailed above, Morrison is engaging with surrealism through magical ability in the characters Lone, Connie, and the other Convent women. Connie is able to raise a child from the dead with Lone's assistance, and later Connie becomes a "Reverend Master" to the women in assisting them to transcend their physical existence as they know it. Surrealism is applied when asking the reader to go beyond what is known as reality, to accept the incomprehensibility of genocide, enslavement, and oppression as concrete truths. The surrealist framework Morrison employs threatens those with a vested interest in nurturing private enterprise, and rightfully so. In *Paradise*, once oppressive systems are lovingly annihilated, previously colonized bodies will live on in a realm beyond comprehension. This exact place, the literary imaginary in *Paradise*, presents a concrete, physical alternative with a surreal facade. After the dematerialization, the reader doesn't know where the women could have gone. They visit their past relationships like ghosts, yet are so tangible to the characters and the reader. Morrison's final passage explores the "alternate reality" that the Convent women have entered as a conceivable location: "Around them on the beach, sea trash gleams. Discarded bottle caps sparkle near a broken sandal. A small dead radio plays the quiet surf" (318). They have persevered through the most surreal of attacks: a colonial strike against their freedom to choose life outside of a capitalist economy. Having survived the absurdity of an armed home invasion and a targeted ambush, the women have landed on a littered beach that could be somewhere in Florida. As Miller begins the Manifesto of Afro-Surreal, “Behold the invisible! You shall see unknown wonders!” (115). Here, the unknown wonder being revealed is a life that is endless in possibility. Of course, this seems absurd; it is a life none of us have ever known.

Morrison does not limit the women to any binaries, not even the one perhaps most obvious, that of being either dead or alive. They are deracialized, desexualized, and decolonized. Morrison carefully crafts the novel with language that is both ambiguous yet clear-cut. Through the lens of Afro-Surrealism, it is difficult to identify where Kakutani can read *Paradise* as a narrative without dimensionality. Kakutani’s remark that *Paradise* is “an earthbound hodgepodge … It’s neither grounded in closely observed vignettes of real life, nor lofted by the dreamlike images the author has used so dexterously in the past to suggest the strangeness of American history” completely disregards the Afro-Surrealist move towards imagination that Morrison offers (Kakutani). The dreamscape of ascending capitalism is only realized when the reader accepts the absurd as reality on Earth; then one can go beyond the limits of the literary imagination. Once Toni Morrison moves beyond the surreal, she finishes the novel in a location within our grasp. What becomes intangible is the invisible ideology around us. By linguistically identifying that which has been ingrained into the colonized mind, Morrison provides us with the tools of surrealism and teaches us how to use them. “Paradise” is achievable, but will we find it?

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Racial Passing and Disability[1]

AUTYMN WILDE

Black bodies and disabled bodies have been, and continue to be, discriminated against in the United States of America. The historical tension between these two groups, due to the top-down pitting of minority identities against each other, has stunted the progression of intersectional scholarly analysis. The predominant cultural thought assumes that disabled bodies are white, and Black bodies are abled, which obscures Black disabled bodies from the conversation. I will explore how the relatively recent convergence of Black studies and Disability studies, forming Black Disability studies, can help inform the motivations driving the act of racial passing. The primary source that will provide a framework for this conversation is the film *Passing*, by Rebecca Hall. By viewing racial passing as a coping method of Race-Based Traumatic Stress (RBTS), the act of racial passing, and the characters who do so, can be understood and sympathized with instead of vilified. Adding *Passing* into the conversation will complicate a Black Disability studies analysis; the audience knows less about why Clare passes, and more about Irene's psyche which exhibits the mental signs of racial passing (reinforcing stereotypes, refusing to recognize racial violence, et cetera). Hall's piece catalyzes re-viewing racial passing through a Disability lens.

Racism in America

The degradation of Black bodies began at the conception of the United States, and its systematic effects are still seen today. The U.S.' participation in the Transatlantic Slave Trade consisted of millions of Africans being sold into slavery and transported away from their homeland and to America. This displacement separated these individuals from their language, culture, and community, damaging their physical, mental, and emotional well-being beyond comprehension. The argument that slavery was sanctioned as Africans were the ones selling their fellow Africans is inherently flawed because "being a prisoner of war or a poor member of society traded for goods is not the same thing as being held in intergenerational hereditary chattel slavery that meant your children and their children and their children would all be born into bondage. That is something unique to the experience of slavery in the Americas" (Smith). The generational trauma mentioned by Smith, "your children and their children and their children," is exemplified in the "one-drop rule." Formally known as hypodescent, the "'one drop rule' has meant that anyone with a visually discernable trace of African, or what used to be called 'Negro,' ancestry is, simply, black" (Hollinger). This "one-drop rule" has continued to plague the U.S. legal system into the 21st century. Despite being *implicitly* overturned by the Supreme Court in the landmark court case *Loving v. Virginia* in 1967, "today [the 'one-drop rule'] remains in place as a formidable convention in many settings and dominates debates about the categories appropriate for the federal census" (Hollinger). In order for a person of African descent to escape from the continuous racist discrimination in the U.S., two things must be done: 1) the individual must fully disown their kin, and 2) granted that their skin is light enough, the individual must racially pass as white.

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[1] This is an excerpted piece from a longer work that positions *Passing* alongside *The Vanishing Half* by Brit Bennett to explore the value of Race Based Traumatic Stress (RBTS) to Black Disability studies. The omitted sections explore the generational effects of racial passing and intersectional violence in *The Vanishing Half*, as well as explaining the significance of RBTS as a social model of disability (compared to a medical model).

Freedom from discrimination through racial passing cannot be presented without also discussing colorism, because racial passing is a result of colorism. Colorism is the increased prejudice against darker skin tones, and it is a direct result of slavery and racist ideologies. The racial trauma that colorism inflicts spans generations, and it is beautifully articulated in the works of Toni Morrison. In her novel *Paradise*, the colorism that Black people post-civil war faced is brought to light:

> This time the clarity was clear: for ten generations they had believed the division they fought to close was free against slave and rich against poor. Usually, but not always, white against black. Now they saw a new separation: lightskinned against black. Oh, they knew there was a difference in the minds of whites, but it had not struck them before that it was of consequence, serious consequence, to Negroes themselves. Serious enough that their daughters would be shunned as brides; their sons chosen last;

> that colored men would be embarrassed to be seen socially with their sisters. The sign of racial purity they had taken for granted had become a stain (Morrison 176).

Once colorism enters the picture, racial discrimination becomes more complicated and nuanced. The lighter an individual's skin, the more they were favored—or perhaps more realistically, the less that they were discriminated against compared to their darker-skinned counterparts. Passing, then, provided an out from extreme violence and discrimination (for light-skinned Black individuals). Internalized white supremacy would have made the colorist hierarchy dark-skinned and then light-skinned; subsequently, racial passing becomes desirable for safety and psyche.

Ableism in America

Eugenics was (and is) another form of atrocious discrimination embedded within U.S. history. The eugenics movement began in 1907 in Indiana and "by the mid-20th century, two-thirds of American states had passed laws authorizing the sterilization of 'unfit' citizens" (Markfield 18). The process of eugenics is simple: differentiation, alienation, segregation, sterilization, and elimination (Markfield). Differentiation is a simple, yet effective, step in the eugenics agenda; get the public to believe that one group is different from another group. To do so, "the ERO [Eugenics Research Office] offered courses to train social workers and concerned Americans on how to develop 'family pedigrees in furtherance of the ERO's mission to collect data on American families and to justify concerns about the heredity of defective traits" (25). After establishing differentiation, alienation isan easy feat—get the public to view otherness as dangerous. In one instance, a group of eugenicists in 1911 categorized the top ten most dangerous groups:

> First, the feebleminded; second, the pauper class; third, the inebriate class or alcoholics; fourth, criminals of all descriptions including petty criminals and those jailed for nonpayment of fines; fifth, epileptics; sixth, the insane; seventh, the constitutionally weak class; eighth, those predisposed to specific diseases; ninth, the deformed; tenth, those with defective sense organs, that is, the deaf, blind and mute. (26)

Clearly, the overwhelming majority of these categories describe disability before it entered our lexicon. However, there is an intersection to racism in that some of the above labels were (and are) applied to Black individuals. Yet the fear that specifically alienated disabled people was that their 'defectiveness' could be spread. This fear was then used to justify and support segregation policies: "In the early 20th century, the [American Bar Association] approved a proposal to promote the segregation or long-term incarceration of the people it considered unfit during their fertile years" (26). Incarceration of all people deemed 'unfit' would eventually prove costly, so eugenicists turned toward a more fiscally responsible approach—sterilization: "By 1940, more than 35,000 American adults had been sterilized through state programs" (33). But sterilization was not enough, it would never be enough—so came elimination. Although most are aware of the genocide that Hitler inflicted on millions of people, less are aware that the U.S. laid the foundation for it:

> In truth, the evidence suggests that what happened in Nazi-occupied Europe was the logical outcome of American eugenic theory. First, each step in the Nazi "final solution" had been proposed first in American eugenic circles. Second, eugenicists and others in the United States knew a good deal about what Hitler was doing before and during World War II. Third, American eugenics programs continued even after the disclosure of the Nazi crimes. (35-36)

A horrific quote by Dr. Joseph DeJarnette in 1934 further cements the connection between Hitler's Germany and U.S. eugenics: "The Germans are beating us at our own game" (34). Starting with differentiation, and ending with elimination, eugenics in America has disproportionately targeted the disabled community. Furthermore, similar to racism, eugenics continues to persist into conversations today with questions surrounding curing Disability, prenatal screening for Disability (with the subsequent option of terminating the pregnancy), and the forced sterilization of incarcerated individuals. (Chappel)

Blackness and Disability

Understanding the fraught history of racism and eugenics in the U.S., it becomes clear that there exists a tension between Blackness and Disability that was forced upon the two groups. In the context of advancing either minority group's rights, it became necessary to dissociate Blackness and Disability. Historically, "To associate blackness with disability was to endanger the rights granted to the former since the latter carried with them the charge of being unfit for rights. To associate disability with blackness was to endanger the rights granted to the former since the latter carried with them the charge of being unfit for rights" (Pickens 97). This unfortunate reality directly comes from systemic racism and American eugenics. Intersectional thought has allowed for the recognition that to be Black is to be discriminated against; to be disabled is to be discriminated against; and to be both Black and disabled, is to be exponentially discriminated against in nuanced ways. The alienation from each group by the other group is not intrinsically ableist or racist—it was a product of systemic violence that both Black and disabled people experienced in tandem with another.

The rise of civil rights movements, intersectional scholarship, recognition of racism by Disability scholars, and more have all laid the foundation for Black Disability studies. The tension between Black studies and Disability studies has existed throughout United States history, for reasons stated previously, but eventually, the intersection of these disciplines would formally occur. In 2006, Christopher M. Bell, a notable disabilities scholar, called out Disability studies for what it was at the time: white Disability studies (Hinton 10). Tracing this as the origin of Black Disability studies is problematic, however. As Anna Hinton goes on to present in her essay "On Fits, Starts, and Entry Points: The Rise of Black Disability Studies," although the term 'Black Disability studies' can be traced to Bell, it discludes previous work done by Black feminist authors. These authors do not specifically reference Disability, however they do use "disability as methodology" which "shifts the attention away from Disability as an 'object of study' to a 'mode of analysis'" (13). Yet, even so, citing a specific origin of Black Disability studies (in contrast to white Disability studies) poses even further problems as it establishes a linear narrative that is in direct opposition to the nonlinear narrative of lived Black and disabled experiences. Hinton articulates this when defining C.P.:

> C.P. time simultaneously refers to the colloquialism "colored people's" time and the academic phrase "crip time," the former preceding the latter in use. Both terms denote a refusal to accede to demands of punctuality that are tethered to the preference for normative embodiment and capitalistic demands for productivity, but they both also speak to the precarity of Black/disabled life. (17)

With recognition to C.P., dating the specific origin of Black Disability studies is an unproductive effort. Black Disability studies exists, it is valid, and it provides essential insight into the nuances of intersectional minority experience in America.

Minority identity, specifically Blackness, is deeply associated with pain and intersects with Disability in three distinct ways. In the article "Disability, Pain, and the Politics of Minority Identity," Tobin Siebers claims that "minority identity is twice disabling…Pain serves as the glue that laminates the outside and inside of minority identity, ensuring that violence enacted by society against individuals remains embedded in their psyche" (111). The internalization of violence is a common experience of minority identities, especially in Black people. Secondly, the chronic organic pain experienced by disabled people is often not talked about in literature, instead the "political and epistemological pain, that is, a feeling of suffering derived from the collision between… the worldviews of the nondisabled and the disabled" (115) is the focus. This presents an interesting duality of both physical pain and systemic pain—a connection from Disability to Blackness is the focus on exposure to systemic violence. Finally, "minority identity is born, not made—born in the nest of pain… disability identity is not based on impairment similarity but on social experience…" (119). Being Black, in and of itself, should not be painful; nevertheless, it is so because of the roots of slavery that were planted at the very heart of America. Being disabled, in and of itself, should not be politically painful; nevertheless, it is so because of ableist ideology perpetuated by American eugenics. Viewing Black pain and identity through the lens of Disability offers a new understanding of the impacts of systemic racism that will be used in the following analysis of Hall's *Passing*.

Racial Trauma in *Passing*

The Netflix film *Passing*, directed by Rebecca Hall, is an adaptation of the 1929 novel of the same name by Nella Larsen. The plot follows two Black female characters, Irene Redfield (played by Tessa Thompson) and Clare Bellew (played by Ruth Negga), as they reconnect after high school. Irene is living in Harlem with her darker skinned Black husband, Brian Redfield, and their children. Clare, on the other hand, racially passed as white after high school and married a deeply racist white man, John Bellew, with whom she shares a child. After coincidently reconnecting in a hotel, Clare slowly infiltrates Irene's life, despite Irene's initial objections.

Clare can be Black again (as opposed to racially passing as white) and develops an alarmingly close relationship with Irene's husband, Brian. Later on, John Bellew discovers that Irene is Black after they accidentally pass each other on the street; enraged at Clare for racially passing and lying to him, John crashes Irene's party where Clare is present. These events culminate with the death of Clare by falling—or being pushed—out the open window.

Hall's *Passing* is cinematically beautiful and intentional. The all black-and-white film transports the audience back in time while also grappling with two very famous contemporary Black actresses' racial passing. The grayscale lends the audience a lens to perceive Clare and Irene as light-skinned in juxtaposition to the darker-skinned actresses who play them, Ruth Negga and Tessa Thompson respectively. In an interview, Hall explains the intention behind casting:

> Women who people broadly understand to be Black women, or biracial…puts the audience in that position of looking at them and going, 'Oh no! Are they OK? Isn't everyone seeing what I'm seeing?' The most articulate way I can describe it is that if you're in a Black family and a member leaves and crosses the colour line, you don't ever see them as white, even if all the white people see it. And that's the perspective that I wanted the audience to see it from. (Jones)

Hall's movie garnered both national and international praise. Ruth Negga won Best Supporting Actress from the International Cinephile Society (Stevens). Best Actress, Best Supporting Actress, Best Debut Director, and Top Ten Films were given to Tessa Thompson, Ruth Negga, Rebecca Hall, and Passing respectively by the New York Film Critics Online (Neglia). Critical reception of Hall's movie was also extremely positive. The New York Times Chief Film Critic, Manohla Dargis, writes: "[Hall maps] the coordinates of a life and consciousness through the expressionistic lighting, through the many tonalities of the black-and-white visuals and through the elegant rooms that edge on dollhouse claustrophobia" (Dargis). While being truly faithful to Larson's original story, Hall is able to add further complexities and commentaries to her film—especially concerning Irene's character.

Although Clare is the most obvious character to racially pass in *Passing*, I suggest that Irene passes in more significant ways. The movie begins with Irene racially passing in a toy store, where she attempts to buy the *Mother Goose Drawing and Tracing Book* (sold out) alongside two toy cars for her son (Hall 00:2:41-00:3:34). After exiting the store, Irene notices a man passed out across the street from the heat; she begins to exhibit signs of distress: heavy breathing, furrowed brow, frowning, raising her hand to her chest, and ultimately throwing her hand up for a taxi to get out of the situation (00:03:40-00:4:00). The taxi driver, not understanding her distress is from witnessing the medical emergency, suggests taking her to the Drayton Hotel to escape the heat; Irene accepts, and enters the hotel after three white characters pass through the doors —indicating that this is a white only establishment (00:004:51-00:05:06). Within the first five minutes of the movie, Irene racially passes three times—to the customers and workers at the toy shop, to the taxi driver, and to the door attendant at the Drayton Hotel. Each of these instances serve a different purpose: Irene racially passes for the benefit of her child, to escape a traumatic scenario, and to escape from the extreme heat. The latter two instances exemplify Race-Based Traumatic Stress. Witnessing a man having a medical emergency causes Irene to express more extreme emotions than the audience would expect; leading one to believe that perhaps Irene had a previous exposure to violence (most likely race-based) that causes her aversion. Furthermore, systems of race-based segregation in place at the time would have barred Irene entry from places protected from the extreme heat; racial passing then becomes a necessity for Irene to avoid heat-induced illnesses.

Alongside instances of Irene's physical passing, I propose that Irene also mentally passes through her dissociation. When in bed, Irene and Brian are discussing how Clare couldn't be satisfied with being white, Brian exclaims "Rot! Who's satisfied being anything?" to which Irene replies "I am…Satisfied. I am" (00:30:03-00:30:33). Despite claiming to be satisfied with her Blackness, Irene's actions and mental state indicate otherwise. As the head of the Negro Welfare League committee, the audience would expect Irene to support the advancement of the treatment of Black people. Although she does so to the outward public, Irene reinforces her own colorism by employing a darker skinned Black maid who she treats as subservient. After Irene drops a flowerpot from the second story window of her home, Clare offers to go clean it up; Irene refuses stating that "No, it's nothing. Zu will clean it. Zu!" (00:39:50-00:40:07). Previous to this instance, Irene had asked Zu to clean the boys' room and cook dinner. Irene could have taken up Clare's offer or cleaned up the mess herself; yet instead she offloads all the household responsibilities onto her maid, treating Zu more like a servant than an equal. Clare, clearly noticing this, asks Irene “where did you find her, Rene? I long for a maid who knows real home cookin,” to which Irene defensively responds, “It’s not like that…Everyone needs help. It’s normal” (00:41:03-00:41:15). Irene exhibits traits of internalized racism through her reinforcement of colorist hierarchy.

Irene comes close to revealing her inner thoughts in three different scenes. The first instance is when Irene is talking to famous author, Hugh Wentworth, at the Negro Welfare League Party. After revealing that Clare is passing, Irene agrees with Hugh that she too could pass. Hugh asks, “and in a way, if you can, why wouldn’t you?“ to which Irene responds, “Who’s to say I’m not…We’re all of us passing for something or other” (00:50:33-00:50:50). Irene comes close to undermining her earlier statement about being satisfied with Blackness in this quote, but immediately backs away from exploring it any further. Nonetheless, Irene identifying that everyone passes hints at her awareness that she too passes.

Secondly, Irene refuses to recognize race-based violence; in all instances, she dissociates—mentally disconnects—from it. When Brian tells Irene that their son was called a racial slur at school, it flashes to Irene picking up groceries (00:55:14-00:55:34). When Brian attempts to tell their children about the lynching that happened in Little Rock while Irene is reading to them, she continuously interrupts him and stops the discussion (00:58:42-00:59:42). Later on, the eldest child, Ted, brings up the lynching again, telling his mother “You gotta know about these things.” Irene retorts, “Do I?” (01:07:42-01:07:45). After the children are finished with dinner and leave, Irene gets into an argument with Brian again about the lynching; she says “I do wish that you wouldn’t keep talking to them about all that lynching stuff…they’re happy. Why ruin that? I want them to stay happy,” ending with the ultimatum that “You are not to talk about the race problem. I won’t have it” (01:08:31-1:09:08). Irene is clearly avoiding any and all discussion of race-based violence, despite her husband’s protest that not telling their kids is doing them more harm. Irene wishes to keep her family and, more importantly, herself completely disconnected from “the race problem.” She escapes from this conversation with Brian by cunningly shifting the blame of their family not leaving onto Clare: Brian reacts, saying “Goddamnit! Irene, I’m not talking about Clare and I’m not talking about a trip. I am talking about leaving this country,” and Irene cleverly jabs, “It seems to me you are a lot less content with what you've got here when [Clare's] not here" (1:10:15-1:10:28). Irene does not see leaving the U.S. as a possibility (assumedly because of Clare), yet she also refuses to engage in any conversation regarding race-based violence. Irene's disconnection from all race-based violence indicates that she has Race-Based Traumatic Stress.

Thirdly, Irene becomes aware of her dissociation throughout the film as she wakes from naps and, most poignantly, when she hallucinates Clare's presence in her bedroom. The scene begins with Irene sleeping in bed, the camera pans to a medicine bottle and glass of water, Irene awakes and moves her head to look at the crack in the ceiling; Irene hears Clare's voice and sheds a tear, then visually hallucinates Clare in her bedroom shortly thereafter (01:11:00-01:12:47). This scene suggests that tiredness and or medicine are the cause of Irene's hallucinations; a different reading of this scene is that tiredness and or medicine simply amplified the effects of RBTS. According to recent research done on race-based trauma, "Trauma-exposed individuals may experience dimild to moderate manifestations of dissociative symptoms across various dimensions, such as 1) distortions in perception of the self, events and sensory information; 2) intrusions of trauma-related experiences, and 3) gaps in memory and awareness" (Polanco-Roman). Distortions in sensory information are exemplified in Irene's hallucinations of Clare. Gaps in Irene's memory and awareness are sprinkled throughout the film with scenes beginning with her suddenly waking up from naps (00:54:14-00:54:27, 00:58:07-00:58:26).

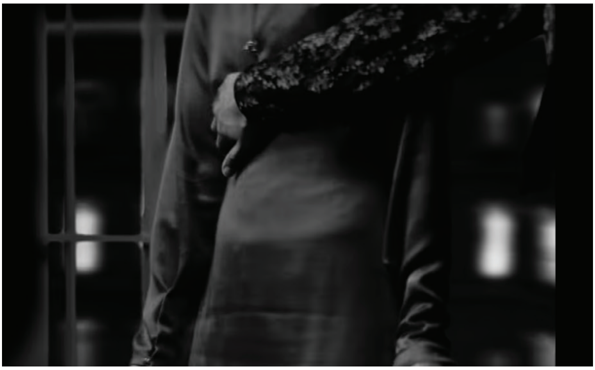

FIGURE 1. Irene's arm around Clare seconds before Clare's fall.
Source: Rebecca Hall's Netflix film *Passing.*

Finally, the movie ends with the death of Clare. Although Clare's death happens within seconds, it can be argued that Hall's *Passing* cinematically poses Irene as Clare's murderer. In the death scene, Clare is positioned in front of an open window, Irene next to her, and John directly in front of Clare. John lunges to reach for Clare, Irene raises her arm and slightly pushes Clare back (*see fig. 1*)—Clare falls through the window to her death (01:28:12-01:28:16). Supporting this interpretation that Irene murdered Clare, is the conversation that occurred between the two characters directly before. While walking up the stairs to the party, where Clare would soon die, Irene asks what would happen if Clare was discovered by her husband as racially passing, to which Clare replies "I'd do what I want more than anything right now. I'd come up here to live. In Harlem. With you" (01:23:40-1:23:55). Supposedly this is jarring to Irene because of the hinted possibility of an affair between Clare and Brian, or even the continuous jealousy that Irene exhibits for Clare.

Earlier in the film, at the Negra Welfare League Party, after Irene discusses Clare's racial passing with Hugh, Irene stares at Clare for 30 seconds; slowly moving her gaze from Clare's neck, down her exposed back, bejeweled waistline, and finally to her hand which Irene grabs (0:52:00-00:52:30). Clare would become less curious, no longer an object of Irene's desire, if Clare were to not racially pass. Although these two examples are undoubtedly influencing Irene, I suggest that a deeper, more impactful motivator is that Clare fleeing from her husband and moving in would mean that Irene would be forced to confront the existence of race-based violence. After Clare told Irene that she would move back to Harlem, the camera focuses on the back of Irene's head as she continues to walk up the stairs robotically; when Irene's face is finally shown over ten seconds later, her jaw and mouth are set in an emotionless expression (01:23:51-01:24:09). As previously established, Irene already exhibits symptoms of dissociation as a coping mechanism—this emotional disconnect is highlighted in this scene through Irene's expression (or lack thereof). Clare moving in would put race-based violence so close to Irene that her protection through dissociation is in jeopardy. Clare does pose a threat to Irene's marriage, but even more perilously, to Irene's psyche.

Conclusion

Race-Based Traumatic Stress is a result of the systems in place that continually commit violence against Black bodies—not a result of Blackness. Although the divide between Black studies and Disability studies has prevented scholarship to be labeled “Black Disability studies” until recently, that does not mean that this intersection does not exist. *Passing* is an exploration of Black Disability studies that comments on the driving causes of racial passing. Hall’s movie juxtaposes Clare, who racially passes outwardly, with Irene, who exhibits Race-Based Traumatic Stress and racially passes inwardly. Hall’s work epitomizes the necessity of Black Disability studies; intersectional readings allow us to resist passing judgment and psycho-analyzing racially passing characters—despite critical reception that continually vilifies them. Instead, this scholarship provides a new avenue for racial passing to be read as responses to the violence inflicted by the white heteropatriarchy.

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It’s Colonialism, Charlie Brown!

Social Memory in *A Charlie Brown Thanksgiving*

GWEN MITCHELL

Of the many American holidays, few are more patriotic and none more controversial than Thanksgiving. Beginning its life as a regional New England tradition, the holiday occupied an important part of the local liturgical calendar, marking the arrival of the Pilgrims in what is now known as Plymouth in 1620 (Pleck 775). It was finally made a national holiday by Abraham Lincoln to assuage continuing tensions between the North and the South following the American Civil War; due to these tensions, it would take several decades for it to see widespread approval (775). However, over the past fifty years, this holiday has become quite controversial due to its historical ties to the brutal history of settler-colonialism in the United States. The day itself has even been renamed and repurposed into the countertradition known Day of Mourning (Weiss 368). The memory of Thanksgiving as a place for unity has been contested with some saying that its brand of inclusion is based on the exclusion, erasure, and genocide of Indigenous peoples. Sitting in the center of this discourse lies 1973’s *A Charlie Brown Thanksgiving*. This animated special follows the miscommunications and misadventures of young child Charlie Brown as he attempts to prepare a Thanksgiving meal for his friends in time for the holidays. In its depiction of this American holiday, this film reinforces the social memory of the Thanksgiving tradition while aiding in the collective forgetting of the genocides of Indigenous peoples.

My analysis is based in and on the scholarship on social memory. Social memory refers to the collective act through which a dominant public[1] engages in rituals of remembering and forgetting its own past, shaping the story that it tells of its history. This is not a novel analytic framework; scholars such as Kristen Hoerl and Sara Rae Kitsch have explored the roles that social memory plays in the collective remembering of events and social categories. For example, Kitsch uses it to analyze museum exhibits depicting the First Ladies of the United States to demonstrate how social memory has constructed these women discursively as dangerous outsiders that need to be contained in order to uphold patriarchy (Kitsch 138). Hoerl explores the news coverage in news coverage of President Barack Obama's inauguration to demonstrate the way that selective amnesia played a role in the development of narratives of racial transcendence and color-blindness during the Obama Administration (Hoerl 1). I build on these scholars to explore the meaning-making performed by *A Charlie Brown Thanksgiving*, specifically the meanings and histories that it ascribes to Thanksgiving and the way that it implies selective amnesia to create shared meaning.

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[1] A dominant public is any group of people who can subordinate other groups of people—other publics—through the use of discourse.

Before one can begin to discuss the narratives that *A Charlie Brown Thanksgiving* perpetuates, one must first examine the importance of this artifact in particular. Written by Charles Schulz and directed by Bill Melendez and Phil Roman, this short film features characters from the popular Peanuts franchise created by Schulz in 1950 attempting to host a Thanksgiving Day celebration for themselves. This wasn't the only holiday special of its kind; in 1963, Schulz began writing specials for the CBS network, such as *A Charlie Brown Christmas* and *It's the Great Pumpkin, Charlie Brown.* The parable-like nature of these specials have cemented their reputation as educational tools, their stories didactically focused on teaching their audiences lessons about Christian values and (simplified) American history. Immensely popular at the time of its release, the Charlie Brown Thanksgiving special has become a holiday tradition in many households. For many families, Thanksgiving is synonymous with turkey, football, the Macy's parade, and Charlie Brown. In addition to the influence that this one short film has on American culture writ large, it is also of note that this special aired during a very important time in the history of Thanksgiving, when the Red Power Movement of the 1960s and 1970s[2] began its protests of the occasion (Kitsch 373). Amidst calls for Indigenous self-determination that publicly called into question the notion of American equality and the justness of the country's history, this special attempted to help shore up the idea of the United States as benevolent rather than colonial. In its depiction of the origin of Thanksgiving, one cannot help but read *A Charlie Brown Thanksgiving* as a part of the discourse of the time (whether it is trying to be or not), as the film reinforces and contributes to the already-dominant collective memory of America's beginnings. Though it may seem frivolous at first blush, it is for these reasons that this film is worthy of analysis. Its commonplace nature as an educational tool combined with its ties to dominant discourses surrounding Thanksgiving, Christianity, and the United States makes it a fertile ground for analysis. I argue that *A Charlie Brown Thanksgiving* constructs Thanksgiving as a Protestant celebration of white setter-colonialism while actively engaging in the collective forgetting of the genocide of Indigenous peoples.

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[2] The Red Power Movement was a movement led by Indigenous activists centered on demanding self-determination for the lives of Indigenous peoples and reclaiming sovereignty that had been taken from them by the government of the United States. Activists staged many high-profile protests such as the occupation of Alcatraz Island from 1969 to 1971, the Trail of Broken Treaties in 1972, and the occupation of Wounded Knee in 1973. It was due to the efforts of this movement that the US government granted "tribes the ability to control their own affairs" though not full sovereignty (Blakemore).

Though Thanksgiving meals have been shared since the foundation of the Plymouth colony, the actual phenomenon that is the holiday (along with America's collective memory of that holiday) has been anything but stable. Originally sanctioned by George Washington and John Adams, the late-winter feast largely remained a New England festival. Instances of these celebrations were noted by their rowdiness and dereliction of various duties. As historian Elizabeth Pleck describes it, the holiday was "a masculine escape [emphasis added] from the family, a day of rule breaking, and spontaneous mirth" (Pleck 776). It was only during the nineteenth century that this understanding of the holiday began to change. This was largely due to Sarah Hale's campaign to make the Thanksgiving feast a national holiday. Her intentions behind it were to ease "the social dislocations of the industrial and commercial revolutions" (775) and to celebrate "the blessings of American nationhood as well as its domestic ideals" (776). In the editorials and pieces that she wrote, these two ends were foremost in her concerns. In the decades after the nationalization of Thanksgiving under Lincoln, widespread crackdowns were placed upon the kind of merrymaking that had typified Thanksgivings past. By the 1920s, Pleck describes how the holiday had become more and more popular amongst children largely due to educators' initiatives to make the holiday appeal to immigrant children:

> Public school teachers and settlement house workers hoped to assimilate immigrant children to America and use children

> as Americanizers of their parents. They wanted the children to become patriotic citizens who demonstrated their love of country through celebration of cherished American holidays…. It was clear that schoolchildren were cultural conduits, bringing home ideas about celebration, national history, and cultural symbols learned at school (779-80).

The Americanization of children became an effort to assimilate entire families into an American way of identifying. However, the results of this were occasionally mixed. In the cases of poorer families, purchasing and roasting a whole turkey was not always possible. For others, Thanksgiving tradition was adopted with spins based on the cultures from which they came, "sprinkling pine nuts in the stuffing" or "steaming the turkey first" (781). Thanksgiving became a domestic moment that allowed for the celebration and sharing of national identity while also allowing for (minor) deviation from the norm of white Protestant domesticity. It is from this reframing of this holiday as a colonizing tool that the modern collective understanding of Thanksgiving takes its shape. The story of the Pilgrims and their first Thanksgiving emerged in order to create a common identity between the American and the Americanized.

The tension between normative behavior and individualistic deviance is the key source of conflict in *A Charlie Brown Thanksgiving*. Peppermint Patty, a friend of Charlie Brown, invites herself and a couple of her friends over to his house for Thanksgiving dinner. Due to what is characterized by Brown's sister as his tendency to be 'wishy-washy,' Brown comically fails to communicate to Patty that his family already has plans to eat dinner with his grandmother. To satisfy both parties, he rushes to prepare a meal that will satisfy all guests. Unfortunately, his attempts eventually fail to achieve the approval of Patty and her entourage. This conflict stresses the importance of the specific domestic moment that is Thanksgiving and the pressures that some feel to achieve it. Just like the poor children of immigrant families in the early twentieth century, Brown has been measured up to the Thanksgiving norm and been found lacking by his peers. However, this negative treatment is not portrayed positively by the film; the negative treatment that Brown receives from his peers is quickly brought into question by Marcy, one of the few characters treated as a morally trustworthy character: "That's kind of rough on Charlie Brown, weren't you, sir?…Now wait a minute, sir. Did he invite you here to dinner or did you invite yourself and us too?" (*A Charlie*

Brown Thanksgiving 17:09-30). Implicit in this admonition is the idea that Brown's deviation from the Norman Rockwell norm of Thanksgiving Dinner is not necessarily a bad thing; the verbal delivered by Patty is not recognized as a good thing, after all. However, the story quickly seems to double back on this point. After a brief reconciliation between Patty and Brown, the group travels to Brown's grandmother's house, a place that has all of the foodstuffs that one would expect at a traditional Thanksgiving feast. This unfortunately implies that the presence of a female cook—something missing from the film until this point—is necessary for the preparation of a true meal, reinforcing the gender segregation of labor still experienced by many households in the modern day (Weiss 783). Though it humorously pokes fun at the traditional ideas of how the holiday should manifest, the film still reinforces the audience's collective memory of the Thanksgiving domestic moment as both an integral part of the holiday and of American identity as a whole.

Also integral to the American identity as it is portrayed in the film is Christianity and its connections to American nationalism. Before the meal, Patty asks the group if they're going to have a prayer: "Are we going to have a prayer? It's Thanksgiving, you know. Before we're served, shouldn't we say grace?" (*A Charlie Brown Thanksgiving* 15:10-16). Implicit in this statement is the assumption that religious observance is inherent in the social practice of Thanksgiving. Grace and pre-meal prayers are linked inextricably to the feast itself. The music cuts, lending a sober air to the scene as Linus begins to recount the story of the First Thanksgiving. He delivers a simple prayer that he claims was given by Elder William Brewster, thanking God for the food that has been given. This scene is an example of how religion works its way into collective understandings of American national identity and the holiday at large. When immigrant children were taught about the story of the First Thanksgiving, they learned that the Pilgrims "held on to their faith and their faith sustained them" (Weiss 372). The survival of the Pilgrims became a symbol that inextricably linked transcendental Christian power with the Thanksgiving holiday. The Pilgrims' survival becomes symbolically reflective of Biblical concepts like the myth of a "chosen people" and a "promised paradise" that would host them. Their journey to North America and their colonization of the land to become the United States was thus not only necessary, but divinely inspired and inherently righteous. This was known even by the celebration's architects. Embedded in the original blueprints for the national holiday written by Hale, churchgoing and grace were and have remained important parts of what should ostensibly be a secular holiday (776). This is part of a concept called "civil religion." This concept's definition is contested by many scholars, so the definition that I will be using moving forward is the one provided by Encyclopedia Britannica: "a public profession of faith that aims to inculcate political values and that prescribes dogma, rites, and rituals for citizens of a particular country" (Swaine). Thanksgiving is an important tool in the reification of this type of civil religion. It is on these occasions that "presidents in their proclamations and religious leaders in their sermons have…reassured Americans of their divine protection, divine aid, and divine guidance" (Weiss 373). In this paradigm, Christian observance becomes not just a part of participating in the holiday but as something integral to the idea of being American in the first place; to be American is to be Christian. This legacy of proclamations centering Christianity in this holiday is reified again in *A Charlie Brown Thanksgiving*. In purposefully involving itself with the legacy of this holiday as a spiritual occasion, this ideology thus becomes indelibly pressed into the collective memory of Thanksgiving and America that it reifies and perpetuates.

It is this affirmation that works to erase the existence of Indigenous peoples as those to whom the identity of "American" is applicable. The way that Thanksgiving constructs American national identity positions "a particular constellation of Americans (traditionally white, Protestant, Anglo-Saxons) as the exclusive representatives of a uniquely American community" (Weiss 369). The Pilgrims, the figures that the audience are meant to identify with in the story of the First Thanksgiving, are the ones that survive the 'harsh winter' of a 'new land' that had been survived many times before them and would be many times after. For this survival, they are positioned as the 'true embodiment' of the American spirit, be that whatever a given rhetor constructs it to be. The efforts the Pilgrims took to build their own exploitative, colonialist homestead become the object of sympathy, situating their ideology as something for their audience to admire and even emulate.

Meanwhile, the American ideological narrative at large being revivified by Charlie Brown and the Peanuts gang constructs the Wampanoag people as a generalized group of Indigenous people, ready to lend their aid in the early days of European colonization before quietly and amicably fading into the background. This is borne out in the stories that characters like

Linus tell in the film. In his Thanksgiving meal prayer, he mentions only one Wampanoag person by name—Massasoit—and only in passing: "In the year 1621, the pilgrims held their first Thanksgiving feast. They invited the great Indian chief Massasoit who brought 90 of his brave Indians and a great abundance of food" (*A Charlie Brown Thanksgiving* 15:20-32). He then continues to mention multiple other Pilgrims by name and recounts the prayer that they delivered at their feast. The language used to describe Massasoit reconstructs him as a passive side character in the Pilgrims' story, a person who was simply kind enough to bring food and company to a feast rather than a political leader capable of making savvy diplomatic decisions. In doing so, Massasoit and the Wampanoag people's actual involvement in the history of Thanksgiving can be more easily forgotten. This is not an accident, either. In fact, the erasure of Indigenous peoples from this narrative is largely due to the era in which the tale of the First Thanksgiving was first codified. Originally written in 1841 by antiquarian Alexander Young, the myth was widely circulated within the United States due to the perceived 'end' of the American Indian Wars as a method by which citizens of the country could work to 'move past' the systematic genocides of Indigenous peoples (Weiss 371-2). This is an example of Kitsch's concept of containment which they describe as a type of narrative that seeks to create a group of people as Other and thus in need of containment (Kitsch 2020). The 'scary barbarians' of the war front were recontextualized as the 'great Indians' who treated America's ancestors with kindness upon arrival. They were contained in the role of benevolent helpers, occasionally depicted as being direct servants of God sent to aid the Pilgrims through the winter.

This myth of intercultural cooperation goes a long way to encourage the active forgetting of the genocides of Indigenous people that are still being perpetuated by the United States. This practice, described by Hoerl as 'selective amnesia,' is not an uncommon one in this country. Hoerl describes it as a "particularly insidious form of forgetting that undermines social justice and collective empowerment" (Hoerl 4). It refers to the ways that hegemony and dominant power structures invite Americans to forget about the injustice and dissent in their history. Be it the radical work of Martin Luther King, Jr. or the work done by the Red Power Movement, selective amnesia operates especially strongly in modern discussions about the First Thanksgiving myth. In positioning the nation's beginnings as a cooperative one, one creates a space in which the rest of America's relations with Indigenous groups can either be actively ignored or glossed over in favor of constructing national identity. A largely white audience can spend their Thanksgivings around the dinner table, toasting to each other about their tolerance and open-mindedness while their ignorance continues to starve, displace, and kill Indigenous peoples all over the country. Year after year, this myth targets, contains, and systematically erases the people that are depicted.

The fact that *A Charlie Brown Thanksgiving* chooses to stick to this narrative uncritically is absolutely baffling when one considers the time in which it was produced. In 1969, just four years prior, the nineteen-month-long occupation of Alcatraz by Indigenous protestors began on Thanksgiving Day, kickstarting what would come to be known as the Red Power Movement (Weiss 373). In 1970, the anti-holiday celebration titled the National Day of Mourning was created in Plymouth, Massachusetts as a direct protest of the Thanksgiving Day parade put on by the town (374). The actions were deliberately intended to be a site for counter-memory, focusing these movements' critiques on the erasure that the Thanksgiving holiday perpetrates on Americans' collective memory of Indigenous peoples. In contrast with Thanksgiving, a holiday that "attempts to establish continuity with a suitable historic past" (374), the National Day of Mourning was created to invert that pattern. Instead, it subverts the symbols of the holiday (Plymouth rock, Pilgrim hats, pumpkins, feasting) to humanize the minority groups popularly depicted in the myth. It was this movement that would lead to open acknowledgment of the contributions of Indigenous peoples throughout American history by President Ronald Reagan and all successive presidents (377), albeit done to reinforce the myth of intercultural cooperation. These were all widely reported on events at the time and would have been popular in common discourse when this special was being produced. Despite this, *A Charlie Brown Thanksgiving* textually seems to refuse any association with counterhegemonic ways of understanding the holiday and continues on its course to replicate the injustices of a contemporary narrative that was already being actively critiqued on a public stage. Predominantly white friends gather around a table and enjoy a feast, parables are told about the exploits of the Pilgrims settlers, Snoopy gets into wacky antics in the kitchen, and the ending arrives as the children go to enjoy a meal at Charlie Brown's grandmother's house. The domestic occasion lays here like a tapestry depicting a romantic narrative of settlers celebrating on the background of genocide against Indigenous peoples made invisible.

Now comes the inevitable question: What's the point? Yes, *A Charlie Brown Thanksgiving* perpetuates a narrative that silences Indigenous voices, encourages the development of a nationalistic version of Christianity, and reinforces the segregation of labor within a binary system of gender. Analyzing this film is important because of the influential role that it plays in perpetuating the narratives of colonialism that undergird Thanksgiving as a holiday. Narratives have an immense amount of power when it comes to shaping the identities of vast groups of people and supporting the agendas of political actors on the world stage. Scholars and the general public need to be able to identify narratives when they appear in media. This is especially true for media designed for children as those have the most power to affect the ways that the upcoming generations will respond and contribute to the political landscape of the future. These kinds of mediated texts are vital in their role in shaping narratives and guiding collective memory either in favor of or against the dominant powers that be. Thanksgiving does not exist solely as a source of national pride but as a "cultural trauma [that] has left indelible marks upon [Indigenous Americans'] group consciousness, marking their memories forever and changing their future identity in fundamental and irrevocable ways" (Weiss 375). Through honest recontextualization of this holiday and the identities developed from it, alongside actual political action like giving stolen lands back to the people they belong to, Americans have a responsibility to right the wrongs of their colonial ancestors. If Americans cannot respond to the generational trauma of victims of genocide to work toward healing, then America has no right to call itself a 'free nation.'

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The *Vanishing Half* and the Monstrous Mother

How Motherhood Has Become Abject and How To Fix It

LILY MILLER

Introduction

> *"Often father and daughter look down on mother (woman) together. They exchange meaningful glances when she misses a point. They agree that she is not as bright as they are, cannot reason as they do. This collusion does not save the daughter from the mother's fate."*
>
> – BONNIE BURSTOW

Without realizing it, most Americans are taught from a young age to scorn, pity, and even hate their mothers. Stereotypes about nagging women, controlling parenting, and overbearing mothers dominate our culture's media, conversations, and behaviors. Plaguing literature since its inception are misogynistic tropes of womanhood and the American repression of femininity to exploit women on the page. This is especially true of mothers, who time and time again are painted as meek, neurotic background characters or as overbearing villains. As feminist movements over time have pushed against these stereotypes, America's hatred of women and mothers has turned up in more subtle ways, pushing mothers (fictional and real) into expectations impossible to fulfill and ridiculing them when they do not succeed. Such is the foundation of Barbara Creed's theory of the "Monstrous-Feminine," building off Julia Kristeva's abjection theory.

American society is obsessed with failed mothers and with depicting motherhood, particularly in mother/daughter relationships, as inherently traumatic. Mass media, movies, TV shows, literature, and even the societal conversations and actions of people every day depict this obsession repeatedly. These theorists help explain why this obsession takes place and how patriarchal societies are bound to grotesque-ify women. In examining Brit Bennett's book, *The Vanishing Half*, great analysis is possible with some troublesome mothers, their troubled daughters, and how even an otherwise very progressive text can fall into tropes of failed mothers. Bennett's novel swept audiences when it was published in 2020 amidst a global pandemic and a national reckoning with police violence against Black bodies. The plot follows twins Stella and Desiree as one sister decides to pass for white and one does not, each facing the consequences of her actions in her own life and their respective daughter's. The story grapples with major themes of desire, control, expectations, and, of course, the complexities of racial passing in America. However, the very core of the book revolves around a deeply emotional, familial story of motherhood and daughterhood and all of the attending horrors that accompany a mother's choice.

Ultimately, however, I do believe there is hope in the daughters of the world. Examining *The Vanishing Half* specifically, one can expand upon the theories of abjection and the monstrous-feminine to find a way to reframe motherhood, read mothers in a kinder, more compassionate way, and begin combating our national disdain of motherhood through the work of their daughters.

Abjection and the Monstrous-Feminine

So what is abjection? Kristeva's monumental 1980 book *Powers of Horror: An Essay on Abjection* introduced the world to the term 'abjection', or "what disturbs identity, system, order. What does not respect borders, positions, rules. The in-between, the ambiguous, the composite" (Kristeva 1). The abject is that which reminds us humans of the fragility of the order we have created, defying systems and boundaries in an appalling, grotesque, and horrific way. In Kristeva's eyes, the ultimate physical abjection is the corpse, as "it is death infecting life" (1). Vomit, pee, blood, and other bodily excretions also are abject as they remind the life-filled person of the cadaver they inhabit. But dead bodies are not all that is abject; abjection can also appear socially in the "immoral, sinister, scheming, and shady" (2) when someone knowingly defies the expectations of society in the name of what is right. She writes that any crime is abject as it points out the fragility of the law, but more so is a friend that betrays you, a premeditated murder, or other such sinister crimes because "they heighten the display of such fragility" (2). Anything that pushes against the delicate systemic order in culture is abject, physically or socially grossing or creeping audiences out and keeping them entertained but uncomfortable and potentially scared. Abjection works so well for American audiences because, to an extent, it is very attractive to see what makes us uncomfortable in a confined setting. The abject is repulsive, but when it is presented in a text that readers can ultimately close, put away, and leave behind, it can be incredibly attractive.

Abjection abounds in films and literature, but Australian media critic Barbara Creed took abjection one step further into the social realm. In her essay "Horror and the Monstrous Feminine; An imaginary abjection," Creed describes that as a patriarchal, male-supremacist society horrified by abjection, it is only natural that women would become abject and grotesque socially. She says that throughout history the feminine body has always been abject; male-dominated societies have created horrific female monsters such as Medusa, the Sirens, and Grendel's mother. In the modern era, these monsters become more subtle, following the social abjection Kristeva notes. Creed considers five archetypes of what she calls the "monstrous-feminine": unruly bodies, failed mothers, terrible mothers, phallic mothers, and feminine hives. Unruly bodies are those that do not follow the "rules" of a body as a male body does. This can include menstruation, pregnancy, and birthing. Unruly bodies link the abjection inherent in the childbearing woman, as her menstruation and ability to create and birth a child "links her directly to the animal world and to the great cycle of birth, decay and death" (Creed 47). This connection through women's reproductive functions places her on the side of animals rather than in symbolic order, reminding mankind of his true closeness with the animal world, defying the boundaries between man and animal he has established, therefore creating the mother as abject. Three of the 'Monstrous-Feminine' involve motherhood in the title, with the terrible mother (a mother who is unkind), a failed mother (a mother who attempts to be good and kind but fails), and the phallic mother (one who mimics "father" or masculine traits). The abjection is the most subtle in the failed mother, as she pushes against the delicate world order of what a mother should be almost accidentally. She is doing what she thinks is right, trying to do right by her child, and creates harm anyway. This is intensified in mother-daughter relationships, which pertains directly to *The Vanishing Half*. In a related essay by Creed, "Woman as Monstrous Womb," Creed discusses more specifically the mother image and how abjection is linked. She notes that there is a societally viewed "disease" passed down from mother to daughter: "the disease of being female - an abject creature not far removed from the animal world and one dominated totally by her feelings and reproductive functions" (47). Mother-daughter relationships are different than any other as they contain two abject bodies, one well versed in her own abjection and desperate to prevent it, the other unaware of her abjection and rejecting her mother for it. I believe that Bennett's choice of one daughter per mother in The Vanishing Half, versus choosing either sister to have a son, was intentionally done to display this more complicated and abject relationship.

First, however, I would like to expand Creed's notion to also include people of color. Notably, there has not been much research or writing on the racialized aspect of abjection, how if America's patriarchal society inherently will make women abject, then America's white-supremacist society will make people of color abject. Marginalized groups often act in Kristeva's "in-between, the ambiguous, the composite" (1) out of necessity, or have actions and bodies placed in between the boxes created by society (because society was created by white men). This becomes additionally abject in the composite of being a mother of color, both non-man and non-white. Kimberlé Crenshaw's monumental work "Demarginalizing the Intersection of Race and Sex: A Black Feminist Critique of Antidiscrimination Doctrine, Feminist Theory, and Antiracist Politics" coined the term "intersectionality" to discuss Black women and the ways both feminism and anti-racism are uniquely leaving Black women out. She writes that "Black women are sometimes excluded from feminist theory and antiracist policy discourse because both are predicated on a discrete set of experiences that often does not accurately reflect the interaction of race and gender" (Crenshaw 140). Black women are facing specific systemic issues based on the compounding of their Blackness and their womanhood, something that Crenshaw argues both the feminist movement (mostly white women) and the anti-racism movement (mostly Black men) are not considering. She argues that the entire framework that the ideas of the "women's experience" and the "Black experience" are based on needs to be "rethought and recast" (140) to include Black women and their experiences combining gender and race.

These concepts lend themselves well to understanding how Black women, in particular, become abject. Oftentimes, that which becomes abject about white women is even more abject in Black women, as all

Black bodies exist in a space that white bodies (men) do not understand. Therefore, mothers of color are more likely to be minoritized as abject, as defined by Creed. This makes Creed's theory of abjection, particularly the archetype of the monstrous-feminine that she identifies as the "failing mother," useful for understanding *The Vanishing Half* and its depiction of two mothers of color. Creed's theory of the monstrous feminine will play a large role in our understanding of *The Vanishing Half* specifically as we view Stella (and Desiree's) choice to identify as white or Black and the impact this has on their lives, our readings of them, and their daughters' understanding of them.

The Vanishing Half

Brit Bennett's *The Vanishing Half* is a book riddled with Black women who meet Creed's definition of failing mothers—women trying to do the best for their daughters but failing regardless. The novel depicts twin sisters living in the town of Mallard, Louisiana, a town founded on generations of mixed-race people. The Vignes twins, Desiree and Stella, grow up interdependent and inseparable. But as adults, eventually living together in New Orleans, Stella decides to pass as white and run away from her old life forever. The repercussions of this decision echo into each of their lives and their daughters' lives. As Desiree runs from an abusive partner with her daughter Jude back to Mallard, Stella, her husband Blake (unknowing of her true racial identity), and their daughter Kennedy live in an affluent white neighborhood in Lpouisiana. When the cousins Jude and Kennedy meet decades later, they discover the truth about their mothers and themselves, forcing all of them to grapple with their decisions, pasts, and futures.

Bennett's novel was incredibly well received. The highly anticipated second novel from her, *Vanishing Half* was a #1 *New York Times* bestseller, a Good Morning America book club pick, and even made it onto former president Barack Obama's end of the year best books list of 2020 ("Barack Obama's Favorites"). *Wall Street Journal* wrote, "Bennett's tone and style recalls James Baldwin and Jacqueline Woodson, but it's especially reminiscent of Toni Morrison's 1970 debut novel, *The Bluest Eye*" ("The Vanishing Half"). It was a finalist for the Women's Prize for Fiction in 2021 and won the Goodreads Choice Award for Best Historical Fiction in 2020. All of this to say, the novel was fabulously successful and generated a meaningful discussion around racial passing and what it means to be Black or white. I personally found the book compelling and driven, offering up a version of passing literature unlike anything that had come before. However, I find the book more interesting in its explicit depiction of the effects that mothers' choices have on their daughters and the complicated, fraught relationships of Stella and Kennedy and Desiree and Jude. The novel lays out these mother/daughter relationships just as Creed lays out the monstrous-feminine and failed mothers, and one quickly begins to see how each mother's circumstances create a mother that becomes abject and tragic.

Stella[1]

Stella, although the more complicated character, is the mother in whom the failed mother trope comes up more clearly. Stella was always the more passive twin, described as neater, more obedient, and more involved in the town. She also loved school and is devastated when their mother pulls them out of school to get a job (Bennett 14). By the time they run away to New Orleans, Stella has already passed as white once before, mistaken for a white girl in a shop in town (93). So, when Stella applied for a job in New Orleans as a white woman after being mistaken for one yet again, it was just a small lie to get the girls some much needed money (82). At this job, unbeknownst to Desiree, Stella meets Blake Sanders, the associate hiring Stella as his new secretary. He eventually asks her to move to Boston with him and her life as a white woman is solidified, marrying him soon after and having a blonde-haired, violet-eyed daughter, Kennedy.

Now, important in understanding Stella's character is how passive her racial passing is. In an essay entitled "Little Lies Everywhere: Untangling Truths in Twenty-First Century Maternal Fiction" by Kathryn Baker, Baker points out that "While there is some evidence to suggest Stella truly loves Blake, it becomes evident that Stella is more attracted to what Blake represents—security, stability, and escape" (76). Stella choosing to pass to get a job was a reasonable action; choosing to stay white forever with Blake was an opportunity for stability that Stella could never have dreamed of otherwise. Baker notes that Desiree and Adele think of Stella's passing as a bold choice, as a separation from her old self and stepping into a new self. However, this is not quite the case. Stella is described in childhood as just going along with what others say, always making the most practical decision without much thought. Then, when Blake proposes a move and requires her to contemplate a permanent passing, "She didn't give herself a chance to second-guess" (261). Stella admits to taking the practical opportunity given and running with it multiple times throughout the text, stating earlier that "She had become white only because everyone thought she was" (249). Thus, her lying starts quite simply and quite passively. She also passes in a way to escape the sexual and physical racialized violence that she has witnessed and faced. As a young child, she and Desiree witness her father being lynched, dragged out of their house, horribly assaulted, and eventually killed (44). When she and Desiree work at the Dupont mansion as teenagers, Mr. Dupont sexually assaulted her several times until the fear and harassment emboldened her to leave with Desiree (204). In this way, passing is another practical advantage: the violence white people face is far less than that of Black people, even those who could pass as white. Of course, the passing lie, practical at first, builds tremendously until her whole life is built on a fiction she can never reveal. Stella must live with one foot in the past and one in the present, and her passiveness in the original decisions causes constant anxiety for her in her adult life. She is worried that the white people she interacts with can somehow tell she is not one of them, and she is afraid that Black people she meets will be able to see her as one of them. In the ultimate act of fear, self-loathing, and deception-building, she even says and does racist things, demanding that a Black family not move into their neighborhood (193). And, unfortunately, this is not a strong foundation for being a good mother.

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[1] This work is taken from a longer piece on both sisters within *The Vanishing Half*; for brevity's sake Desiree and her daughter Jude have been cut from this excerpt.

To make matters worse, Stella never wanted to be a mother, mostly because of her fear of being discovered. She had imagined "pushing out a baby that grew darker and darker, Blake recoiling in horror" (199), a great image of bodily abjection in women and pregnancy's connection to the natural world. She is relieved when Kennedy is born white passing as ever, with beautiful blonde hair and blue-violet eyes. But, she notes that "still, sometimes, Kennedy felt like a daughter who belonged to someone else, a child Stella was borrowing while she loaned a life that never should have been hers" (200). This unfortunately forms the basis of the type of relationship Stella and Kennedy have: distant, lying, and cold. Bennett writes, "Like anything, lying to her daughter became easier over time. She was raising Kennedy to lie too, although the girl would never know it" (231). She indirectly teaches Kennedy to lie through their relationship to the new Black family that has moved in, the Walkers. The relationship between Stella and Mrs. Loretta Walker is the only friendship Stella really ever tries to pursue and it is built on lies: lying about why she is pursuing this relationship to her daughter, her husband, and herself. Of course, in a more direct way, Loretta and Stella's relationship falls apart because of Kennedy's parroting Stella's racist words (264). In the fallout Stella slaps a young Kennedy across the face, "seeing everyone that she had ever hated" (265), then falling to her knees and kissing Kennedy's crying face. As the book continues, Kennedy acknowledges the impact this constant lying and hot and cold energy had on her development: "She saw herself as a little girl – eager, pestering, clambering to be close to a mother who never wanted her to be. A mother whom she'd never actually know" (385). She is an actress, albeit not an incredibly successful one, and Stella becomes infuriated by how she is "blissfully unaware of how hard her mother had worked to maintain the lie that was her life" (299). Kennedy almost takes lying for granted, a skill she learned in youth that she has no idea the significance of in her life.

In these instances, Stella becomes a failed mother, or even a terrible mother. Again, the difference between a "failed" and a "terrible" mother is that of intentionality; Stella is not intentionally mothering Kennedy poorly, but she seems to try a little less to be caring than Desiree. She never really wanted to be a mother, and when Kennedy is a young adult, Stella outright vocally disapproves of and reprimands Kennedy's choices. When Kennedy is a child, Stella is regularly and consistently lying, racist, and a bit mean. She is not the perfect mother. There are multiple instances of Kennedy, both as a child and as an adult, outright asking Stella questions about her childhood and Stella repeatedly chooses to lie (201, 358). But, Stella's choices are somewhat forgivable in that they are rooted in her anxiety of being caught and her constant fear because her life is based on a lie. In that regard, Stella's decisions, viewed as survival instincts, can be given a bit more grace. She is doing the best with what she is working with. She keeps her identity a lie from Kennedy in part because of the racialized violence she has experienced and witnessed in her own life; by giving her daughter a life as a white woman, she is protecting her from this violence. And, she loves Kennedy! But her well-intended love does not necessarily guide her to make good choices. She and Blake give Kennedy everything she asks for, putting her in the best schools, buying her way into a good college, and pampering her with a lavish lifestyle. That, of course, then has its own negative repercussions: Jude's friend Barry describes Kennedy as a "rich bitch" (286). She never says thank you, takes every opportunity handed to her for granted, and is generally an insufferable person. This becomes an obvious example of failed motherhood, as trying to control the positive outcomes for her daughter, albeit masked in the role of a caring provider, she leaves Kennedy always wanting more, taking everything for granted. Similar to Desiree, Stella also seems to have some acknowledgement of her own failings, seen in a fight Stella has with Kennedy:

> …sometimes lying was an act of love. Stella had spent too long lying to tell the truth now, or maybe, there was nothing left to reveal. Maybe this was who she had become. (344)

Where Do We Go From Here?

As seen up to this point, even a progressive text like Brit Bennett's *The Vanishing Half* can create women characters who systemically fall into the trap of failed motherhood. Where do we go from here? American society is riddled with failed mothers in and outside of texts, and Bennett's mothers are no exception. However, the book does not end at page 344 with Stella giving up on ever telling her daughter the truth; it goes on to explore Jude and Kennedy's lives in conjunction with each other and with their mothers. And that is where there is hope for our future, a light in the darkness of women-on-women madness. While in many ways Bennett writes these women as failed mothers, by showing all perspectives she ultimately displays that the context is what is failing these mothers. Desiree and Stella take wildly different paths in life; one living as a relatively happy Black woman working in a diner in her hometown and one as a wealthy white woman miserable in her own anxiety. And yet, they both fail. Why is that? Is motherhood inherently abject? I believe it is—the patriarchy has set women up to fail as mothers. Creed names failed mothers as a trope that abounds in media, that women are trying to be good mothers and still fail. *The Vanishing Half* sees two mothers in vastly different worlds make vastly different decisions for the good of their daughters and both still fail. Bennett pivots at this point in the novel to make a new point here in agreement with Creed's monstrous feminine abjection: it is not these women who are failing, it is the world (our boxes and labels) that has failed them. Their circumstances and their reaction to them create failure and Bonnie Burstow's quote points us to the usual apathetic, cruel reaction from fathers and daughters. However, if Creed is right that mothers become abject in the moment their daughters reject them for their fathers, there is hope that the monstrous mother can be made beautiful and glorious again through the acceptance from their daughters. Desiree and Stella are complex people living in complicated circumstances with intricate reasons for their complicated decisions. Luckily for them, and intentionally in Bennett's writing, their daughters seem to ultimately come to a place of forgiveness and understanding. Their daughters, and arguably all daughters, become empathetically responsible for saving their mothers from abjection's cruel fate.

Kennedy

Kennedy's moments of empathy are a bit more nuanced than Jude's,[2] and she has a lot further to go in repairing her relationship with her mother, as she truly knows so little about her. After interacting for a while at her show with Jude knowing the truth about Kennedy and Kennedy unaware, Jude finally is pushed to reveal it all. Kennedy, rejected and vulnerable after she thinks her mother never came to see her show, taunts Jude about Reese, saying how lucky she is that he loves someone like her (333). She hits where she knows it hurts, targeting Jude's insecurities and Jude has had enough. Her taunting pushes Jude over the edge, and the truth bursts out: "Your mother's from Mallard! Where mine's from. They're twins. They look exactly alike and…your mother's crazy. She's been lying to you her whole life" (334). This, of course, wreaks havoc on both Kennedy and Stella's lives. Kennedy begins questioning her mother, asking about Mallard (340) and if she ever had a sister (343). Stella reacts by pushing Kennedy away further, calling her crazy for believing Jude and bribing her with a new apartment (345). Their relationship is flawed, broken, and distant here, as Jude's revelation of the truth seeps into all that Kennedy has never known about her mother.

Kennedy goes on to be an actress in a soap opera and low-level theatrical productions and readers begin to see glimmers of empathy from her. She thinks back on her mother slapping her for what she said to Loretta Walker's daughter, noting that "The slap confused her less than the kiss after, her mother's anger and love colliding together so violently…

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[2] **2.** Again, this is an excerpt from a longer work that spends some time dissecting Jude's forgiveness of her mother. Jude's empathy is a bit more blatant and simpler to understand, but I believe Kennedy's is more interestingly complicated and nuanced.

[Her mother] was angry, yes, but more than that she looked…frightened by…her daughter, who had revealed herself to be something so ugly" (380). Her mother, as we know, is lashing out because she sees herself and her own perceived ugliness in her daughter; she taught her daughter to hate, and hateful she has become. Kennedy in reflection starts to see how her mother was not acting out of hate or anger towards Kennedy herself, but rather out of fear and stress. While that is not an excuse for her actions, it is the first glimpse of Kennedy seeing her mother in an empathetic light.

They then see each other one last time before Kennedy flees to Europe, sitting together in their backyard. Kennedy shows Stella a photo Jude gave her of the Vignes twins in their youth at their father's funeral and, of course, Stella partially lies again. When Kennedy says that she just wants to know who her mother is, she replies, "You know who I am! This…is not me…She doesn't look anything like me" (398). Kennedy runs away after this conversation, moving to Europe for a few months to find herself. When she returns, Stella picks her up from the airport without her wedding ring on; Kennedy asks about it and Stella almost lies again but decides against it, saying "I gave it to my sister…We can talk in the car" (437). She finally admits to who she is and what her life was like, although Bennett does not detail for the reader exactly what she tells Kennedy. All she says she says through Stella, who says to Kennedy: "It hurts to talk about…You understand? But I want you to know me" (438). This is the ultimate show of Kennedy's empathy; she has put in the work to hold her mother accountable and eventually it gets Stella to a place where she is willing to share her life with someone. Of course, Kennedy's kindness to Stella is less overt than Jude's, being in no way tender with her mother. Instead, she shows Stella kindness by urging her to be honest with herself and with her daughter.

This demand for honesty, although perhaps delivered unkindly, comes from a place of longing for connection—for a mother that she can know and understand. While Stella initially is resistant to this, because of Kennedy's insistence she gets to live her life as her true self with at least one person. Around Kennedy from this point forward, she does not have to live in fear or stress, comforted in the understanding that her daughter truly knows her. While her lying was done to protect Kennedy, Kennedy empathetically demands that they share a relationship of truth to help her mother protect her peace. In one of the final mentions between the two, Kennedy reflects on her relationship with her mother and that she will lie to her about her relationship with Jude: "Secrets were the only language they spoke. Her mother showed her love by lying, and in turn, Kennedy did the same. She never mentioned the funeral photograph again" (448). This ending moment also shows empathy to her mother in a big way; she understands that it hurts for Stella to talk about her past and intentionally keeps things a secret from her to keep her comfortable and at peace. She never tells her of Adele Vignes's death (448), of her continued relationship with Jude, or of the photograph. She mimics Stella's behavior in this way, lying to keep her mother safe.

Conclusion

Abject motherhood and the failed mother trope haunt American literature and media today, and Brit Bennett's *The Vanishing Half* is no exception. Desiree and Stella Vignes diverge in youth and create vastly different lives for themselves, each mothering a daughter and each failing her. Bennett falls into the trap of failed mothers and American audiences eat it up. The book was included on book club lists across the country and likely was read by millions of readers, each on reading Desiree and Stella as mothers who unintentionally harm their daughters. However, these millions of readers also saw something not too popular in American media: great empathy, understanding, and insistence of honesty and goodness from Jude and Kennedy towards their mothers. I believe that Bennett has written young female characters who subvert Bonnie Burstow's quote from the opening, saving themselves from their mother's fate through graciousness and understanding. It is not these mothers who have failed, it is their circumstances that have failed them. Jude and Kennedy begin to do the work that we all must do to understand our mothers, allowing them the opportunity to fall and helping them get back up.

As I began with a quote from distinguished author Bonnie Burstow, I want to conclude with a quote from the esteemed Toni Morrison. Morrison delivered a speech at Queen's College entitled "Women, Race, and Memory" saying that our country is on the verge of a slow and subtle sororicide due to the way patriarchy has pitted women against one another. However, at the same time, women are the ones that can fight against this, the only ones who can save us from ourselves. She said one of the best hopes of all is "the dazzling accomplishment of women's art and scholarship. Nothing, it seems to me, is more exhilarating, and more dramatically to the point, than what is happening among the artists and scholars" (Morrison). Brit Bennett's book of failed mothers and empathetic daughters is a prime example of this: a fabulous young Black female writer reclaiming an age-old story of passing and abject motherhood and turning it into an empathetic masterpiece. The wide success of *The Vanishing Half* and the beauty of the story gives us hope beyond the repetitive "failed mother" trope. The patriarchal world fails these mothers, yes, but through their daughters we are encouraged to read them kindly. With hope and the continuation of women's writing, the way we view motherhood can be reframed forever.

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PART THREE

WORLD

Dalila as a Function of Doubt

TARA HOLLANDER

The story in *Samson Agonistes* is an age-old tale of the Bible that author John Milton's audience would be familiar with. In a time where religions groups were grappling with the idea of predestination and how free will and temptation fit into it, this story was particularly relevant. What Milton brings to light, though, is the vagueness surrounding Samson's death. In the story, Samson has been captured by the rivaling Philistine tribe because his wife, Dalila, turned him in; Milton portrays conversations between Samson and his friends, father, and wife leading up to Samson's final act of bringing down a Philistine temple, killing himself and all within. Samson's death, however, is delivered to Milton's audience through the words of the Messenger, a final narrator, not through Samson's first-hand account of what was going through his mind. We must take all the clues leading up to that point to guess what he was thinking and what his true motivations for destruction were: selfish revenge and self-inflicted suicide or God-divined action. That distinction would be important to early modern readers and is a contested point in Samson's story even today. I argue that Dalila's character is employed by Milton to investigate the morally ambiguous aspects of Samson, adding to the complexities of his final act.

We begin the story with a broken-down Samson amid his imprisonment, here we begin to learn of his unstable emotional state. Both Manoa and the Chorus, Samson's father and friends, visit Samson in an attempt to raise his spirits, his father even tries to gain his ransom. When asked about his transgressions, Samson replies that Dalila, a "specious monster," was "not the prime cause, but I myself" was (Milton ll. 230-4). Here we see Samson take the weight of revealing the secret that led to his capture, and it is not the only instance. Later he says, "I myself have brought them on, / Sole author I, sole cause" and "let me here, / As I deserve, pay on my punishment," indicating that he takes responsibility for exercising the free will God has given humans (ll. 375-6, 488-9). Here we start to see the weight of free will that Samson is grappling with, along with Milton's early modern audience.

This sin against God throws Samson into depression, revealing more so his instability prior to engaging with Dalila. Over and over, Samson reiterates his desire for death as a mercy: "but as for life, / To what end should I seek it," "oft-invocated death / Hasted the welcome end of all my pains," and "speedy death, / The close of all my miseries" (ll. 521-2, 575-6, 650-1). He is tempted by these thoughts. Even though wishing for death is not explicitly condemned by Milton in the story, it would be shocking for his audience to see someone disrespect God's greatest gift: life. God's children may have free will, but they must choose to avoid temptations like this. Both the Chorus and Manoa try to dissuade Samson from this thinking, arguing that Samson has "the tumors of a troubled mind" and he must "repent the sin" that got him into this mess (ll. 185, 504). Though Samson has physical strength, it is becoming more and more apparent that he is weak of mind. Both parties also, above all else, maintain that Samson must "let another hand, not thine, exact / Thy penal forfeit from thyself" (ll. 507-8). This is because suicide, for both Samson and Milton's audience, is a sin in the eyes of the Lord—something that is very important concerning Samson's final act. Based on Samson's depressed nature and wishes for death, the audience begins to wonder if he will take the advice of his father and friends.

Samson's nature, though, takes a turn when conversing with Dalila and continues to make the audience question his actions. The once sullen man is immediately enraged by Dalila's presence; he is not happy to see the woman he at various times calls a snake, concubine, and monster (pp. 717, 39). Dalila comes in peace, seeking forgiveness for her betrayal. Instead of lending her mercy, he heaps insults upon her, saying he "unbosomed all [his] secrets to thee / not out of levity, but overpow'red / by thy request" (ll. 880-1). He seems to forget howhe took full responsibility for his transgression against God when conversing with his friends. Dalila's first purpose in the story, then, is to point out the inconsistency of Samson's character, setting up doubt about his morality.

It is also important to note that Milton is quite bold in giving Dalila, a historically despised and jezebel-troped woman, a voice. Her words must carry a deep significance to the story that Milton is telling, and their effect is to continue picking away at Samson's moral character. She speaks of her "prevailing" love and how it was overshadowed with deceit, but maintains she was pressured into deceit by "the bonds of civil duty" to her tribe and "religion" (ll. 853-4). Samson, again, dismisses all her claims as false, saying that personal "zeal moved thee" towards her own gain (l. 895). Then, Samson says something that damages his own character more than anything, arguing in the face of Dalila's love that her "charms / No more on me have power, their force is nulled," but later saying he has a "sudden rage to tear thee joint by joint" (l. 935). It is obvious through his own words that his spirit and anger has been roused by the presence and words of Dalila. She says so herself, later noting that "thy anger, unappeasable, still rages" (l. 963). The irony of Samson's statements points to his flawed self-perception, and the inconsistency of his character is proving to be a bad look for a biblical hero.

The parallels between Samson and Dalila seen in their motivations, emotional state, and response to affliction lend themself to an easy comparison. First, they both are motivated by similar causes: to advance their own tribe and religion. However, only Dalila is condemned for this aim, whereas Samson is continually praised. In this, the double standards have begun. Furthermore, in her final act of kindness towards her husband, Dalila is shunned and said to have come in "malice not repentance" (l. 821). If the audience were to question Samson's final act with the same severity, there would be some serious implications, rather than immediately being granted with the Messengers assurance that he "self-killed / Not willingly" (ll. 1664-5). Dalila, to her credit, even points out this inconsistency saying, "In argument with men a woman ever / Goes by the worse, whatever be her cause" (ll. 903-4). Here she appears cool and collected, pointing out that she lost the argument before it started because of her gender, while Samson has proven his emotional instability throughout the entire story. The audience, along with Dalila, begins to question and lament unwarranted unfairness. These parallels should also cause the audience to wonder what else is unfair that they once understood as natural—what is more available for such fundamental inquiry than the ambiguous final act of Samson?

The final pages of dialogue serve to increase the audience's doubt of Samson's character. First, when speaking to Harapha, he changes his opinion of who holds fault for his capture. He tells Harapha that the Philistines "constrained the bride / To wring from me and tell to them my secret" (ll. 1198-9). He directly contradicts what was his previous stance, that the fault laid on Dalila's own religious zeal. This shifting of blame again continues to obscure what should be his sound moral character. Furthermore, he pursues morally gray actions by returning to his wish, a temptation for "death to rid me hence" (l. 1263). Finally, Milton's structure and use of a messenger concerning Samson's final act can cause doubt. While the dialogue prior is drawn out, the story of Samson's end comes quickly and not from his own lips. Without Samson's words we are unable to know what he is thinking in the moments before exacting revenge. It seems hard to believe, after seeing his depressed state, that Samson's friends and father would so easily accept his death as "favored and assist[ed]" by God (l. 1720). A footnote from the text adds to the ambiguity, saying that Milton probably agreed with the Chorus on the status of Samson's death though "the point cannot be proven" (Page 758). Samson's actions in combination with the hastened ending provide evidence that Milton may be pushing his audience to question the legitimacy of Samson's ordained death.

Ultimately Milton's words give new light to a well-known story and may even provide an alternate ending. Those who read Milton's work during his time would have felt the unease that this alternative ending brings—he complicates the comfort that comes with a simple ending. Unease like this complicates religion and belonging, forcing followers to evaluate their beliefs. The broken state of Samson's emotional well-being in combination with his wishes for death and shifting of blame onto others creates a morally gray hero to investigate. When compared to and interacting with Dalila, we can see that these concerns are exacerbated. Samson remains a person without mercy and with dangerous double standards when it comes to his deceiving wife. All of these things could cause doubt on the nature of Samson and his decision-making skills when it comes down to his final act for an early modern audience. This questioning has implications beyond the story, though, as readers are forced to reflect upon the ambiguity of God's will and acknolwedge that actions are not black and white in the face of temptation.

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Truth over Performance

Anne Brontë's Bold Criticisms in *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall*

OLIVIA SANDVIK

Anne Brontë's *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall* (*Tenant*) received much criticism when it was first published in the summer of 1848. In a newspaper article from July of that year, the authors wrote that "It is not easy to make up a positive opinion about this book…many things may be said against it; for its exposition of vice goes far beyond the limits of true art; it is absolutely painful and disgusting; great part of the book is decidedly uninteresting and difficult to read" ("By Acton Bell"). Although the reviewers additionally say that the book's boldness is one of few in its "favor," they completely ignore Brontë's criticism of the expectations of women in the home, in marriage, motherhood, and duties expected of women in the period. Most American audiences are not well versed in Victorian society, so the purpose of this research is to use *Tenant* to inform said audience of the dark side of the Victorian home and unfair expectations of women. Women's autonomy and freedoms were constrained by class ideology and the patriarchal powers of men, specifically husbands, in the Victorian Era, and *Tenant* criticizes these domestic expectations of middle-class women. The middle-class Victorian woman was expected to be a dutiful wife, an orderly household manager, a virtuous angel in the house, and a loving mother—not an artist. Helen Graham (later Helen Huntingdon) often conforms and aspires to meet those norms at the beginning of her marriage but deviates from them when she deems it necessary for her or her son's wellbeing.

Before diving into the gender, marriage, and parenthood dynamics in *Tenant*, it is important to first establish the context in which Anne Brontë was writing, specifically her upbringing and motives for her last novel. Anne and her siblings Charlotte, Emily, Maria, and Branwell were born to Reverend Patrick Brontë. His interest in art, literature, writing, nature, politics, and religious beliefs can be seen in the lives of his children (Alexander 15). Anne, in particular, used her education to become a governess, and later to craft literature containing social criticism. But her life was not flawless. Brontë went through personal struggles both at home and at Roe Head School, and "The pattern of struggle—unhappiness and dissatisfaction competing with acceptance and stoic endurance—repeats itself in Anne's professional experiences" (Frawley 77) Brontë wrote *Tenant* after *Agnes Grey*, a novel about a fictional governess that paralleled her experience. Her personal experiences are also present in *Tenant*, but their purpose has been debated by critics. Frawley claims that

> Portions of *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall* have long been believed to have been prompted by Anne's response to her brother Branwell's reckless [behavior], capitulation to alcoholism and early death; but the novel's sophisticated narrative technique and its confrontational approach to thorny social issues (involving gender ideology, marriage and property laws and class hierarchies) reveal a much more complex agenda on the author's part. (79)

While it may be true that parts of *Tenant* were inspired by Branwell, alcoholism was an issue very much present in Victorian society. In the Preface of the Second Edition of *Tenant*, Brontë states that she did not write the novel to please her readers or herself or to gain exposure (13-4). Instead, Brontë "…wished to tell the truth, for truth always conveys its own moral to those are

able to receive it" (16). To Brontë, the "truth" means exposing the nooks and crannies of the home—inequalities and unhealthy behavior—that people like to ignore or justify. In exposing these darker Victorian home realities, Brontë strives to create positive change in the domestic sphere. If readers are not receptive to the truth, then they can gain little to no moral from it. As seen in the newspaper article, it follows that many critics of the time, especially men, thought that the subject matter was "uninteresting" or "disgusting." This important cultural and literary context sets up the discussion for examining Helen Huntingdon, a middle-class married woman and mother.

The middle-class wife's role as the moral center in the home was one of the most important in the Victorian Era, and Helen Huntingdon was no exception to this expectation. An accepted term for this role is the mythic "Angel in the House," which shaped the mistress' "behavioral expectations" ("Give Me Back" 113). Helen is, by definition, an exemplary angel, not just in character but in her religiosity too. Elizabeth Langland goes on to define the angel as "…the avatar of middle-class Victorian womanhood, [who] embodied purity, virtue, and selflessness" ("Give Me Back" 113). In *Tenant*, Helen exemplifies these three characteristics. She never compromises her values or beliefs when troubles arise; she uses them to help her push through them.

A key example of Helen performing the role of the angel is towards the end of the novel; the disparities between a wife's and husband's duty to integrity are stark. Months into Helen's stay at Wildfell Hall, she receives word that Mr. Huntingdon has fallen ill. With no more servants left to aid him, Helen goes back to Grassdale Manor to nurse him. When she arrives, he is delirious and mistakes her for multiple other women. When he realizes that it is his wife who has come to help him, he bitterly resents her "act of Christian charity" (Brontë 412). While she sees her promotion of "recovery and reformation," (417) as both a reward and a noble, wifely duty, he sees it as revenge for his various misdeeds against her. Langland talks to this point, stating that "Unsurprisingly, given his wife's personal growth and new habits of self-assertion, Huntingdon's perception of Helen rapidly mutates from angel to devil" ("Give Me Back" 122). This transfer of power, Mr. Huntingdon's reduced state and Helen's state of control, clearly triggers a repulsed response from the husband. Even though Helen consistently emblematizes the angel in the house, Mr. Huntingdon demonizes her actions in retaliation for his loss of control over her. Yet, she still urges him to repent to God so that he may be made blameless in God's eyes before he dies. This scene reveals that even in a rare instance where the husband's power over his wife and his own life diminished, the wife's morality was still unsuccessful in leading her "decent" Victorian husband on a good, right path. Solely placing the weighty expectation to always behave purely, virtuously, and selflessly on the wife creates an unbalanced marriage where the husband treats her and others poorly because he has minute moral expectations and accountability.

Another role of the middle-class wife is as household manager, and readers of *Tenant* see Helen execute some of the duties performed, but also that her efforts are thwarted. The household manager's job is to keep up social and political status, host parties and gatherings, and help her husband with managing finances. In "Nobody's Angel," Langland asserts that the household manager's importance applies to the public sphere, not just the private:

> The prevailing ideology regarded the house as a haven, a private domain opposed to the public sphere of commerce, but the house and its mistress in fact served as a significant adjunct to a man's business endeavors. Whereas husbands earned the money, wives had the important task of administering the funds to acquire or maintain social and political status. (291)

In *Tenant*, Helen hosts gatherings and maintains relationships with Millicent Hattersley and, begrudgingly, Lady Lowborough, but readers are never explicitly told of Helen helping Mr. Huntingdon manage finances; it is assumed that she does help since it is expected of her. That is, until Chapter Forty, when Huntingdon finds out that Helen is stashing away jewelry and money from the paintings she sold. He confiscates her keys and valuables so that she has no privacy or financial freedom. After that confrontation, he declares to Helen that she no longer has access to any funds in the house, which ultimately terminates her escape plan. Langland argues that "Previously, when we have looked at the angel in the house, we have not seen the figure I call 'nobody's angel,' an individual far less constrained, imprisoned, and passive than the victim discerned in conventional gender-inflected interpretations" ("Nobody's Angels" 303). This statement applies to *Tenant*. Helen tries her utmost to be the manager and angel in the house; and while she is not always passive, she is constrained and imprisoned by Mr. Huntingdon. Whether or not the Victorian societal expectations of women were attainable or sensible, Mr. Huntingdon's extreme restrictions prevent Helen from meeting those expectations, and more importantly, the freedom to meet them.

Helen Huntingdon becomes a mother in *Tenant*, but while she *is* meeting societal expectations, her parenting ideology does not match that of the typical Victorian mother. It was thought at the time that "… the parents' chief duty to their children was to make them fit for Heaven" (qtd. in "Marriage and Family" 316). In Chapter Twenty-eight of *Tenant*, Helen writes that "God has sent me a soul to educate for heaven, and give me a new and calmer bliss, and strong hopes to comfort me" (Brontë 239). Here, Helen is delighted to have the company of her son, Arthur, and turn him towards God. Although this instance is in some ways aligned with the angelic mother figure, Brontë provides an unconventional way in which a parent, Helen, spiritually leads her child:

> Two things make Helen's stance [on parenthood] particularly remarkable: to twenty-first-century readers, her conviction that her darling's death would be preferable to his growing up 'a man of the world' seems strange to the point of repulsiveness; and a mid-nineteenth-century audience would query her resistance to the notion that while a girl should be shielded from temptation and danger, a boy must face them unprotected by the parental solicitude that would envelop any sister of his. ("Marriage and Family" 316)

Through Helen's character, Brontë contests the notion that parents should not offer their sons any sort of protection against the temptations and dangers of the world. All children, boys and girls, who are offered protection—or better, offered protection and moral education—are better equipped to make moral decisions and act with integrity and respect.

An example of this objection is in Chapter Three, where Helen and little Arthur go to a gathering at the Markham's place and she politely declines the offer of wine for her and her son. Helen offers an explanation for her refusal: "I have been accustomed to make him swallow a little wine or weak spirits-and-water, by way of medicine, when he was sick, and, in fact, I have done what I could to make him hate them'" (Brontë 37). Helen's answer is serious, and she thinks it is a "very excellent plan," yet everyone else in the room laughs, considering it preposterous. Mrs. Markham replies "Well, Mrs. Graham, well, you surprise me! I really gave you credit for having more sense.—The poor child will be the veriest milksop that ever was sopped! Only think what a man you will make of him, if you persist in—" (Brontë 37). This response reveals that Helen's parenting style is quite unorthodox. Helen has seen the negative effects of alcoholism, especially in her husband and his friends, and does not want her son to fall into this addiction. In the first years of their marriage, Mrs. Hattersley, a friend of Helen, was physically abused by her husband, whose outbursts would flare up when he drank alcohol. Mr. Huntingdon never physically harmed Helen, but he did verbally. As Ian Ward points out,

> Helen Huntingdon may not have been systematically beaten in the way poor Millicent was, but the reader is left to contemplate the likelihood of an abuse that is all the more terrifying for its spasmodic and unpredictable nature, and that, moreover, leaves its victim in a state of perpetual anticipatory fear. (158)

Helen's main concern is for her child, so even if she has to live—in fear—with her bold precautions against Mr. Huntingdon, she does everything she can to make sure that her son does not follow the same destructive path as him. She wants Arthur to grow up to be a moral, stand-up gentleman, unlike his father and Mr. Hattersley. Ultimately, Helen parents Arthur in the way she deems best, which diverges from the middle-class norm that permitted sons to run loose and forge their own rugged paths.

Helen is an artist from beginning to end in *Tenant*, and between her husband and societal expectations, she was (1) stripped of the freedom to express herself through art, and (2) prevented from enjoying her hobby. Aside from wifehood, being an artist was one of the few careers available to middle-class women in this time period. Before getting married and having a child, sketching and painting filled Helen's time. During her marriage, she sacrificed her art to concentrate on her domestic duties as a wife, household manager, and mother. Basically, she forfeited her passion so that she could satisfy Victorian social norms. Nicole Diederich speaks to this point when she says that "Helen seemingly embodies the accepted social role for middle-class white women in nineteenth-century Great Britain at the expense of her role as artist" (27). As seen throughout the novel, and additionally examined in the above sections, Helen takes her duties seriously. Theoretically, Helen should have some power in the home, such as managing status and finances and providing a haven, which is discussed above. Although Helen's domestic power was repeatedly usurped by Mr. Huntingdon, Diederich goes on to say that "…despite the domestic discourse that surrounds their courtship, in marriage Helen lacks this domestic authority with Arthur. She has no power to pursue her own art, an obvious variation of Arthur's name" (27). Helen could not do anything that either distracted her from tending to Mr. Huntingdon or that he did not approve. In essence, Mr. Huntingdon often controlled how she spent her time; Helen could not "vary" from his wants.

When Helen escaped from Grassdale Manor to Wildfell Hall, she returned to creating art, but she still could not fully enjoy it, as it primarily served as her income. "'I cannot afford to paint for my own amusement,'" Helen admits (Brontë 53). Before Helen runs away, Mr. Huntingdon discovers her plans to leave him, and he confiscates her money and jewelry and burns all of her art supplies (350-2). Although Helen preferred to sell art to survive, her hobby was still taken away from her. Not only that, but female artists did not have the same standing as male artists in Victorian society. In "Careers for Middles Class Women," Langland gives insight into how the artist profession functioned for women at this time. "Women artists often used men as their agents. Part of the reason for this was a desire to secure their anonymity and procure less partial judgements of their work" ("Careers" 309). This prejudice is present in *Tenant*. An art dealer from London comes to Wildfell Hall whenever Helen wants to sell her paintings (Brontë 53-4). However, Helen eventually sacrifices painting for Mr. Huntingdon a second time. "Helen's determination to support herself and to continue her reclusive life alters only when she learns her husband is critically ill" ("Give Me Back" 122). When it is clear that Huntingdon can no longer take care of himself, Helen pauses her career as an artist to reclaim the role of a nurturing wife. Again, wifely duty takes precedence over artistry. Even when Helen parts from Mr. Huntingdon, although voluntarily, the circumstances around selling art and lingering wifely obligations prevent her from enjoying something as mild as painting for pleasure.

In the Victorian Era, class ideology and the patriarchy, spearheaded by husbands, prevented middle-class women from fully exercising their autonomy and freedoms. In *Tenant*, Brontë shamelessly criticizes many of these impractical domestic expectations held upon women. Helen's multifaceted character as a wife, household manager, moral guide, mother, and artist shows readers how Brontë thought about these roles. At the beginning of the marriage between Helen and Arthur Huntingdon, she willingly performs the duties expected of her. However, when Mr. Huntingdon limits her functions as household manager, mother, and artist, she retaliates by temporarily relinquishing her wifely duties and using her morality and religiosity for personal reasons. Brontë's criticism of Victorian society's idealized womanhood in *Tenant* is groundbreaking. Her work exposed the dark side of the Victorian home, and how unfair the expectations of women were. There were mostly negative reviews of the novel at the time, yet Brontë stood resolute in the claim that everything she said was true. Anne may be the least famous amongst the Brontë sisters, but her work is well worth analyzing, even to this day. Modern readers of *Tenant* will realize that an author's boldness and passion can expose societal inequalities. For Helen, "home" is not restricted to a place owned by a man like Huntingdon. Home is where her heart is: her son.

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Enclosing Art

Enforcement and Subversion of Socioeconomics in Gainsborough's *Mr. And Mrs. Andrews*

SAGE STEELE

Introduction

In 1748, Mr. Robert Andrews and Ms. Frances Carter married. As the National Gallery describes, with this union Mr. Robert Andrews "was not quite marrying the girl next door, but probably the nearest marriageable girl of his own class" as both grew up in the area with landowning fathers (The National Gallery). In 1750, Thomas Gainsborough received a commission to paint a portrait of the couple, aptly titled *Mr. and Mrs. Andrews* (Figure 6). The work remained largely unknown until Mr. George Andrews, a descendant of the sitters, lent the painting to the Gainsborough Bicentenary exhibition at Ipswich in 1927. The painting was circulated and become widely popular as a representation of eighteenth-century English art, now hanging in the National Gallery in London (The National Gallery).

As a culturally recognized piece, this work requires extensive study to comprehend why it is considered an appropriate representation of the time. Eighteenth century tradition firmly anchors the painting; culture —class, gender, economic ideology—sows itself into the landscape portrait. Examining this Gainsborough portrait through artist biography, economic context, and gender analysis all hinges on one sociocultural movement: English enclosure. The English enclosure movement was a systematic privatization of land by which collectively owned land was transferred to the sole control of wealthy individuals which climaxed during the eighteenth century. Influenced by this phenomenon, decades of cultural transformation produced *Mr. and Mrs. Andrews*.

While large oil painting portraiture at this time tended to uphold and reflect the upper class's elite status, not many portraits from this genre directly demonstrate the means by which the wealthy have become and remain wealthy. *Mr. and Mrs. Andrews* directly addresses the enclosure movement, the movement that benefited the Andrews family. Throughout his career, Gainsborough aligned himself with the dominant system that privileges social stratification, and his work on this portrait mirrors that relationship. Gainsborough straddles the tension between personal inclination to resist economic superstructures and a cultural system that values capital accumulation. This pressure to thematically conform in society resulted in the Andrews portrait celebrating enclosure, regardless of Gainsborough's personal beliefs.

Gainsborough upholds a capitalist value of society but in a unique way that differs from other portraits of this nature. Thus, this essay will take a historical framework to interpret this specific portrait as not aligning with other traditional landscape paintings, but as a clear break from the conventions of art during this period due to its addressing of the relationship between labor and land ownership. It is an anomaly amongst other portraits and amongst Gainsborough's own body of work. *Mr. and Mrs. Andrews* epitomizes a representation of the enclosure process of mid-eighteenth-century England by showing its cultural implications—implications still seen today under a capitalist system where enclosure is foundational to its formation.

Biography

Mr. and Mrs. Andrews, an outlier in Gainsborough's body of work both as a landscape and as a portrait, challenges his standard conventions. Gainsborough's biography, both his career as a portrait painter and his beliefs about the English countryside, help elucidate an understanding of *Mr. and Mrs. Andrews*

To begin with, Gainsborough's relationship with portraiture leads to a recognition of the rarity of the *Mr. and Mrs. Andrews* painting and a questioning of Gainsborough's intention for the piece. Thomas Gainsborough, born 1727, was the youngest son of John Gainsborough, a woolen goods maker. He attended Sudbury Grammar School at the same time as Mr. Robert Andrews before leaving to study painting in London at thirteen. Gainsborough became one of the top portraitists in England in the mid-eighteenth century after training with the French engraver and painter Hubert Gravelot, yet though popularly recognized for these portraits, Gainsborough's true affinity was for landscapes, inspired by seventeenth century Dutch landskips. In fact, painting portraiture was merely for economic reasons as there was more money and esteem in portraiture than landscapes at the time. Gainsborough clearly expressed his disdain for portraits. In a letter to a friend William Jackson, Gainsborough writes "I'm sick of Portraits and wish very much to take my Viol da Gamba" (Bermingham 42). Gainsborough painted *Mr. and Mrs. Andrews* only a few years after returning from London to his hometown of Sudbury, marking it as one of his earlier commissioned works.

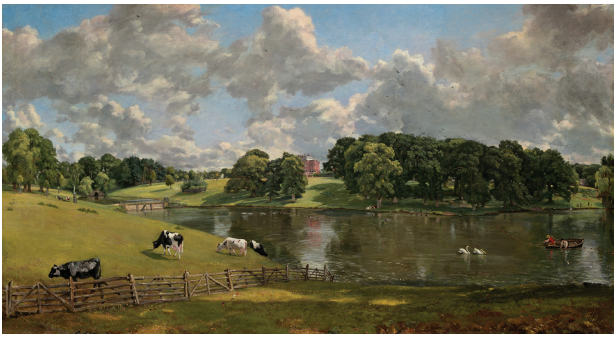


FIGURE 1

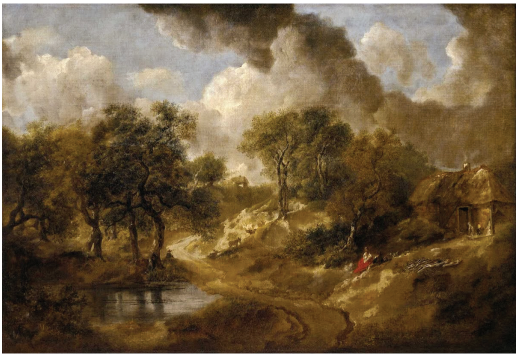


FIGURE 2

His landscapes often focused on rural country life in England with a fixation on an idealized version of the countryside. This differed from other contemporaries such as John Constable who depicted a more realistic English countryside. In *Wivenhoe Park*, Essex, 1816 (Figure 1) Constable shows the Wivenhoe estate in the far background and foregrounds the land converted to cattle husbandry. Most notable is the fence keeping in these livestock which reflects the changing landscape as ownership of land has changed the control over agricultural practices, in this case, the containment of cattle during grazing. This landscape deviates from Gainsborough's style, as seen in works like *Landscape in Suffolk* (Figure 2), where a small cottage is positioned in the midst of the woods without distinctively partitioned land.

Gainsborough depicted nature in its pre-enclosure state when rural inhabitants lived independently rather than serving as wage-dependent tenants. He crafted picturesque scenes with thick forests, wild trees, and untouched land, portraying a natural ruggedness through light brushstrokes and intricate details. The inclusion of small structures and interactions with English folk was intended "for the Eye to be drawn from the Trees in order to return to them with more glee" rather than placing a strong emphasis on human engagement (Barrell 35). Gainsborough seldom incorporated prominent landmarks like villages or churches, and when present, these elements were often relegated to the distant horizon, challenging easy identification. His work actively resisted urban themes, favoring isolated country scenes far from city life, projecting a positive nostalgia for a bygone era.

Art historian Ann Bermingham argues that it is not a far leap from his anti-urban sentiments to read Gainsborough as anti-enclosure (Bermingham 40). There were many anti-enclosure cultural figures during this time, most notably poets such as Oliver Goldsmith, John Clare, and George Crabbe who rallied against the countryside's enclosure induced transformation by describing the land's negative changes:

> These were thy charms—But all these charms are fled.
> Sweet smiling village, loveliest of the lawn,
> Thy sports are fled, and all thy charms withdrawn;
> Amidst thy bowers the tyrant's hand is seen,
> And desolation saddens all thy green:
> One only master grasps the whole domain,
> And half a tillage stints thy smiling plain… (Goldsmith)

Goldsmith's long form poem, "The Deserted Village" creates a comparison between pre- and post- enclosure English countryside. It is a passionate 431-line attempt to bring audiences to understand how the privatization of land starts to unravel the country as it disenfranchises the working peasants.

Gainsborough contributes to this movement, functioning in a different space. He does not depict a changed countryside, rather he places England before enclosure wholly ignoring its hold on the land. One might look at a Gainsborough landscape and think it depicted a time a hundred years earlier for it is not an accurate depiction of the mid-eighteenth-century country. His work memorializes a fiction of time before greedy landlords and far-spread wage labor. By not showing the current landscape, Gainsborough makes an argument that pre-enclosure England deserves our attention in a way that post-enclosure England cannot demand.

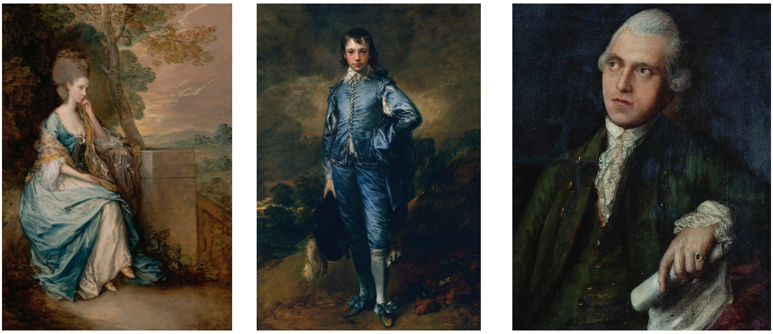


FIGURE 3, 4, 5 (LEFT TO RIGHT)

These ceaseless depictions of rural countryside in Gainsborough's work are what make *Mr. and Mrs. Andrews* an anomaly. Firstly, as a portrait, it distinguishes itself from his other portraits that incorporate nature-based backgrounds. For instance, the *Portrait of Anne, Countess of Chesterfield* features a garden setting, and *The Blue Boy* stands outdoors. When deviating from nature-based scenery, such as in the portrait of *Antonín Kammel*, the background assumes a neutral color. However, in no other instance is the backdrop a farm. This portrait is an exception to his many other portraits. Moreover, even when considering the perspective of many who perceive *Mr. and Mrs. Andrews* as a landscape painting, it remains distinctive. The portrait conspicuously presents cultivated land owned by the affluent, departing from his previous and subsequent works, which consistently depict rugged environments.

This irregular subject matter raises questions about how it functions and for what purpose. Yes, it is a family portrait of a wealthy couple and the display of land is a symbol of wealth. But why would the Andrews couple ask for a painting that falls outside of the standard perimeters for conversation pieces, especially when other conventions of conversation pieces show wealth without the association to labor? If the Andrews did not ask for this background, then why would Gainsborough fall outside his normal modus operandi? While there is no documentation known to answer these questions, one assumption can be made: as a professional painter with anti-enclosure sentiments, Gainsborough would not have passively painted a scene depicting enclosure, he would have been very aware of what his scene was portraying. Therefore, whether the control leaned more towards the artist or the commissioners, this landscape communicates a cultural understanding of the relationship between wealthy landowners and the ownership of territory.

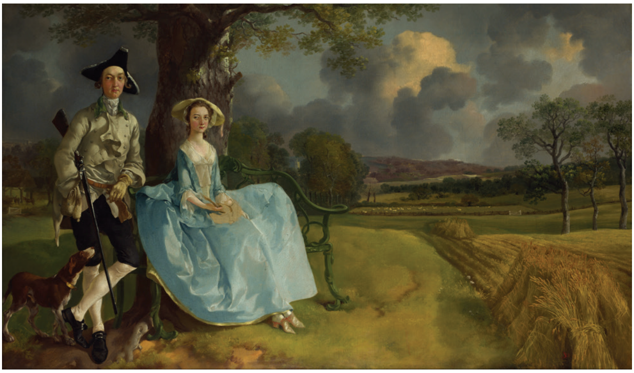


FIGURE 6

Form

Mr. Robert Andrews stands nonchalantly, leaning slightly on a bench his wife sits on. He holds a hunting rifle accompanied by a hunting dog at his feet. His dress complements his nonchalance: an unbuttoned coat, slightly disheveled, giving the impression of casualness. Less casual is his wife, Mrs. Frances Carter Andrews, who sits upright with her arms placed in her lap. She wears a blue dress that cascades across the bench, defying gravity in its volume. Gainsborough paints her dress much nicer than would be expected in a farm setting. The bench she sits on feels out of place in the middle of the field, there is a properness to Mrs. Frances Carter Andrews that does not mesh well with the setting. The couple only takes up about one third of the frame; Gainsborough filled the rest with the couple's land. Harvested wheat foregrounds the image, the rows extending back from right to left, fading downhill. This leads the eye to the background where sheep and enclosed land are seen. In a small, wooded area beside the grazing animals, lies a convenient opening in the trees to show a church, identified as All Saints Church in Sudbury, the church where the couple married.

This portrait can be classified as a conversation piece, a form of eighteenth-century family portraiture. Falling below historical paintings in the hierarchy of respected work, portraiture played an important role in memorializing the elite. Three main characteristics define this popular form: setting, sitters, and activity, which all point to the importance of class and a demonstration of wealth.

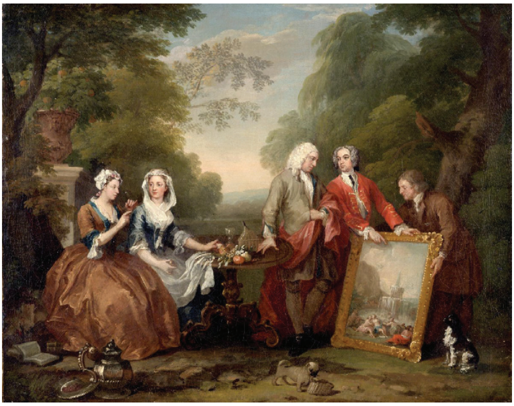
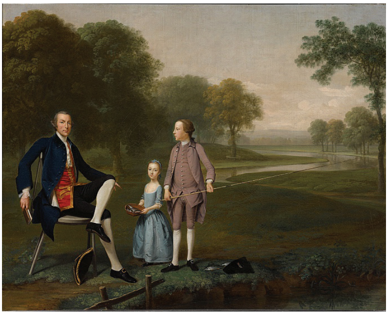


FIGURE 7

Painters often set conversation pieces in elegantly tailored gardens or in stylish drawing rooms. For instance, William Hogarth stages his *Portrait of Sir Andrew Fountaine with Other Men and Women* (Figure 7) in a lush garden, where the polished setting promotes the ideology of the English elite, emphasizing the essential nature of property to the higher class. The ability to devote space and land as well as time and money to manufacturing a garden is something only an upper-class person could do. Thus, the outdoor conversation piece attempts to display wealth.

Because of this purpose of maintaining wealth and the nature of art commissioning, the subjects were typically landed gentry and their families with their wealthy friends occasionally featured beside them. These portrait subjects center on men, which can be seen through the titling. The conversation piece takes on names like *Richard Moreton, Esq. of*

Tackley with His Nephew and Niece John and Susanna Weyland (Figure 8), *Viscount Tyrconnel with Members of His Family on the Grounds of Belton House* (Figure 9), or *Gentleman Presenting a Lady with a Piece of Honeysuckle* (Figure 10). In these cases, the culture of this genre points to the gendered nature by naming the man first or solely. Women have a space in art, but only to complement the men.



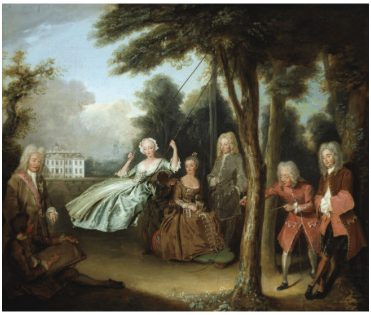


FIGURE 8, 9

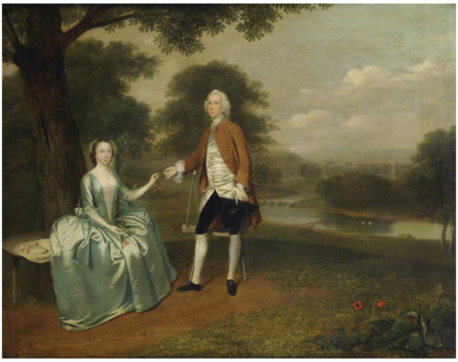


FIGURE 10

Lastly, the activity of the subjects informs the painting. While the genre often depicts conversations, there are also leisure activities such as fishing, performing instruments, or children playing, each pointing to the class freedom to engage in non-essential activities. In addition to this, their posing also reflects their status as they mimic the standardized images of etiquette textbooks (Bermingham 26-7). These subjects act in certain ways because they have been brought up to adhere to strict mannerisms and appearance. Their etiquette aligns them with the upper class.

The subjects of *Mr. and Mrs. Andrews*, Mr. Robert Andrews and Mrs. Frances Carter Andrews, are identifiable in this painting as they engage in specific actions—Mr. Robert Andrews holds a hunting rifle, while Mrs. Frances Carter Andrews sits with proper etiquette. What sets this artwork apart from its contemporaries is its location and the unique choice of the couple facing the painter rather than adhering to the conventional practice of engaging in conversation with each other. While it is not uncommon to encounter exceptions, such as subjects looking outward to the viewer or artist instead of at each other, depicting an agricultural site as the backdrop for these portraits is unfounded. This deviation is noteworthy as it contradicts the expectation that such affluent individuals would not be portrayed in a setting associated with labor, considering that "work was precisely what this [wealthy] class had been freed from" (30).

Economics

Gainsborough's portraiture comes at the heart of a radical transformation of economics, therefore benefiting from an analysis through the context of changes in rural farmland and class hierarchies. Specifically, the English enclosure movement—a major economic phenomenon, that began as early as the twelfth century, rapidly increased during the eighteenth century when Gainsborough was painting. The English enclosure had many key aspects to it but largely became defined by the consolidation of small farms into enclosed farms of 300 to 500 acres and the mass displacement of the peasantry from common land. The paintings of Gainsborough deeply reflect this economic transition with aspects of the English enclosure especially reflected in his painting of *Mr. and Mrs. Andrews.*

To begin, the Gainsborough portrait reflects the widespread privatization of land brought about by the English enclosure, particularly evident in the surrounding landscape. The English enclosure marked the transition from recognized commons, accessible to all classes for sustaining their needs, to fenced or hedged fields that delineated owned property, predominantly by the wealthy elite. The landscape surrounding *Mr. and Mrs. Andrews* serves as an illustration of this evolving scenery, where the property has been "tamed." In the portrait of the couple, their estate is enclosed with fences reflecting the enclosure of land. Every aspect of the land is meticulously harvested and manipulated. By choosing to showcase the Andrews land, this portrait actively celebrates the agricultural movement of enclosure, offering homage to the economic transformation that facilitated the couple's affluence.

Additionally, the portrait matches Mr. Robert Andrew's own benefit as a member of the wealthy elite who profited from the agricultural change. In the span of the English enclosure, the rich grew exponentially in wealth while the poor became more disenfranchised. Being separated from the land meant the creation of wage labor in which landowners were setting the wage rate that the poorer class felt they had to accept, no matter how nominal, in order to survive. Mr. and Mrs. Andrews embody the concept where no labor is present in the field, yet great wealth abounds. While conversation pieces already point to wealth without laborers, this image is strictly an image of capital. Rather than alluding to economic security, the Andrews directly show their security by sitting atop a hill displaying their land. The land, in its perfect, organized state yields to the owners. The lack of laborers in this image implies the Andrews couple were independent producers rather than individuals who relied on the work of others. It is the lack of acknowledgement of laborers that reflects the culture of enclosure in which landowners are given full credit for the work of production.

Similarly to how laborers are not acknowledged for their work, this painting shows social class and the specifics of a wealthy lifestyle. Enclosure's stratification of social classes supported a continuation of upper-class elite culture being separate from the rest of society. For example, only landowners holding property worth at least one hundred pounds were allowed to hunt game; Mr. Robert Andrews, seen with a hunting rifle, directly shows his wealth. In this example, the leisurely culture of the wealthy is directly protected by enclosure as one legally needs land to participate in sport. Additionally, looking into the context of the painting, the couple's fathers jointly owned the Auberies Estate, so their marriage was an attempt to consolidate this land. While economic marriages were made long before the enclosure movement started, this marriage reflects the economic culture of the time which allowed Mr. Robert Andrews to inherit the whole of the estate, consolidation of families resulted in consolidation of land. Gainsborough's portrait comes in 1750, two years after the Andrews marriage but the same year as Mr. Robert Andrews inherited the land due to the deaths of his father and father-in-law. Thus, this painting is less a marriage portrait and more one celebrating the acquired land and therefore playing into the pro-capital ideology of the time that celebrated riches.

Still, it is necessary to recognize the links between enclosure and culture. Other critics have studied this economic trend and its relationship to how it informs art. In Anne Bermingham's *Landscape and Ideology*, Bermingham leads with the correlation between the rise of rustic landscape painting in England and the accelerated enclosure of the English countryside in the eighteenth century. Bermingham says these are not independent of each other, the "parallelism of these events is not an accident but rather a manifestation of profound social change" (Bermingham). The changes she refers to take shape across English culture but are all rooted in the economic shifts of the time. Gainsborough, as an established landscape painter, is one such artist deeply influenced by these changes.

Mr. and Mrs. Andrews situates itself in its time of rapid enclosure. It manifests capital accumulation and warrants acknowledgment within its historical context, intimately connected to the English enclosure. The understanding is limited, and the painting simplified to a basic piece of portraiture, when there is no acknowledgement of the role of the painting's capitalist ideology. The painting embeds itself in land privatization, stratification between rich and poor, and the upholding of elite culture. The economics of England are not separate from the culture, rather they are interdependent and reinforcing.

Gender

While Gainsborough roots his portrait in an economic context, changing gender ideologies of the eighteenth century also contextualize the landscape painting. When feudalism ended and people were separated from the land, forced to obtain wage jobs, the labor force became gendered. Rather than working as equals, women were confined to a limited number of roles. For a wealthy gentlewoman, the only respectable role was that of homemaker. Gainsborough operates under economic representations of power in this piece, but these economic strengths are rooted in male ownership as sexism was ingrained in enclosure-period England. Fertility and marriage imagery in *Mr. and Mrs. Andrews* necessitates a focus on the gendered context.

To begin, Gainsborough's portrait broadly grounds itself in marriage practices of the time, which were particularly based in stratified gendered beliefs. The process of coverture—which happened in the Andrews' relationship—held that a married woman could not be legally independent. Instead, their identity is tied to the husband, the authoritative figure who controls money, property, contracts, and their children. This practice stems from a gender ideology of legal infantilization that believes women are incapable of managing themselves, that they must be dependents (Federici 100). In the painting, this ideology is reflected in both the positioning and title of Mrs. Frances Carter Andrews, who has very little power in the relationship. Mrs. Frances Carter Andrews, sitting on the bench while her husband stands, represents her status in the portrait by being lower than her husband, and the title names her as a secondary character belonging to Mr. Andrews. In fact, her presence in the painting can be argued to solely compliment Mr. Robert Andrews as her docility juxtaposes his sense of power. This power over the land extends to power over her, as Mr. Robert Andrews benefited from coverture and his marriage that gave him more property. In a context where Mrs. Frances Carter Andrews had no capital, it must be asked if this painting is a portrait of a couple or of one man and his property—his wife and his land.

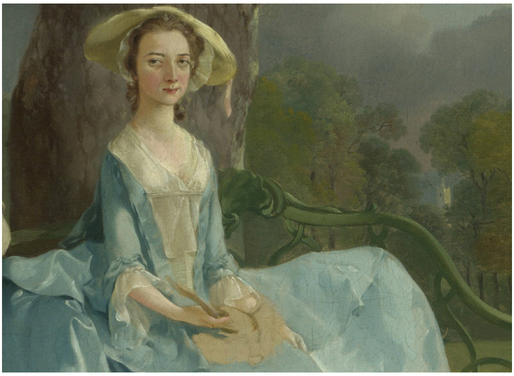


FIGURE 11

While Gainsborough's portrait represents marriage, it also shows individual gender roles, especially that of women and their relationship to reproduction. As labor became transformed under enclosure, women's work became "labors of love," activity seen as mandatory for women to execute without acknowledgement. These "labors of love" were all domestic and specifically focused on the birthing and raising of children to maintain family wealth. Gainsborough's portrait, while not directly about domestic labor, features undertones of the reproductive societal expectation of women. In Mrs. Frances Carter Andrews' lap is an unfinished portion of the painting (Figure 11). While there are multiple theories as to what this unfinished section was intended for, many critics believe this space was intended for a baby. This speculation situates Mrs. Frances Carter Andrews as a reproducer, further emphasizing this through the land itself, which is seen as fertile and implies a representation of the couple's child-bearing abilities. The couple's first child was not born until 1751, a year after this painting's creation. Devoting space to a future child reinforces the idea that Mrs. Frances Carter Andrews must reproduce to fulfill her role. Birthing an heir ensures security and success in living out a specific gender role.

Additional gender roles are seen in this portrait in the context of Mr. Robert Andrews who is depicted in a masculine role. While feminine roles were limited to labors of love," men were constrained by the expectation of being a sole provider of food, money, and land. With his gun and hunting dog, Mr. Robert Andrews is fulfilling a hunter-provider role, which directly aligns with masculine traits. Another hypothesis for the empty space in Mrs. Frances Carter Andrews' lap is a dead pheasant from her husband's shooting. With his land and social class, Mr. Robert Andrews supports his wife, but the imagery of hunting suggests a "natural" manliness that he still manages to concurrently fulfill. This portrait uplifts the "proper" expectations of what it is to be a man while also justifying his power that not only stems from his land but from his own gendered composure.

Evolving gender roles were necessary during this time to uphold the social system. The enclosure movement would be less functional without women, acting as capital, maintaining home and continually reproducing and raising children to replace laborers. This painting enforces these roles through its symbolism—land and fertility—and outright statements of gender through subjects' actions. Understanding gender in this portrait assists in understanding how gender roles in the upper class played out and were reinforced in art. This portrait would be seen by visitors to the estate therefore cementing Mr. and Mrs. Andrews as active performers of social roles.

Conclusion

Understanding the implications of the enclosure movement is imperative in gaining insight into this painting. These themes coalesce into one central narrative. *Mr. and Mrs. Andrews* emerges as a multifaceted canvas that intricately ties together various elements of its sociohistorical context. Examining the portrait through the lenses of biography, economics, and gender unveils the painting's nuanced commentary on the transformative period of English enclosure.

A gendered analysis shows how the conformity of roles has been shaped by enclosure's changing of labor practices that placed women in the home. This is seen in the painting through the traditionalism of the couple which upholds values of masculinity and femininity within marriage.

Economic understanding positions the English class structure within the painting and shows how enclosure's changing of agriculture reflects itself in art. The canvas becomes a visual chronicle of the English enclosure movement, celebrating the prosperity of the Andrews family. The meticulously enclosed and harvested land symbolizes the economic changes that privileged the wealthy elite and the intertwining of art with economic shifts.

Thomas Gainsborough's biography provides insight into his own works, implying he would be aware of enclosure and what message the Andrews portrait was portraying. His ambivalence toward portraiture, expressed in personal correspondence, adds a layer of complexity to the work, suggesting a negotiation between personal beliefs, societal expectations, and economic pressures.

All three of these analyses are interwoven in an argument that establishes this painting as a cultural model of enclosure's importance in England. In essence, *Mr. and Mrs. Andrews* transcends the realm of conventional portraiture. Gainsborough's portrait, laden with cultural significance, creates a canvas that not only depicts a specific moment in history but also invites contemplation on the interplay between art and society.

In the art canon the nuances of portraiture can be overlooked, as dominant narratives of all elite portraits displaying wealth are favored. The motivation of most English portraiture has been to show wealth and power because there is a cultural ideology that privileges the elite.

However, looking beyond the most overt purpose and finding what else the artist is stating provides depth and fulfillment in interpretation. In these closer examinations we find lasting meaning from interpretations that bridge the relationship between life informing art and art informing life. Gainsborough situates himself at the intersection of being both a recipient and transformer of this cultural reality. He plays into the elite system through his role of portraitist tending to the desires of wealthy clients, yet his complex understanding of enclosure and vision for the English countryside allows him to make statements with his work. Thus, we must dive into questions of the influence of the English enclosure on Gainsborough, especially his portrait of *Mr. and Mrs. Andrews*, and the ways his paintings both uplift and challenge these cultural movements.

This work acts as an early example of defiance of social norms. Enclosure radically changed economics and accelerated England into the iteration of the capitalist system seen today. Therefore, *Mr. and Mrs. Andrews* is a form of early protest against capitalism and can be seen as a historical document of such nature. One may view *Mr. and Mrs. Andrews* as a simple portrait of a wealthy couple, but there is another narrative in which Gainsborough's painting is a point of inspiration for the practice of art as a form of challenging society.

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The Guadalupe Tree

ANDREA MORENO

Introduction

La Virgen De Guadalupe is a religious idol that defies any attempt to pin down a fixed definition or to place it within a predetermined system of truth. Rather, La Virgen is permeated with a multiplicity of meanings and associations, from representing an embodiment of autonomous and virtuous power to serving as an ideal for wives and mothers, an army fighter, a dispenser of miracles, and a devoutly religious woman (Sterns). Through cultural mythology, there has been a fixed story about La Virgen that has been manipulated and distorted by European secularism which has impacted indigenous spirituality. This interplay of competing interpretations creates a tension that belies any simplistic notions of a stable and unambiguous identity for La Virgen De Guadalupe.

This passage in Gloria Anzaldúa published dissertation Light in the Dark/Luz en lo Oscuro: Rewriting Identity, Spirituality, Reality depicts La Virgen De Guadalupe as a transmogrifying transformation through her own decolonial reality that she bears witness to. “In the mist and the fog and the stinging wind, I suddenly saw her coming out of the hollowed trunk: It was la Virgen de Guadalupe, head tilted, arms extended, halo spread all around. From a distance, the bright live tans and browns of the raw newly cut wood and dangling trunk fibers looked like the folds of her robe” (Anzaldúa 23). Anzaldúa is grappling with her perception, reality, and trauma and postulates her own shifting identity of being queer, a woman, Chicana, and a writer, through questioning and deconstructing the icon she is making room for various interpretations of Guadalupe. Anzaldúa proposes that knowledge is relative, thus she calls the audience to engage the “facultad” of one’s “imaginacion” and explore the “rendijas entre mundos” (45) a mode of healing for her own far-ranging and diverse identities.

This essay aims to understand how the Latine subject in the United States is placed around the racial discursive systems that forge forms of objectification onto people who are seen as distinct from the Anglo-

American persona. This binary constructs marginalized spaces that these groups are forced into, projecting a universalizing mechanism of white imagination that becomes the end-all be-all of what becomes an acceptable projection of oneself. Understanding the surrounding borders that define who we are and are not is integral to confronting the ontological status of Chicanx identities. Thus, my argument is that the transmogrifying Guadalupe tree exemplifies an anticolonial approach to reality through Anzaldúa's transfigured self who refuses the limitations of what must be and what has never existed and being with the strangeness of the tree is an ongoing process and a mode for being and knowing that centers a healing narrative that consists of unlearning the conceptual 'reality' (Anzaldúa).

The subsequent paper is organized as follows. Part 2 will include the literature review. Part 3 will discuss La Virgen De Guadalupe and the persistence of Chicanx spirituality in the face of colonial misrepresentations. Part 4 will analyze La Virgen through Chicana queer theory, and the interplay of fluid interpretations La Virgen represents. Part 5 will define transmogrification and Anzaldúa's anticolonial approach toward unlearning conceptual reality. Part 6 will provide concluding remarks.

Part 2: Literature Review

The literature overview will place the current paper in the context of colonial realities that Chicanx people face daily. The perpetuation of corporeality has defined civil society in all aspects through the maintenance of racial, colonial, and capital violence. State policies have shaped which stories can and cannot be told, thus limiting any 'deviant' form of knowledge. Discovering the intersection of colonial realities, corporeality, and symbolic borders, are moments of forced confrontation with one's identity and the layers that confine Chicanx people. For Anzaldúa, confronting a more "expansive identity interconnecting with its surroundings…" (66) lets her explore the interplay of her identities. Without this, Chinanx folks would always be trapped in the racialized discourses that reinscribe them as 'illegal', or 'lazy nonworkers'. This form of pervasive language travels beyond status-quo conceptions of Chicanx people or Mexican Americans; many indigenous groups in Mexico were subject to this violence. Juan Diego, who was born with the name "Cuauhtlatoatzin," was a member of the Chichemeca people, and his story as it passed down, we recognize the tensions that had existed between the native folk in Mexico and the ruling class ("Juan Diego"). By acknowledging these ancestral roots, we can challenge the colonial narratives that contribute to a form of system disenfranchisement still recognizable today.

I am using Lisa Flores to forward the work on rhetorically constructed borders and how these impact Mexican-American immigrants. In her article, "Constructing Rhetorical Borders: Peons, Illegal Aliens, and Competing Narratives of Immigration," she argues that symbolic borders, "have emerged on and through the bodies of racially marked immigrants" (Flores 363). Symbolic borders are the atypical forms of being that don't fit the mythic norm. Being free of these borders surrounding us is a form of decolonizing our world and creating open spaces full of kinship, love, and acceptance. Chicanx people are destined to face the realities of what is allowed to us and who we are meant to be; it is necessary to question and deconstruct the imposed systems that present themselves to us. More times than not, we are caught in a cycle that is controlled by colonial authorities that draw the lines of what and who is sustainable for their ecosystems of thought and being. As eloquently described by Gloria Anzaldúa in *Borderlands, La Frontera: The New Mestisiza*, border culture can be seen as a Third World in which she, and many others, exist (Anzaldúa). This unique cultural space is where two languages merge, giving birth to a community that represents what Anzaldúa aptly describes as the "emotional residue of an unnatural boundary" (3). It's not merely a geographical or material location; it becomes an integral part of the people inhabiting it, casting a profound shadow on anyone who is perceived as 'abject': the distinction between the self and the other. This shadow manifests in various ways, but it has a particularly significant impact on Latine communities in the United States.

To substantiate my argument, I am drawing on Bernadette Calafell and her narrative in "Rhetorics of Possibility: Challenging the Textual Bias of Rhetoric through the Theory of Flesh." She describes how her culture was written on her body, which needed some form of rehabilitation because to be Chicana is to carry the power and burden of all women in our cultural narratives. La Virgen is just one character that makes up our existence but she holds great power over who we all are; just like La Malinche, "y" la Llorona, they endure forms of over-sexualization and perpetuate gender stereotypes, despite these frames that they have been put in, their enduring cultural reflects the interplay between historical narratives, societal expectations, and the evolving perception of femininity. These characters invite an ongoing dialogue between gender dynamics, identity, and culture.

Part 3: Conceptualizing La Virgen Beyond Static Colonial Misrepresentations

Focusing on this narrative that Anzaldúa proposes reinvents new ways of reconstructing reality that are necessary for Chicanx cultural survival. The way that Chicanx individuals interpret la Virgen matters; although criticism of a sociopolitically fixed interpretation brings forms of psychic violence, it is necessary for a liberating understanding of themselves. The icon of the Virgen de Guadalupe, which has traditionally been seen as a symbol of Mexican Catholic Identity, is shaped by cultural mythology.

According to tradition, La Virgen appeared as a Mexican woman with brown skin and dark hair to a man named Juan Diego, born of Aztec descent. She asked him to build a church where she had appeared, but when he went to the bishop he was not trusted because he was an Indigenous man. When La Virgen appeared to Juan Diego a second time, she instructed him to open his "tilma" before the Bishop. When he did, roses that were not native to Mexico fell from the cloak and an image of La Virgen was miraculously imprinted on it. Drawing from Levi Strauss, and in particular, Myth and Meaning, this can be explained through the lens of how European secularism has influenced the portrayal of indigenous religions. The appearance of the Virgin to Juan Diego and the miraculous imprint on his "tilma" are central elements of the story, and they are seen by many as evidence of the power and validity of indigenous spirituality. However, Spanish colonial authorities initially dismissed the story as a Pagan myth, and it was not until the mid-20th century that the Catholic Church recognized the significance of the story and the image of La Virgen De Guadalupe as an important symbol of Mexican identity and culture.

I argue that the dismissal of the story as a primitive myth by colonial authorities reflects the European secular perspective that has historically devalued indigenous religions, while the later recognition of its significance speaks to the resilience and persistence of indigenous spirituality in the face of colonialism and modernization. Now, Levi Strauss suggests that mythology or folktale refers to a system of stories and beliefs that explain the origins and meaning of human experience. If knowledge is relative, then our understanding of the world is shaped by our own experiences and perspectives.

Part 5: Resisting Traditional Gender Paradigms and Embracing Broader Latina Feminist Theology

Drawing from Chicana queer theory, Anzaldúa resists dominant gender paradigms and expands the dialectical notions of La Virgen by changing the limits and conditions of her body's presence that transforms gender. Thanks to queer theorists, such as Judith Butler, Anzaldúa is able to question the assumptions about a stable identity of la Virgen by deconstructing the icon. Understanding Butler's notions in *Gender Trouble*, traditions of womanhood are challenged through the appropriation and reinterpretation of Guadalupe (Butler). Anzaldúa writes, "It feels like the tree is teaching me how to perceive not only with the physical eyes but also with the whole body, and especially to see with the eyes of my other body" (24). The Guadalupe tree "no es un recipiente" for a useful metaphor for hybridity but rather is a new way of conocimiento of 'otherwordly' beings. Anzaldúa points out that such otherworldly beings and phenomena alter the human body and consciousness. The process of gender identity performance allows for the creation of her "own feminist architecture" (Anzaldúa), a unified female front to which all women are connected and are able to resist dominant gender paradigms. Using Nancy Pineda-Madrid in "A Reader in Latina Feminist Theology," she writes about the way that Guadalupe can symbolize "autonomous and virtuous power…" because she can just be without being defined by her relationship with a man. This supports Butler's notion of womanhood as it creates a broader interpretation of what it means to be a woman.

Chicanas need to criticize interpretations that idealize them as mute and passive; rather than assimilating to our ethnic and cultural integrity, we must develop new ways of existing within certain worldviews. Not only is criticizing the icon important, but it is also necessary to 'queer' La Virgen. In Anzaldúa's description, the Guadalupe Tree is not only a transmogrification but also becomes a challenge to stagnant forms of being. This is not the same thing as making La Virgen queer, but rather disavowing the role that she has been given. Anzaldúa is queering the figure of La Virgen to come to terms with her own form of queerness that holds a part of who she is. Despite La Virgen being a virgin, and presumably a heterosexual one, Anzaldúa, a lesbian Chicana whose sexuality has been pushed to the margins of society, has occupied a space in her consciousness for this icon. The indoctrination of La Virgen through notions of divine conception and eternal virginity is the denial of the materiality of La Virgen's body. La Virgen herself is not occupying her full embodiment in the way that she has been translated to Mexican and Chicanx folks. This is the bodily reduction that Anzaldúa rejects and transforms.

A conventional traditional identity label is "entrapado en jaulas" which limits any form of growth that doesn't fit the mythic norm. To formulate new ideas and transform and resist colonial and racist imperatives, shapeshifters find ways of 'being' and explore new forms of consciousness. Drawing on Jason Sterns' theory of Guadalupe's being in "Making Room for Guadalupe," he points out that in Mexican traditions there are binaries that sexualize or objectify women: the virgin/whore dichotomy or the strong/weak duality that becomes a tool for constraining Chicanx or Mexican women's agency, autonomy, and freedom. Using Stuart Hall's "The Work of Representation," meanings, and representations are produced around characters such as La Malinche, and La Virgen in Latinx culture. The dominance of a particular truth regime that upholds European values and truths as universal has led to the construction of these icons to serve different causes. The way that religious and social institutions have sheltered these icons becomes a way to control bodies and reinforce gender norms and expectations. Many Chicana and Latina feminists, including Gloria Anzaldúa, Bernadette Calafell, and Lisa Flores, have argued that the representations of appropriate and inappropriate womanhood encoded in the representations of these women have contributed to women's oppression. How can La Malinche and La Virgen be the most notable women in Latinx culture when they are vastly contrasting images? La Malinche, the 'traitor' and 'whore' who was the translator and lover of Hernan Cortez, conqueror of the Aztec empire, is directly juxtaposed to the purest characters as La Virgen. Anzaldúa uses La Malinche and reclaims her as her mother—embracing both the "whore" and "virgin" and investing in both of these social designations.

To insist on the materiality of La Malinche and then re-representing La Virgen as a tree invites the visibility of the body and sexuality of La Virgen. Both women show a complex array of stories about colonialism, sexuality, and social inequity. To decolonize our understanding of these women, it is necessary to contextualize the way meanings and representations are produced and to break down the dominant truth regime that upholds European values and truths as universal.

Part 6: The Guadalupe Tree and the Revolutionary Power of Transmogrification

In the experience with the Guadalupe tree, it is necessary to read this as a queer inhumanist transmogrificatory framework. I use Marcos Gonsalez', "Transmogrifying Guadalupes, Transmogrifying Selves: The Queer Inhumanist Aesthetics of Gloria Anzaldúa's *Light in the Dark/Luz en lo oscuro*." Transmogrification is the ability to greatly alter or change. Using this structure, the paper tracks the uncanniness of transmaterial becomings. The way that the Guadalupe tree postulates itself in Anzaldúa's writings acts upon a pleasurable, attuned, and responsive being. This defies any anthropocentric way of viewing the world as the tree is a shapeshifting entity that is deserving of respect. Using the framework transmogrification thus lends itself to creating avenues for understanding the land, others, and self. "The Guadalupe tree reminds me of something I'd forgotten—that my body has always sensed trees' special relationship to humans, that we have a body awareness of trees and they of us. Awareness is not just in the mind, but also includes body knowledge" (Anzaldúa 24). The power of transmogrification goes beyond the tree but is a way to reinvent traditional genres and identities that have been demonized upon Chicanx folks; adopting the reimagination of the human postulates our understanding of nonhuman entities and creates an intervention of the "hierarchal logics and categories" (Gonsalez 637). What it means to be a shapeshifter comes with understanding what it means to be human, and how humans are discursively made of race, sexuality, gender, ability, and species. Postulating the Guadalupe tree through this lens reveals the intimacies of an anti-colonial, anti-capital, and delinking from anthropocentric consciousness.

This form of reality is profound as Anzaldúa emphasizes the aesthetic possibilities of a decolonial frame of mind. This is an example of smashing conceptual idols and creating space for new ways of viewing the world (Nietzsche). A decolonial mind is a total reinvention of reality necessary for cultural survival and reaching new ways of life that go beyond the 'formal education' (Anzaldúa). Nietzhe's concept of Amor Fati, or love of fate, is a way that we can embrace the unknowing and the complexities of this form of life and using the transmogrificatory framework and reimagining traditional categories, Anzaldúa is embracing the chaos of living and being and using it as a source of inspiration. In "Nobody Told Me: Chicana Women's Madness and Mourning in Sandra Cisnero's *Have You Seen Marie,*" written by Lindsey Vreeland, she explains that Chicanx people "retell stories of their folk and religious traditions to include women as agents in culture, history, and community and to encourage healing spaces" (5). This form of storytelling of the Guadalupe tree and how it is vital for Anzaldúa's identity forecloses how Chicanas are oppressed and torn between identities and culture, but through storytelling and writing these are ways to heal from past, personal, and political traumas. This form of the story allows a new perspective of the unseen through techniques of cultural materials allowing us to break the silence and identify self-care techniques that can acknowledge different realities to include Chicanx women having full autonomy over their stories.

Part 7: Conclusion

The power of the tree is through its branches reaching out, connecting new possibilities of life that bloom all around, the roots of the tree run deep in the earth, and from them, new meanings are given birth. The tree gives 'womanhood' a new world that goes beyond tropes that have constructed what women should and should not be. The tree gives thanks to feminist theology that has redefined European secular Catholicism and has embraced a 'queer' understanding of La Virgen. The transmogrifying Guadalupe tree evidences the need to understand reality as reconstructions and uncanny transformations seeing what was once not there is necessary to disrupt the normative understandings of reality that disavow and criminalize those who have multiple forms of 'being'. Refashioning our relationships to reality heals those who are subjected to fragmented colonialism and social oppression.

This essay argues that we need to have a reimagining of spatial contact of border culture that generates hybrid identities that carve out spaces beyond hegemonic freedoms; the tree offers a visual representation of resilience and a continual adaptation of growth that defies any limitation imposed by normative societal structures. The tree is free of borders and allows Chicanx people to imagine themselves unbound of the societal borders imposed on them. Comprehending that there is no one right way of 'being' allows for a more ethical way of sympathizing with 'otherness.' Embracing the transfigured self and tree disrupts dominant epistemologies and introduces a spiritual knowledge, "I came to the conocimiento that this personal, private, spiritual practice of healing focuses on our daily lives" (Anzaldúa 24). The personal experiences that we have with, emotions that we let out, and spaces that we enter, are all aspects that have the power to heal, if we let them.

La Virgen de Guadalupe is no longer an entity that contains a single definition but rather has been able to live and prosper through multiple identities. The transmogrification of the tree to La Virgen is evidence of freeing herself. We need to free ourselves.

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Stewardship and Destruction

An Ecocritical Perspective on *Paradise Lost*

MADDOX REIMER

Throughout John Milton's 1667 epic poem *Paradise Lost*, changes and alterations to the natural environment underlie much of the story's narrative progression. Imbued with the pastoral sensibilities of Milton's earlier poetry, *Paradise Lost* centers a progressive notion of ecological stewardship in its depiction of Adam and Eve's presence in Eden. As such, this text can be uniquely read in a modern context through an ecocritical lens. Ecocriticism offers a necessary lens of inquiry into Milton studies, as it centers humanity's relationship to the natural environment within literary discourses. While Milton's canonical legacy has lasted over three hundred years, his work—specifically *Paradise Lost*—can continue to occupy a space of primacy in literature through the application of contemporary theories and challenges, especially those relating to themes of environmentalism.

While much of the existing ecocritical scholarship on *Paradise Lost* is centered on the changes to the natural environment that follow Adam and Eve's sin, this paper will use an ecocritical framework to a different effect: as a means of interpreting Satanic evil. A central tension at play throughout *Paradise Lost* involves Satan's nature as a character. On one hand, he is a figure of temptation and guile, yet, the complexity of his rhetoric—much of which presages ideas that continue to be prominent in modern philosophy—arguably transcends the notion of temptation itself. This paper, however, will adopt an ecocritical framework to argue that Satanic evil can be ascertained through his destruction of the natural environment as a means of enacting revenge on heaven. Adam and Eve's prelapsarian stewardship, in turn, represents an idealized vision of humanity's relationship to the natural environment, which Satanic temptation seeks to pervert.

Ecocritical theory studies the relationship between literature and the physical environment. Ecocriticism emerged in literary studies in the 1980s to introduce questions about humanity's increasingly precarious relationship with the environment into literary theory; by 1993, ecological literary studies had become a recognized school of criticism (Glotfelty and Fromm xviii). In the introduction to *The Ecocriticism Reader*, the first anthology of ecocritical theory, published in 1996, Cheryll Glotfelty writes that "[e]cocriticism takes as its subject the interconnections between nature and culture, specifically the cultural artifacts of language and literature (xix). In doing this, ecocritical theorists approach literature by asking questions about how a text depicts the natural world through metaphor, language, physical setting, as well as through intersectional topics of race, class, gender, and colonialism.

Ecocritical readings of Milton's work date back to the 1990s, and a robust and prolific amount of scholarship connects Milton to modern environmentalism. More specifically, environmental readings of *Paradise Lost* have adapted the Biblical rhetoric of stewardship in the poem to secular and contemporary discourses surrounding humanity and its obligations towards the environment. In such a context, Milton remains relevant not just from a literary standpoint, but also from an ideological one. Miltonic rhetoric portrays environmental preservation and restoration as an imperative for humanity. As our relationship with the natural world becomes increasingly fraught, the presentation of such notions in a work like *Paradise Lost* offer justification to uphold Milton's placement in modern literary discourses. In his 2003 book *Milton and Ecology*, Ken Hiltner writes about *Paradise Lost* that "told in an early modern age witnessing the passing of a once-pristine landscape, the epic brings fresh new meaning to the notion of losing a Paradise" (3). Although Milton's writing predates modern notions of environmentalism, Hiltner argues that the destruction of the English countryside through pre-industrial practices made the preservation of the natural environment a distinct concern for many English writers in the seventeenth century (2). Ultimately, Hiltner points out the necessity of understanding both Milton's theological beliefs, as well as the historical circumstances surrounding his writing when approaching his work through an ecocritical framework.

Much of the current body of ecocritical scholarship on *Paradise Lost* is oriented around the "wound" felt by the Earth immediately after Eve eats from the Tree of Knowledge (Milton 9.782). This moment has been the subject of wide-ranging interpretations from Milton scholars. In an early ecocritical article written in 1996, Richard DuRocher argues that this moment indicates a “ringing ethical imperative: [v]iolating the Earth amounts to a desecration of divine creation” (98). Leah Marcus, in an article in the *Milton Quarterly* titled “Ecocriticism and Vitalism in *Paradise Lost*,” argues instead that “the destruction of nature is rather God’s punishment for [the] crime and is engineered by God himself” (98). These perspectives question—and ultimately disagree—on the presence of environmentalist ideologies in Milton’s theological beliefs. This is a necessary debate to have in regard to ecological interpretations of Milton, as it fundamentally alters how modern readers interpret the presence of divinity in *Paradise Lost*. This paper will adopt the argument present in DuRocher’s article—that environmental destruction is an offense to divine creation—and apply it to an interpretation of Satan’s character.

Satan’s introduction to *Paradise Lost* in Book I establishes his unique appeal, especially in the way that his rhetoric frames the beginning of the epic. Speaking to his fellow fallen angels, Satan boldly claims that “The mind is its own place, and in itself / Can make a Heav’n of Hell, a Hell of Heav’n” (Milton 1.254-5). While Milton derives Satan’s expulsion from heaven according to the Biblical narrative, his characterization of Satan is also remarkably complex. As he is introduced in Book I, Satan feels not like a figure of inherent evil, but rather the victim of a heavenly injustice. However, as Book I progresses, the rhetoric of self-justification and determinism employed by Satan and the fallen angels— “[b]etter to reign in Hell, than serve in Heav’n” (1.263)—warrants the first application of ecocritical theory. Milton scholar Warren Tormey connects the tone of the fallen angels to concerning impulses regarding the environment, arguing that their philosophy is envisioned and “achieved at the expense of the degradation of the natural world” (129).

The environmentally-destructive intentions of the fallen angels is first alluded to with the narrator’s introduction of Mammon in Book I. Mammon is described as an angel who was plagued by greed even in heaven, and the prophecy of his destructive influence on humanity is detailed:

> by him first
> Men also, and by his suggestion taught
> Ransacked the center, and with impious hands

Rifled the bowels of their mother Earth
For treasures better hid. (Milton 1.6868)

This passage has been explicated extensively in ecocritical Milton studies, as it not only foreshadows the sinful nature of humanity being provoked by Satanic influence, but also provides insights into Milton's preservationist leanings in proto-industrial England. Returning to the introduction of Ken Hiltner's *Milton and Ecology*, he writes that urbanization, deforestation, and intensive mining practices—associated both with the rise of English industrialization and the Civil War—presented deep concerns for Milton and other English writers inspired by pastoral traditions in literature (3). By connecting these practices to the legacy of Satan and the fallen angels of *Paradise Lost*, Milton adds a dimension of environmental ethics that was absent—at least in the thematic forefront—in the Biblical telling of Genesis. Through this, Milton frames ecological preservation as an imperative under the ideals of Puritan theology.

The introduction of Adam and Eve in Book V of *Paradise Lost* introduces a radical contrast to the previous books concerning Satan—both in tone and physical setting. Waking from sleep,[1] Adam and Eve attend to their daily labors in cultivating the environmental paradise of Eden: "And let us to our fresh employments rise / Among the groves, the fountains, and the flow'rs" (Milton 5.125-6). This introduces important concepts to an ecocritical reading of *Paradise Lost*: environmental stewardship and non-destructive agrarian labor as a means of preserving divine landscapes. Stewardship, as embodied and idealized through Adam and Eve, offers a logical connection between Milton's Puritan theology and practices of ecological preservation. Adam and Eve are called to labor not by necessity (as in, their livelihood does not entirely seem to depend on it), but rather through a sense of divine obligation to preserve God's creation: "These are thy glorious works, a parent of good, / Almighty, thine this universal frame, / Thus wondrous fair; thyself how wondrous then!" (5.153-5). As it relates to Adam and Eve's relationship to nature in Eden, Ken Hiltner applies the deconstructionist theories of Martin

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[1] It is worth noting, here, that in the beginning of Book V, Eve wakes from a nightmare foretelling the coming of Satan to Eden; not only does this serve the narrative purpose of connecting Satan to Adam and Eve, but it also introduces a tension which disturbs the tranquility of Eden from the beginning.

Heidegger and Jacques Derrida in chapter two of *Milton and Ecology*. He argues that Milton rejects the dualism embedded in Medieval theology, proposing instead a "monism" that rests on the "de-struction of dualistic (as being of the Earth or not of the Earth) Christianity into a Christianity rooted in place on the Earth" (Hiltner 32). *Paradise Lost*, when read through this lens, carries subtly-progressive environmental themes when compared to the Biblical story of Genesis—especially through the notion that humans are connected to the Earth on a level that extends beyond mere physical inhabitance.

Adam and Eve's livelihood in Eden should also be situated within the broader history of pastoral poetry—a genre of particular interest in ecocritical literary studies. In chapter three of Greg Garrard's comprehensive book on Ecocriticism, he includes *Paradise Lost* in the literary lineage of the "Classical pastoral," referring to Milton's embellishments to the "elegy of lost pastoral bounty and innocence" already inherent in the story of Genesis (42). While Classical pastoral poems predate general awareness of ecological crisis, they are also seen as rhetorically-didactic in more modern contexts—particularly in the way that they evoke joy through a harmonious connection with nature.[2] The elements of pastoralism in *Paradise Lost* are further infused with a sense of theological wonder: "Witness if I be silent, morn or even, / To hill, or valley, fountain, or fresh shade / Made vocal by my song, and taught his praise (Milton 5.202-4). These lines are taken from a lengthy pastoral ode stretching from lines 153 to 208, through which Milton summons images of prayer resounding not just from the songs of Adam and Eve, but also the landscapes of Eden: "Thou sun … Air … Ye mists … ye winds … ye pines … Join voices all ye living souls … Bear on your wings and in your notes his praise" (5.171,199). Not only does this imagery recall the anti-dualist theology posited in the poststructuralist reading of Milton outlined in the prior paragraph, but it also deepens the sense that the natural world is an inherently divine creation. On this vision of pastoral poetics, Nick Pici writes that "beneath [Milton's] striking

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2. Though, they are also often subject to criticism in this regard; Greg Garrard's book *Ecocriticism* points out that "'pastoral' implies an idealisation of rural life that obscures the realities of labour and hardship" (37-38). This idea is not entirely impertinent to *Paradise Lost*, or Milton's capacity to critique pastoralism. In Book IX, the lushness of Eden becomes a point of stress, to which Eve remarks to Adam: "but till more hands / Aid us, the work under our labor grows" (9. 207-208). The separation that ensues, at least in a narrative sense, creates the isolation necessary for Satan to tempt Eve into eating from the Tree of Knowledge.

sensuous imagery and luxurious pastoral descriptions of place are ideas of moderation and stewardship … pointed connections between God and nature, and an overarching picture of mutual, harmonious human living within nature" (35). Through this, the idea of environment and ecology as a creation of God provides a necessary thematic framework in an ecocritical reading of *Paradise Lost*.

A final narrative lens through which this argument can be supported occurs in Book VII, in which Raphael recounts to Adam how God created the world. This process of creation is detailed throughout most of Book VII, and these passages contain some of the most extravagant and lyrical lines of poetry in *Paradise Lost*:

> Then herbs of very leaf, that sudden flow'red
> Op'ning their various colors, and made gay
> Her bosom smelling sweet: and these scarce blown,
> Forth flourished thick the clust'ring vine, forth crept
> The swelling gourd, up stood the corny reed
> Embattled in her field: add the humble shrub,
> And bush with frizzled hair implicit. (Milton 7. 317-23)

These lines—and Milton's poetic embellishments of this moment—are fascinating to read in juxtaposition to the Biblical text: "And God said, Behold, I have given you every herb bearing seed, which is the upon the face of all the earth, and every tree, in which is the fruit of a tree yielding seed; to you it shall be for meat" (Genesis 1:29). Of course, comparison between these two texts should take into account significant differences in rhetorical purpose; however, such a comparison illuminates Milton's intensive use of imagery as a means of adding an environmental depth that is absent in the Biblical telling of Genesis. In doing this, *Paradise Lost* introduces a vision of the natural world that is steeped in both the influence of pastoral poetry—and in a more historical sense, it is indicative of environmentally-progressive interpretations of divinity within Christian theology.

Returning to the actions of Satan and the fallen angels, the impulse of environmental destruction that they ascribe to validates the use of an ecocritical framework as a means of deciphering their moral nature. This is detailed most clearly—and through especially hyperbolic imagery—in Book VI, in which Raphael tells Adam and Eve of Satan's failed attack on Heaven. As a means of resisting the “dreaded bolt” (6.491) of God, Satan directs the creation of “dev’lish machination” and “in a moment up [the rebel angels] turned / Wide the celestial soil” (6.509-10). This done, Satan and his angels “saw beneath / Th’ originals of nature” and they “[p]art hidden veins [dug] up … mineral and stone, / Whereof to found their engines and their balls” (6.510-18). With these allusions to destructive mining and industrial manufacturing, Book VI of *Paradise Lost* is especially difficult to separate from contextual factors behind its creation in post-Civil War England, in which much of the English countryside was being uprooted for purposes of war or industrialization. Within literary history, too, Milton’s depiction of these processes poses a concern that is notably prescient. On depictions of mining in literature, Heather Sullivan writes in an article that “many older literary narratives of extraction share … the tendency to overwrite mining's problems and disasters with glorious tales of heroic extraction and individual accomplishments leading to technological productions and economic might” (114). In aligning this ecocritical perspective with *Paradise Lost*, mining and the technological power envisioned by Satan contain a destructive evil; and, even with these technological capabilities, Satan and the fallen angels are vanquished by God’s naturalistic defenses.

Book VI also introduces a point of tension in the firmness of this ecocritical reading, as the forces of Heaven also employ environmentally-destructive means as they attempt to defeat Satan. In order to contend with the machinery created by Satan’s angels, the warring angels of heaven begin ripping up mountains and throwing them as weapons: “They plucked the seated hills with all their load, / Rocks, waters, woods, and by the shaggy tops / Uplifting bore them in their hands” (Milton 6.644-6). For all of the excessive and hyperbolic imagery that Milton uses in Book VI, the apocalyptic themes at play are also pertinent to an ecocritical interpretation. In chapter five of Greg Garrard’s *Ecocriticism*, he writes about “comic apocalypticism” as a theological and literary trope, arguing that “[e]nvironmental problems … might seem more amenable to solution if they are disaggregated and framed by comic apocalyptic narratives” (115). This idea is applicable to Book VI of *Paradise Lost*, in the sense that while Milton’s overwrought and vaguely absurd imagery might be a valid point of artistic criticism, it also, arguably, services an extremely simple metaphor. The created weapons of Satan and the fallen angels are utterly annihilated by the weaponization of nature, which is restored to its original state by Jesus: “At his command the uprooted hills retired" (6.781). With this, the symbolism at play throughout Book VI is resolved with an optimistic notion of nature's ultimate triumph and restoration in the hands of divine power.

Envisioning the broader implications of this ecocritical interpretation of *Paradise Lost*, it is important for contemporary readers to question how the environmental undercurrents of this work might remain didactic in a modern context—especially when modern environmentalism is predominantly rooted in secular principles. Environmental conscience has become embedded in modern discourse in the twenty-first century on a literary and societal level, such that older narratives rarely contain the necessary urgency and relevance when addressing ecological subject matters. As this relates to Milton, it should be noted that environmentalism—at least in the contemporary sense of the word—was not an organized or stable movement during the seventeenth century. With this in mind, ecocritical readings of Milton's work are often fruitful, but also tend to be largely speculative in nature.

Further, Milton's environmental conscience is deeply embedded within—and largely inseparable from—his theological leanings. While *Paradise Lost* is a work that espouses ideas of preservation and environmental stewardship, it also operates around a religious framework that is rooted in humanity's dominion over the Earth. After God creates Adam in Book VII, he says,

> Be fruitful, multiply, and fill the Earth,
>
> Subdue it, and throughout dominion hold
>
> Over fish of the sea, and fowl of the air,
>
> And every living thing that moves on Earth. (7. 531-4)

This ideology poses a challenge to secular environmentalism, which is increasingly geared towards destabilizing anthropocentric[3] views of the natural world. While Adam and Eve cultivate a healthy environmental landscape in Eden, the story of Genesis also rests on the premise that ecological life depends upon humanity's presence. In contemporary ecocriticism, this idea is becoming increasingly obsolete.

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[3] Defined, in the Oxford English Dictionary, as "the view or belief that humanity is the central or most important element of existence" ("Anthropocentrism, N.").

Concerns over environmental preservation permeate through various dimensions of *Paradise Lost*, making ecocriticism an apt and necessary framework to analyze this text. This paper utilizes such an approach to make the argument that the ambiguity of Satan's moral character is challenged by his willingness to destroy the natural environment as a means of achieving revenge on Heaven. In doing so, Adam and Eve's relationship to the natural world in Eden prior to their fall is illuminated as an ideal relationship between humans and the environment; they cultivate growth and a harmonious existence that is distinctly connected to nature. This depiction of stewardship continues to offer a unique vision of humanity's sustenance in relation to the natural world, to which the religious basis of *Paradise Lost* is not entirely necessary. Just as the preservation of the natural world can be understood through Edenic symbolism, the secularized notion of Earth as a home calls for responsibility, stewardship, and care. Further, a modern reading of *Paradise Lost* gives additional credence to this argument, in an era during which environmental crises are intensifying and occupying public consciousness in new ways. Satan, in employing destructive rhetoric and actions, can be uniquely interpreted in such a context. As such, ecocriticism provides a unique and didactic lens through which to read *Paradise Lost* in a contemporary context, when topics like environmental destruction and climate change have come to the forefront of human experience in the twenty-first century. From a literary standpoint, this connection speaks to the ongoing and profound relevance of Milton.

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Beings at Home in The World

An Interview with Dr. Alejandro Arango Vargas

INTERVIEW BY AMISA RAMADHANI

What is your field of study and research?

My field of study is in the discipline of philosophy. I study Western philosophy, including European philosophy. Also, I study Latin American philosophy and American philosophy. When it comes to the area of study, there are three areas that I work on. One of them is social philosophy; in this area, I approach different questions about sociality and what it means to be a social being. Furthermore, in this area, I explore questions in social epistemology and questions in social ontology. The former explores questions such as "How do we come to know about the social world?" Social ontology explores questions like what it means to be a social being. The second area is the philosophy of perception. I am interested in the social aspects of sensory perception. Lastly, Latin American and Latinx philosophy. In there, I am interested in the social identity 'Latinidad' and how this social identity helps us see the limits of other categories such as race and ethnicity.

How did you become interested in this field?

When I think about what made me interested in philosophy, I think it is about some personality traits, like seeking the explanation of why things are the way they are. When I was a teenager, I was interested in logical answers. I kept asking, "Why?" I was not satisfied with the answers that were just about how things were. I was interested in "Why" things are that way. Second, it was culture. I was exposed to philosophical concepts; I learned how philosophers ask questions and the type of answers they get. I am Colombian, and in Colombia, we study philosophy in the last two years of high school. I was exposed to the field of philosophy. Philosophical questions and answers to them made sense to me.

Having said that, our theme for this year's edition of* Charter *is Home. How would you define home or how you encounter this concept in your field of study and research?

Reflecting on your question, I think I approach the concept of home in two ways. One of them is the standard meaning, which I think refers to the place where our roots are and is connected to family. In my case, it is the place one is born and raised. That sense of home can change as we grow, but it remains a place where we feel a sense of belonging. We do not need to prove we belong there. That's the common sense of home. It does not always have positive feelings associated with it.

The second meaning of "home" is "world": the world is our home. One way to look at it is by asking ourselves questions such as, "As human beings, are we a part of the world, or are we somehow separated from the world?" I am looking at this from the philosophy of perception, which involves the mind. The mind has to do with our mental life, and it involves the brain, but it is not the brain; the mind is not the brain. So the question of who we are is, "Are we connected to the world, or is there distance between us and the world?" In Christianity, both Catholic and non-Catholic, the soul is often thought of as if this world is just an accident; fundamentally, we are removed from the world, we are separated from the world. The world is there, and we are here. In this sense, there is distance between us and the world.

I disagree with this viewpoint because everything we do, we do because we live in the world; we are not separated from it. I disagree with the idea of a non-worldly essence, that we do not belong in the world. Whatever we are in our core (if we allow that way of speaking) it is another piece of the world, very much in the way a tree is part of the world. We are one of the things that has sprouted out in this planet, out of the explosion of life—we are a product of the world. Our capacities to see, feel, smell, and touch are all ways of our being in the world.

We are attuned to the world, and we are well-made to live in this world. That is what I mean when I say the world, in general, is home for us. When we are in the world, and the world is home to us, we need to see that this world is common to us and others because others are also products of the world; we are very similar, and we are children of the earth. If we looked at it that way, we would find more commonalities with fellow humans that sometimes we do not find if we remain too focused on our interiority. It emphasizes our relational aspect, how we are connected to everything around us and everybody around us.

Would you speak a bit on what systems, practices, and values contribute to the construction of what home is? How does this construction shape the experiences of home that different people encounter?

These practices, values, and practices do not apply to the second definition of home because it is not a matter of practice or values. It is a way of looking at reality; it exists independently of us, whether we want it or not; it exceeds us, is beyond us, and is bigger than us. So, home, in the second sense is bigger than our desires, wishes, and inclinations.

In the first meaning, belonging is tied to the geographical locations of people. Then, the practices are cultural practices. It is a communal, shared way of doing things: doing certain actions, or sharing in rituals, social ways of doing things such as food, holidays, and annual celebrations. It is our sharing in those cultural practices that make a place home; roots are tied to that. For those of us who are migrants, if at one point we start calling a new place home, I think it is because we have established some commonality of meaning over some realities that perhaps, at first, we couldn't relate to, then there is being part of shared community. In those practices, the meaning comes along with values. Assigning a certain value to ways of doing things, such as spending time at the dinner table with your family or friends, or the value of sharing the same meal as opposed to each person deciding what they want to eat, is a value; it is valuing that situation. It does not mean that the opposite does not have value; it is just that people assign different values.

In the first meaning of home, when we truly belong somewhere, we don’t quite feel that we are there. I am just in my element, and this ‘element’ does not fight me; I am there and share things. This is an idea of belonging. The philosopher María Lugones says that the risk of always “being at home” in the first sense is not realizing that the world isn’t always a happy place where everybody belongs and is included. In one sense, this is positive, perhaps when related to a geographic area, group of people, or community. But in another sense, it points to a certain risk for us human beings: the insensitivity that things and places are not always joyous for everybody.

There is a tendency to think there is something wrong with people who find social practices and systems difficult to navigate or oppressive, as if it's their fault to not feel at home. And that's a risk because, for one, we all might come to be in that position, losing those places and communities we are connected to. If we have only that sense, we may be missing part of the understanding of some of our fellow human beings and how they navigate the world. We do not often have the tools to understand how it is for people when it is not smooth sailing.

To anyone in our readership who has never felt like they belong, what words of comfort or advice would you offer them?

This is a difficult question. I think of the word 'hope'. Earth is home for us, for all of us. We are on this planet, children of it, and well-equipped to deal with it. If a person who doesn't feel like they belong could find hope and patience of exploring the world, trusting that they will find others who feel the same, I believe in that sense, they will eventually find those who can relate to them and whom they can relate to. That would be a place to start building a sense of the world, of a common world, in a more positive and belonging sense.

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Andrea Moreno is a Junior from Sandy, Utah. She is pursuing a B.A. in Communications & English Degree at Gonzaga University.

MADDOX REIMER

Maddox Reimer is a Sophomore from Missoula, Montana, majoring in English Literature and History.

DR. ALEJANDRO ARANGO VARGAS

Dr. Arango's research interests are in social philosophy, Latin American and Latinx philosophy, and philosophy of perception. He is working on a book manuscript on a social enactive theory of perception, a monograph on the social identity of Latinx persons in the U.S., and essays on the nature and epistemological role of social identities. Dr. Arango received his doctorate from Vanderbilt University, a master's degree from SUNY Binghamton, and an Andrew W. Mellon Postdoctoral Fellowship at Tennessee State University. He received bachelor's degrees from the Pontificia Universidad Javeriana (in Social Communication) and the Universidad Nacional de Colombia (in philosophy) in Bogotá, Colombia.

Staff Biographies

Delaney Sousa

EDITOR-IN-CHIEF

Delaney is a Senior majoring in English Literature and Writing. She is from sunny San Diego, but the beautiful mountains and trees Pacific Northwest has caught her heart. She enjoys road trips, hiking, baking, and reading Early Modern literature. One of her life goals is to visit as many National Parks as humanly possible, Glacier National Park being her favorite one so far. She hopes you enjoy this edition of *Charter*!

Kevin Pinkelman

COPY EDITOR

Kevin is a Sophomore majoring in political science, sociology, and criminology. He is from Glen Ellyn, Illinois (30 minutes outside Chicago). He loves attending music festivals and concerts, participating in Mock Trial, and spending time with friends. He is passionate about human justice, environmental advocacy, and creating a better world for all. He plans on attending law school and using that degree to promote concrete change.

Ellie Crist

ASSISTANT EDITOR

Ellie is a Junior history major and secondary education certification candidate. Her dream right now is to be a middle school social studies teacher. She is from Tacoma, Washington, and loves the Pacific Northwest. Ellie hopes to one day move back to Tacoma to teach in her hometown. Her favorite things in the world are reading, watching silly TV shows, and spending time with her friends. Stories and writing have always been something she is passionate about, and she is so excited to share the stories contained in this journal with the Gonzaga community.

Amisa Ramadhani

ASSISTANT EDITOR

Amisa is a Senior majoring in criminology. She loves milk and people. She calls Rwanda her home.

Emily Grygar

GRAPHIC DESIGNER

Emily is a Senior from San Diego studying marketing and business operations/supply chain management. In her free time, she enjoys working on graphic design projects, spending time outdoors, and watching Gonzaga basketball.

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