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Listening to Reason: Jonathan Swift's Simultaneous Awareness of a Literal and Fictional Audience in "A Modest Proposal"

| Dylan Phillips

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Not many typical pamphlets suggest an entire nation begin eating its infant children as a solution to poverty, but that is precisely what Jonathan Swift suggests to Ireland in "A Modest Proposal"; although, at the same time, he does not literally suggest that at all. Swift's direct purpose in his satirical persuasive pamphlet would not be clear if a reader chose to interpret the piece literally. Readers who study "A Modest Proposal" today are likely aware that it is a satire and realize that Swift never intended for any of his kinsmen to devour their children. One may wonder, then, why Swift argues this and why he addresses his readers as if they would be willing to partake in the infanticidal feast. The truth is that Swift is aware of and effectively writing for two unique audiences, one literal and one fictional, and his argument is different for each audience. By distinguishing the literal audience from the fictional audience, accepting their simultaneity, and analyzing how Swift's addressing one audience affects the other audience's understanding of meaning, one can reveal Swift's literal meaning in "A Modest Proposal" as an indictment against Ireland's socioeconomic behaviors and his literal audience's rejection of the invoked fictional role as a means for promoting a more practical proposal for solution.

Robert Phiddian argues in his essay "Have You Eaten Yet?: The Reader in 'A Modest Proposal'" that "In order to negotiate the

ironies of the piece, the reader must learn to distinguish between Swift's voice and the Proposer's" (608). At first glance, this idea appears logical enough. Differentiating between Swift's literal voice and the Proposer's satirical voice could indeed be key to identifying Swift's true meaning versus the satirical call to consume infants. After further speculation, however, restricting the quest for meaning to the distinction of authorial voices is actually unreliable. Even Phiddian undercuts his own idea later in the essay, stating, "As readers, we invent the concept of voice. If you doubt this, turn up your hearing-aid, lift this text to your ear, and listen carefully—anything you hear will not have come from me" (610). While a work's author may have a bit more control over the semblance of voice than Phiddian allows, he still makes a valid point in that it is the readers who "hear" or rather project a voice onto the text, often leading to disagreements between readers in regards to the voice. For example, Phiddian makes a case for distinguishing Swift's voice from that of the Proposer's:

We can hear genuinely Swiftian excess emerging from the Proposer's judicious restraint in the passage which opens this essay: having been informed by the Proposer that babies are a "wholesome Food," it is really Swift who labors the point by suggesting recipes, "whether *Stewed, Roasted, Baked, or Boiled*"; and, should we somehow have missed the point or managed by some ruse to maintain our complacency, he goes on with "and, I make no doubt, that it will equally serve in a *Fricasie, or Ragoust.*" (611)

I, however, whole-heartedly disagree with this assessment of voice. I would argue instead that unless Swift is really arguing that Ireland should eat its children, which he is not, then the entire passage regarding potential recipes would be coming from the voice of the Proposer, who actually is the one suggesting such a heinous solution. I would argue that Swift's voice appears in passages that allude to the author's actual feelings:

For we are told by a grave author, an eminent French physician, that fish being a prolific diet, there are more children born in Roman Catholic countries about nine months after Lent than at any other season; therefore, reckoning a year after Lent, the markets will be more glutted than usual, because the number of popish infants is at least three to one in this kingdom; and therefore it will have one other collateral advantage, by lessening the number of Papists among us. (1116)

Being a devout Anglican himself, Swift's insult directed at the Roman Catholic Church is more likely something written in Swift's literal voice, but with the consistent references of eating infants, an argument could be made for any single passage in "A Modest Proposal" as being either Swift's voice or the Proposer's. Because of this inconsistency in distinction, I would argue that Phiddian misses the key to understanding Swift's pamphlet; rather than distinguishing Swift's voice from the Proposer's voice, it would be more effective to distinguish Swift's literal audience from his fictional audience and further identify the author's individual arguments directed to each of those audiences.

To fully understand the appropriate view of literal versus fictional audience in Swift's "A Modest Proposal," one should be familiar with the compositional theory pertaining to these types of audiences, as well as prepare to extend the parameters under which audiences are theoretically viewed. Walter J. Ong nearly defines the idea of a fictional audience with his essay, "The Writer's Audience is Always a Fiction." In this essay, Ong insists, "If the writer succeeds in writing, it is generally because he can fictionalize in his imagination an audience he has learned to know not from daily life but from earlier writers who were fictionalizing in their imagination audiences they had learned to know in still earlier writers" (11). This idea of a writer envisioning a fictionalized audience is brilliant. Certainly Swift has imagined an audience of Irish citizens in poverty who are actually desperate enough to sell

and stew their infants in a time of crisis. The problem with Ong's essay is not the idea of a fictional audience but the limitations he assigns to it; the title after all is "The Writer's Audience is Always a Fiction." Discussing writers potentially imagining the literal people that read their work, Ong asserts, "There is no need for a novelist to feel his 'audience' this way at all" (10). I would argue instead that the writer's audience need not always be a fiction, and that there can be value in a writer's awareness of his literal audience. Lisa Ede opens up Ong's limited hypothesis by discussing both "addressed audience" (literal audience) and "invoked audience" (fictional audience) as two separate and valid schools of thought: "Those who envision the audience as addressed" (156) and "Those who envision the audience as invoked" (160). Even though Ede and Lunsford give more attention to a literal audience than Ong, they still emphasize fictional audiences by stating, "writers simply cannot know this reality of readers" (160). Even though many authors may be unaware of the identities of their literal readers, Swift would have been very aware of his literal audience, the nation of Ireland, of which he was a resident and with which he was politically involved and motivated. Swift addressing a literal Ireland is no more ludicrous than a president addressing his own literal nation. Ede and Lunsford ask, and do not adequately answer, the question, "If the perspectives we have described as audience addressed and audience invoked represent incomplete conceptions of the role of audience in written discourse, do we have an alternative?" (165). My answer to this question would be, "Yes, we do!" Ede and Lunsford do not fully explore the concept that a writer could be simultaneously aware of both a literal and a fictional audience. As this pertains to Swift's "A Modest Proposal," Carole Fabricant writes in her essay "Antipastoral Vision and Antipastoral Reality" that "We can, if we wish, discuss ["A Modest Proposal"] as a satiric fiction, but only if we simultaneously acknowledge its inextricable links to what was, for Swift, economic and political reality" (235). Certainly, the idea that Swift addresses a fictional audience with a satirical argument is

not invalid, but that idea lacks potency and purpose until coupled with the idea that Swift addresses a very real literal Ireland as well, and it is the cooperation between those two arguments directed at two audiences that makes "A Modest Proposal" the fascinating yet pungent read that it has come to be.

In order to see how Swift's awareness of one audience affects his address of the other, one must first identify the two audiences through the purposes that Swift has outlined for them, the most obvious of the two being his fictional audience. Swift begins with an address to his literal audience, outlining the actual problem he wishes to solve: "It is a melancholy object to those who walk through this great town or travel in the country, when they see the streets, the roads, and cabin doors, crowded with beggars of the female sex, followed by three, four, or six children, all in rags and importuning every passenger for an alms" (1114). The problem of poverty was a real and literal problem in Ireland during Swift's time of writing. It is with his proposed solution, however, that he leaves his literal audience behind in order to appeal to his fictional audience: "I have been assured by a very knowing American of my acquaintance in London, that a young healthy child well nursed is at a year old a most delicious, nourishing, and wholesome food, whether stewed, roasted, baked, or boiled; and I make no doubt that it will equally serve in a fricassee or ragout" (1115). At this point, and for the majority of the pamphlet, Swift explicitly targets this fictional audience, a people who would consider the idea of eating children as a solution to poverty.

This audience is indeed a fictional one as it is likely no readers during the time believed Swift to be sincere. Even Phiddian agrees, writing, "I suspect that a similarly small percentage of the "Proposal's" readers has been slow enough to take it seriously" (607). Further probing this idea that literal readers do not take what is intended for the fictional audience seriously, in the essay "Why the Houyhnhnms Don't Write: Swift, Satire and the Fear of the Text," Terry J. Castle explains, "To accept the premise of "A

Modest Proposal”—the utility of cannibalism—is to divest ourselves, of course, of a natural moral sense of thing” (66). The repulsion that readers find with Swift’s fictional argument leads to a problem with Ong’s very idea of the proper mechanics of a fictionalized audience:

First, that the writer must construct in his imagination, clearly or vaguely, an audience cast in some sort of role—entertainment seekers, reflective sharers of experience (as those who listen to Conrad’s Marlow), inhabitants of a lost and remembered world of prepubertal latency (readers of Tolkien’s hobbit stories), and so on. Second, we mean that the audience must correspondingly fictionalize itself. A reader has to play the role in which the author has cast him, which seldom coincides with his role in the rest of actual life. (12)

If Ong insists that an “audience must correspondingly fictionalize itself,” and if it is clear that Swift’s audience is unwilling to do that, then the question is raised as to how Swift’s fictional audience even functions within the context of his pamphlet. The answer is in the way it draws attention to Swift’s actual implicit argument intended for a literal audience.

Claude Rawson identifies Swift’s actual intentions for his literal audience by stating, “‘A Modest Proposal’ does not really intend the killing and sale of babies, but it is an angry attack on the entire Irish population” (13). Swift addresses the literal population of Ireland in regards not only to their socioeconomic downfalls, but also to their unwillingness to implement any logical strategy for solution. This audience to which he writes is not an imagined literal audience in the way that Ong, Ede, and Lunsford seem to think that writers are incapable of attaining. Rather, this is an audience with which Swift is extremely familiar and involved. Phiddian agrees: “He knows his audience: in the Irish context, those who can read are among the distrainers” (609). Swift knows that the audience that will be literally and physically reading his pamphlet is the same audience he wishes to directly address, as well as part of the problem outlined in the

“Proposal.”

While the explicit nature of “A Modest Proposal” may be the argument of consuming infants directed toward the fictional audience, there are many sly implicit references throughout the pamphlet directed toward this literal audience buried within the fictional ruse, such as the many references to the Roman Catholic Church and England. In addition to this, while the proposed solution is radically fictional, the problem Swift sets out to solve is far from fictional:

The number of souls in this kingdom being usually reckoned one million and a half, of these I calculate there may be about two hundred thousand couples whose wives are breeders; from which number I subtract thirty thousand couples who are able to maintain their own children, although I apprehend there cannot be so many under the present distresses of the kingdom. . . . There only remain an hundred and twenty thousand children of poor parents annually born. The question therefore is, how this number shall be reared and provided for, which as I have already said, under the present situation of affairs, is utterly impossible by all the methods hitherto proposed. (1115)

By this point, even before the revelation of Swift’s fictional argument, he adopts satirical vocabulary such as “breeders,” which equates children with cattle, a metaphor Swift uses consistently throughout the pamphlet. Despite this language, however, Swift is sincerely describing a problem with Ireland’s socioeconomic condition. The “question” really is “how this number shall be reared and provided for.” Swift further claims, though now slipping back into satire, that “all the methods hitherto proposed” will not solve the crisis, so instead he asserts a plan for selling, skinning, wearing, and eating babies.

Ultimately, it is Swift’s call to his fictional audience that, in an ideal situation, would stir his literal audience to action. Whereas Ong believes it is necessary for a literal audience to “fictionalize

itself,” Swift is counting on his literal readers to reject the fictional role he has cast for them. It is in this rejection of the absurd role as fictional audience that Swift’s literal audience may finally begin to seriously consider the more logical strategies that had been proposed in the past and left unimplemented. Swift lists them *ad nauseam* near “A Modest Proposal’s” conclusion:

Therefore let no man talk to me of other expedients: of taxing our absentees at five shillings a pound: of using neither clothes nor household furniture except what is of our own growth and manufacture: of utterly rejecting the materials and instruments that promote foreign luxury: of cutting the expensiveness of pride, vanity, idleness, and gaming in our women: of introducing a vein of parsimony, which we differ even from Laplanders and the inhabitants of Topinamboo: of quitting our animosities and factions, nor acting any longer like the Jews, who were murdering one another at the very moment their city was taken: of being little cautious not to sell our country and conscience for nothing: of teaching landlords to have a least one degree of mercy toward their tenants: lastly, of putting a spirit of honesty, industry, and skill into our shopkeepers. . . .
(1118-19)

While presented as a list of “expedients” that should not be discussed, it is clear that these are the real solutions Swift would champion for Ireland, and this assumption is solidified by the editor’s footnote which states, “Swift himself had made all these proposals in various pamphlets” (1119). Phiddian writes about this passage, arguing, “The obvious reading here is to see this as the last words of Swift, signing off with a snarl after his description of the expedients which just might work and handing control of the text (and the world) back to the lunatic projector” (612). I would argue instead that Swift is not handing “control of the world” back to the “projector” but rather back to the people, the people who make up his literal audience.

In the end, the meaning of Swift's "A Modest Proposal" is indeed to propose a solution to Ireland's crumbling economy. This is a feat Swift had tried again and again but was never taken seriously. With "A Modest Proposal," however, he takes on a new strategy by creating a mockery of the Irish in his call to eat babies, hoping that they, his literal readers, would reject this fictional role, thus rejecting the argument and finally looking toward reason for a solution. Swift's pamphlet directed solely to this literal audience has not been taken seriously, and if Swift had written "A Modest Proposal" with only a fictional audience in mind, there would have been little point in its publication. It is Swift's brilliant awareness of his two audiences that makes "A Modest Proposal" stronger than any proposal before or since.

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A Battle for “Cherl” Masculinity in Chaucer’s *The Canterbury Tales*

| Sueanna Smith

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Like most medieval literature, Chaucer’s *The Canterbury Tales* displays an acute social consciousness by reflecting the true nature of human societies: a unified external collective that is internally divided by rigid social boundaries. Chaucer’s invocation of the pilgrimage motif, which Peter Travis suggests is “a standard medieval metaphor of a man’s life,” brings together representative characters from various social class backgrounds in order to highlight a common human journey through life (213). Paul Ruggiers emphasizes that Chaucer’s storytelling framework is a unifying force that renders “the complexity of human experience. This complexity, in all its diversity, is a given body and a unity. It moves, in the form of a social group, concertedly toward a goal, and is so persuasively realistic as to force the reader to accept the tales as utterances of the various pilgrims” (xviii). As Chaucer’s pilgrims embark upon a collective journey, they struggle to defy social stratifications by defining themselves as individuals and by developing individual authoritative voices through which to validate their own experiences. Larry Benson advances a reductive view of Chaucer’s pilgrims by describing them as “familiar types in medieval estate satire, in which representatives of various classes and occupations are portrayed with a satiric emphasis on the vices peculiar to their stations in life” (5). Chaucer’s significant attention to the individualization of each pilgrim suggests that they are not to be read as mere stock types but as fully subjective individuals who react to the limitations imposed upon them through their respective social positions. As Ruggiers

suggests, “each agent reveals in his tale something of his own limited view of the human condition, a view necessarily shaped by his status, his profession, his personal bias” (12). Through the individual prologues and tales, the pilgrims attempt to authoritatively redefine their outer worlds to correspond with their inner realities. In this essay, I explore the way that class ideologies inform the various and competing models of masculinity that are espoused in “The Miller’s Tale” and “The Reeve’s Tale.” I argue that, more than viewing these two tales as attempts to “quite” one another, they can be viewed together as a unified attempt to revise the image of masculine chivalry constructed in “The Knight’s Tale.” Here, the Miller constructs a model of physical “cherl” masculinity; whereas the Reeve devises an image of masculinity that prizes internal desire over physical bravado.

Through the combination of “The General Prologue,” the individual prologues, and the individual tales themselves, Chaucer’s pilgrims become *representatives* rather than *representations* of social class. This distinction between “representatives” and “representations” is significant in regard to the long-standing debate over whether Chaucer’s pilgrims can be treated as fully actualized, subjective individual characters rather than as images that are projected through their tales. The latter argument is represented in Helen Cooper’s suggestion that “the stories can be seen as defining or creating their speakers . . . the character is a projection of the thing said, not the other way around” (75). Cooper suggests, “to ascribe the attitudes expressed in the tales to the narrators is an oversimplification and denies much of the richness of what Chaucer is doing,” and she concludes, “the pilgrims may be allowed their say in the links, but in very few of the stories does the voice of any of the ostensible narrators replace Chaucer’s” (84). Cooper certainly raises a valid point; however, to ascribe the narrative voices of the pilgrims to that of Chaucer himself would be to undermine the overall brilliance of his literary talent. There is more artistic merit and aesthetic value in the successful creation of twenty-nine fully

individualized characters, each endowed with a unique voice that is projected through a unique tale, than there would be if Chaucer simply used his characters as objects through which to espouse his own views and ideas. Moreover, Chaucer specifically distances his own subjective voice from the text itself through the simple act of creating accurate representatives of all social classes and allowing each representative to speak for himself. Louis Haselmayer makes a similar observation when he suggests that Chaucer transformed the popular medieval portrait “from a bit of verse embellishment into a realistic portrayal and true characterization” (313). In contrast to Boccaccio, whose “narrators are merely mouthpieces,” Chaucer’s artistic brilliance lies precisely within his ability to create individual pilgrims who speak for themselves (Baldwin 298).

In *The Canterbury Tales: A Literary Pilgrimage*, David Williams offers a theoretical framework that is useful in successfully distancing Chaucer’s authorial voice from that of his individual narrators. Williams suggests that *The Canterbury Tales*, in its unique structure, succeeds in creating a stratified model of fictional characterization. Chaucer distances himself from the narrative by creating multiple levels of fictional characters, which Williams describes: “there is the level of Narrator, who, through his reportage of the Canterbury frame story, creates pilgrims, like the Knight, who, in turn, become authors and create a third level of characters in their tales, such as the character Theseus” (24). This multi-layered framework allows the pilgrims to achieve a fully subjective, three-dimensional status through their inadvertent attempts of self-definition through their tales. Williams suggests that Chaucer “invokes reason as his poetic criterion, which leads him to present ‘the condicion’ that is, not only the pilgrims’ worldly circumstances, but also their dispositions, character, behavior, and very mode of being” (29). It becomes appropriate, then, to discuss each tale as a manifestation, to some degree, of the individual ideologies of its specific teller. Charles A. Owens, Jr. highlights this relationship between the pilgrims and their tales: “through their efforts to create,

through their quarrels and discussions and confessions, we see not only their intentions, their conscious images of themselves, but also on occasion, the inadvertent self-revelation that gives depth to the character” (5). Throughout the unified body of *The Canterbury Tales*, each pilgrim assumes a distinct individualization that betrays not only his/her words and behaviors, but also his/her unconscious motivations and self-images.

The pilgrims clearly articulate their own private self-images through their tales as they utilize their tales as a space to articulate a social discourse that validates these self-conceptualizations. Kevin Teo Kia-Choong suggests that, through their tales, the pilgrims are essentially “manipulating their discourse to silence dissenting views” against their authority (328). Thus, the tales become an act of revision, a means of establishing one’s own personal authority over a particular discourse. In this manner, the first three tales, those of the Knight, the Miller, and the Reeve, can be read as attempts to establish, and subsequently to redefine, a dominant model of masculinity. “The Knight’s Tale” establishes a model of masculinity that reflects the Knight’s own aristocratic class position by emphasizing the chivalrous code of knightly virtue and honor.¹ The Miller’s subsequent attempt to “quite” the Knight is fairly obvious; however, critics generally overlook or misidentify the Miller’s primary motivation for “quiting” “The Knight’s Tale.” For example, Larry Benson suggests that the Miller offers a “positive alternative to the Knight’s idealism,” whereas many critics suggest that the Miller uses the fabliaux as a method of avenging the Knight’s tale of courtly romance (8). Perhaps Ruggiers is the most perceptive to this motivation in suggesting that “The Miller’s Tale” “is an answer, a requital, told from the point of view of one who has missed the point of the story he has just heard” (56).

Indeed, the Miller missed the moral of “The Knight’s Tale,” but this was due to his desire to reaffirm his own masculinity by revising the Knight’s aristocratic model, which inherently denies peasant masculinity. It is appropriate, then, that the Miller, in his lewd and

drunken state, demands to “quite” the Knight and his authoritative model of masculinity by replacing it with one that not only validates his own manhood, but also one that advocates a model of “cherl” masculinity that is as socially valid as the Knight’s.

The Miller is very clever in his methodology of utilizing the genre of *fabliaux* to accomplish his didactic purpose. Erica Zilleruelo describes the particular benefit of utilizing a genre that is dominated by irony and satire as a means of exploring social issues: “While satirical expression in the *fabliaux* at times causes hilarity bordering on the outlandish, the tales still manage to maintain a constant realism through descriptions of everyday items” (32). Thus, it offers a platform of realism that allows a teller to employ irony and parody in a critical scrutiny of society. Benson further elaborates on the significance of the *fabliaux*: “the style is simple, vigorous, and straightforward; the time is present, and the setting real, familiar places; the characters are ordinary sorts . . . the *fabliaux* thus presents a lively image of everyday life among the middle and lower class” (7). While the Knight’s romanticism allows him to paint an accurate representation of chivalrous machismo, the *fabliaux* allows the Miller to represent an idealized image of “cherl” masculinity; a model that is not necessarily governed under the strict laws of morality. Benson suggests that *fabliaux* justice “does not always coincide with conventional morality: greed, hypocrisy, and pride are invariably punished, but so too are old age, mere slow-wittedness, and, most frequently, the presumption of a husband . . . who attempts to guard his wife’s chastity” (8). Thus, the Miller advances a conception of masculinity that advocates pragmatic assertiveness and self-reliance, values which do not always correspond to those found in the knightly code of conduct. Rather, in the Miller’s world of *fabliaux*, “the heroes and heroines, invariably witty and usually young, are those whom society ordinarily scorns—dispossessed intellectuals, clever peasants, and enthusiastically unchaste wives. Their victims are usually those whom society respects” (Benson 8). Thus, the Miller’s *fabliaux* revises the logic of “The Knight’s Tale”

by mocking the idealistic nature of its aristocratic virtues and by forming a new authoritative model of masculinity that validates and celebrates the lower class peasantry.

The Miller authoritatively revises the image of masculinity by injecting his own physical image into his fabliaux tale. Through “The General Prologue,” Chaucer (the narrator) emphasizes the masculine “cherl” nature of Robyn, the Miller. He is introduced by the following description: “The Miller was a stout carl for the nones; / Ful byg was he of brawn, and eek of bones, / At wrastlynge he wolde have alwey the ram” (545-47). He was “short-sholdred, brood, a thikke knarre” (549). Thus, Robyn is a huge mass of man who delights in the game of wrestling—a battle of physical strength and endurance—that starkly contrasts with the Knight’s favored game of jousting. Chaucer describes Robyn’s other favorite pastime of breaking down doors: “There was no dore that he nolde heve of hare; / or breke it at a rennyng with his heed” (549-50). In addition to emphasizing the Miller’s extreme physicality, Chaucer references the Miller peasant class status in “The General Prologue” when he describes the Miller as a “janglere and a goliardeys,” a buffoon and teller of dirty stories (560). Thus, the image of Robyn articulates a masculine discourse of physical bravado that directly challenges the Knight’s noble, chivalric discourse.

The Miller’s fabliaux conveys the story of John, an old carpenter who marries Allison, a young girl of eighteen. The details of the storyline are irrelevant to my purposes here, except to state that Allison and Nicholas, a young clerk who boards in John’s home, convince John that an impending flood will destroy humanity and only they three shall be saved. Through a series of comic events, the three are each made into a fool humiliated in front of the town. The Miller himself appears in the tale as Robyn, John’s knave, a very minor character whose only role is to help John break down a door: “His knave was a strong carl for the none, / and by the hasp he haaf of it atones” (3469-70). This description of Robyn is, verbatim, an exact replication of Chaucer’s description of the Miller in “The

General Prologue.” John Duvall suggests that within the genre of *fabliaux* it is not unusual for an author to parody himself: “Only a poet sure of his talent could afford to poke fun at his own art”; therefore, “humor is achieved by conscious play on the author’s part either by establishing distance between public and *fabliaux* characters or events . . . or by the openly parodic and burlesque” (78, 10). While I would argue that the Miller’s self-parody is blatantly open and obvious, the majority of critics fail to recognize it. Among the few critics who do, Derek Traversi concludes that the servant, “whose name—Robyn—is, by a coincidence which is at least suggestive, that of the Miller himself, who has been presented in ‘The General Prologue’ as adept in breaking down doors” (77). On the other hand, Ruggiers notes a correlation between the Miller and his tale, but it involves a far different connection: “The Miller unwittingly represents himself and his positions in the characters he makes the victims of the plot” (63). Here, Ruggiers suggests that the Miller projects his own personal characteristics into the character of John, Nicolas, and Allison in a metaphorical manner, but he doesn’t appear to notice the Miller’s direct representation of himself in the character of the knave.

The Miller’s projection of himself into his tale may, at first, appear as an uncanny coincidence, a simple act of comedic humor; however, I suggest that it is quite deliberate on the part of the Miller and carries with it a much larger significance. Lee Patterson recognizes an intentionality and significance in this projection, as he suggests, “Robin represents himself in the tale as a servant boy who can be packed off to London and (so John at least thinks) to death by drowning without a second thought . . . the Miller thinks of himself . . . as a dependent and unregarded *famulus*” (98). While Patterson accurately identifies the Miller’s self-representation, his overall conclusion that it reflects the Miller’s self-conception as a degenerate peasant is incorrect. Instead, the Miller actually celebrates his social status and views himself as the epitome of “cherl” or peasant masculinity, essentially constructing a model of

masculinity that centers around himself as Robyn, the knave. The knave's brief, seemingly minor role is inherently deceptive, because he becomes the only named character in the tale that does not end up being duped, manipulated, and publicly humiliated. Having been sent off to London for the "flood," Robyn is saved from the compilation of events that lead to the downfall and humiliation of the others. Moreover, as a knave, or servant, Robyn occupies the lowest position in the social hierarchy inside of the story, yet he emerges as the masculine hero while the other males are emasculated. Thus, the Miller inscribes a model of masculinity that celebrates peasant masculinity, and at the very least, provides the lower class with a sense of dignity and self-respect.

The Miller's defiant model of masculinity achieves a broader significance when it is contextualized through the events in "The Miller's Prologue." Robyn's interruption of the class-inscribed order through which the storytelling is intended to proceed reflects his dismissal of the existing social hierarchy. Harry Bailey attempts to pacify the Miller: "Abyd Robyn, my leeve brother; some better man shall tell us first another" (3129-30). Instead, this angers the Miller because it conveys the idea that Robyn is less of a man than the Monk, who had previously been called to follow "The Knight's Tale." The Miller's refusal to accede to the social hierarchy angers Bailey, who then calls the Miller "a fool;" a comment which the Miller ignores: "he nolde his words for no man to bere, / but told his cherles tale in his manere" (3168-69). The Miller refuses to alter his peasant vulgarity in order to suit the wishes of the respectable classes; instead, he resumes his speech and denies the authority of the higher classed pilgrims to stop him. The Miller declares that he will "quite" "The Knight's Tale" by telling a "legend and a lyf / bothe of a carpenter and of his wyf" (3142). However, "The Miller's Tale" does not portray John or Allison or any of the other main characters as saints; they all err and are humiliated in the end—all except for Robyn. Far from being a "fool," Robyn becomes the saint: the patriarchal saint of masculinity. Thus the Miller authoritatively

redefines the image of masculinity that the Knight had previously established and successfully “quites” the social hierarchy.

Osewold, the Reeve, redefines the masculine images that are presented by both the Knight and the Miller in order to create an image that advocates his own conceptualized manhood. In “The General Prologue,” Chaucer describes the Reeve as a “sclendir colerik man,” (587); he is old and withdrawn, a direct opposite of the young and loud Miller, thus the Miller’s model of “cherl” masculinity does not apply to him. The Reeve is an unethical cheater who openly deceives his young landowner; however, he is never caught because the servants are frightened by his angry disposition. Moreover, he is described as a cuckold—a status that calls his masculinity into question. As the Miller announces his intention to tell a story of a carpenter and “how that a clerk hath set the wrightes cappe” (3143), the Reeve angrily interrupts by claiming, “it is a synne and eek a great folye / to apeyren any man, or him defame” (3146-47). There is no doubt that the Reeve is angered by the Miller’s intention to portray a gullible old carpenter; however, the severity of his response results from his perception that the Miller is essentially emasculating the old carpenter who is sexually outperformed by a young scholar. Ruggiers raises a critical point when he suggests that the Reeve’s bitter response is aroused “because the very nature of the man telling the tale, private and retiring, cautious and old, crabbed and complaining, choleric and revengeful, demands a specific kind of performance . . . their very personalities are at odds” (67). Thus, the Reeve feels as though the Miller, with his emphasis on physical masculinity, is insulting his own manhood; afterall, the Miller is a young masculine bravado, while he, like John, is nothing more than a frail old man. Therefore, Osewold begins to identify himself with the image of John in “The Miller’s Tale” and seeks to construct a suitable masculine discourse for himself.

“The Reeve’s Prologue” mimics a confessional sermon as he bitterly attempts to justify his own masculinity in relation to the Miller’s model. Osewold’s announcement that he could easily quite

“The Miller’s Tale” with a tale of a proud Miller reinforces the idea that he resents the Miller’s pride and self-confidence. He begins to lament his old age but quickly utilizes this confession to espouse a new image of masculinity: a model based upon the internal forces of desire—qualities that persist throughout old age. He refers to this as he says, “Til we be roten, kan we nat be rype” (3875). He suggests that old men are driven by an inner sense of desire which remains strong despite the physical limitations imposed by age: “for thoghoure might be goon, / oure wyl desireth folie evere in oon” (3879-80). Interestingly, he suggests that old men still possess the same desires of young men, a suggestion that possibly signifies the retention of strong sexual desires. Osewold also refers to the “foure gleedes” which last through old age and carry the man even while his limbs grow frail (3883). Through his lament, the Reeve cleverly signifies that mental faculties and inner desire do not fade with old age as does physical strength. Ruggiers describes the Reeve’s interior confession: “The reader has the feeling of being privy to secrets which are not general comments about human nature, but specific and particular manifestations of the character and personality of a living man” (68). As Ruggiers suggests, “The Reeve’s Prologue” reflects his own internal struggle with feelings of emasculation that arise from his loss of youth.

“The Reeve’s Tale” then becomes a site of revision as Osewold revises the images of masculinity previously established by the Knight and the Miller. More significantly, he attempts to revise his own image by revising the image of John, the carpenter. In “Creative Writing and Daydreaming,” Sigmund Freud advances a theory of artistic creation that suggests that a creative writer, through his stories, “creates a world of his own, or, rather, rearranges the things of his world in a new way which pleases him” (510). Therefore, writing becomes a vehicle for wish fulfillment; through it, the writer corrects an “unsatisfying reality” (510). The writer then projects himself into the story as the hero, who “is the center of interest for whom the writer tries to win our sympathy by every possible

means" (512). Additionally, the hero does not necessarily need to be confined to a single character; rather, he can be represented by two characters at once. Freud's theory provides a useful framework for interpreting "The Reeve's Tale" as Osewold's attempt to create a scenario in which he can highlight his own status as a man. Interestingly, most critics highlight the way that Osewold caricatures the Miller through the character of Symkyn, but they neglect his representation of himself through the transformation of John into the two young, sexually aggressive scholars, John and Alleyn.

The Reeve portrays Symkyn as a physical brute who closely resembles Robyn, the Miller. Like Robyn, Symkyn is proud, he plays the bagpipe, and he can "turne coppes, and wel wrestle and sheete" (3928). His physical demeanor evokes fear, thus enabling him to cheat people out of their grain. Symkyn uses his physical stature, along with knives and other weapons, to assert his own masculinity by invoking fear—essentially a form of emasculation—in others. On the other hand, the two scholars are defined as "testif" or headstrong and represent the strength of intellect and desire, rather than physical prowess (4004). Their plan to watch the Miller while he grinds their grain suggests their successful use of logic, and this plan succeeds for a short time until the Miller attempts to defeat them through their own medium of logic by cleverly unleashing their horses. The clerks' physical endurance fails them in retrieving the horses in a timely manner, and they are, at least temporarily, defeated by the Miller. Symkyn mocks their intellect as he says, "myn hous is streit, but ye han lerned art; / ye konne by argumentes make a place / a myle brood of twenty foot of space" (4122-24). However, John foreshadows their ultimate method of revenge, as he tells Symkyn: "I have herd sayd, 'Man sal taa of twa thynges: / slyk as he fyndes, or taa slyk as he brynges'" (4129-30). John then adds, "with empty hand men may na haukes tulle" (4134). Here, he conveys the idea that men may take two types of things: things they find and things they bring. In this sense, men who have nothing

need not worry about luring predators, while those who have desirable possessions (women) must beware. This becomes an ironic foreshadowing of the clerks' ultimate display of masculinity as they "take" Symkyn's wife and daughter.

The sexualization of the two scholars, however, implies more than a simple "taking" away from the Miller. As Thomas Cooke describes, "the potency of the penis in the fabliaux is generally enormous . . . aggressiveness is also a part of the sexuality of the fabliaux; the penis is a weapon" (147). Therefore, sexual aggression becomes the ultimate form of retribution to avenge the loss of pride, a sense of emasculation that the scholars have suffered at the hands of Symkyn. Thus, the penis becomes the ultimate weapon of revenge; one which they use to reassert their own masculinity. Through his tale, the Reeve creates an image of masculinity that is based upon desire, anger, boasting, and greed—the four "gleedes" or sparks in the lives of older men—while also disassociating masculinity from physical strength. Interestingly, Charles Owens views "The Reeve's Tale" as a "trap" because "he has unconsciously chosen a tale in which the young win out" (108). It is true that the young clerks do triumph; however, the young scholars are actually projections of the Reeve himself as he transforms this scene into a staged revenge fantasy. These young scholars then establish a masculine discourse that emphasizes the internal motivation of desire, thus allowing the Reeve to reclaim his own masculinity. In this manner, I agree with David Williams, who suggests, "the absence of descriptions of the clerks is itself an indication that emphasis is not so much upon their characters as it is upon the function they perform in bringing about the fall from pride" (71). Thus, their youth is insignificant to the movement of the tale itself; its sole purpose is to allow the Reeve to gratify an impulse through the role of a fantasy.

Through the unique structure of *The Canterbury Tales*, Chaucer creates individual characters who, through their own tales, attempt to reconfigure or redefine their positions within the medieval social

hierarchy. The three models of masculinity that are constructed through “The Knight’s Tale,” “The Miller’s Tale,” and “The Reeve’s Tale” highlight the intense ideological struggle that individuals face when attempting to define their own position in society. The Knight’s model of noble masculinity inadvertently emasculates the peasant class as it advocates values and ideologies that are not accessible to them. In turn, the Miller’s model of physical masculinity inadvertently oppresses older men who have become physically frail while the Reeve’s model of masculinity based on desire is essentially oppressive to the women who are exploited by it. The constant revision of images and ideologies in *The Canterbury Tales* therefore reflects the consistent ideological revisions that individuals make as they struggle to negotiate their position within society—a process of revision that defines the pilgrimage of life.

1. I limit my discussion of “The Knight’s Tale” to simply provide a contextualization for my main discussion of the Miller and Reeve’s tales.

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“I must speak to you by such means as are within my reach”: The Language of Agency and Passivity in *Persuasion*’s Constancy

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Jane Austen’s *Persuasion* is hardly a “courtship novel.” If there is any “courting” going on, it is relegated to the subplots of the novel’s secondary characters, giving greater attention to the narrative’s construction of an older, more mature heroine. In her final novel, Austen explores her own “post-courtship” protagonist, focusing upon the role of constancy in a woman’s deep attachment to a former love and its broader implications for the volatile society in which she lives. We love Anne Elliot for her detachment from the frivolity of youthful infatuation and for her characterization as a sensible, grown woman who recognizes the validity of her attachments through an extended romantic abstinence. In his 1971 article “The Achievement of *Persuasion*,” Thomas P. Wolfe writes in opposition to Anne’s constancy toward Captain Wentworth as the primary lens through which we might view “some inviolable core of [Anne’s] self that almost defies analysis” (693). Instead, Wolfe advocates the “deeper overtones” of themes of constancy in the novel, recasting it as an “abiding integrity” linked to the composition of Anne’s own intact self (696). Although I align myself with Wolfe’s reading of *Persuasion*’s “deeper overtones” of constancy, *Persuasion* seems to call for a more thorough inquiry of the rhetoric of agency and passivity in the formation of its “constancy.” Likewise, it is difficult to impede the relationship between constancy and the passage of time; the novel builds the relationships between

its characters upon the effects of time, allowing for the favorable (and unfavorable) byproducts of the passing years to implement the plot. This interplay between agency and passivity in *Persuasion's* "constancy" lends itself to Austen's presentation of time, transforming our typically inactive view of love's constancy into a powerful source of agency in rapidly changing, early nineteenth century England.

Persuasion begins with a haughty father reveling in his family history, fully enamored with his own fleeting entry in the aristocratic chronicles of time. As Sir Walter Elliot "turn[s] over the almost endless creations of the last century" within the pages of the "Baronetage," he initiates a preoccupation with the effects of the passing years (9). This sense of stagnancy in the aristocracy is characterized by hereditary rights, passively allowing the inheritance of property through birth or marriage. Time has played a passive role thus far, permitting the upper class to slide into inactivity as hereditary inheritance runs its natural course. This "natural course," however, sanctions that which Sir Walter abhors. After referring to Captain Wentworth as a "nobody," he "wonders how the names of many of our nobility become so common" (25). The answer is the influx of marriage between the classes, stirred by the military's faculty for upward social mobility. The passivity of time is not only the foundation upon which the aristocracy is built, but it is also the force which will serve in its slow demolition.

Anne's perspective of time contrasts with the way in which her father pompously grapples with its effect on societal distinction—she is accepting, willing to let the years pass as they always have. "The years" take on an active role in Anne's perception, "destroy[ing] her youth and bloom" and giving Wentworth "a more glowing, manly, open look" (53). Anne's view of time is that of a slow destroyer and uplifter, stealing her "bloom" and gifting Wentworth with a more "manly" disposition. Time is an unfair mediator between the would-be lovers, and Anne must work to nurse her own feelings with the power of her tempered reasoning. When Anne sees "the

same Frederick Wentworth,” she asserts the ability of the years to simultaneously deconstruct one lover and improve another (53). Anne, a member of the aristocracy, suffers from a declining physical appearance; likewise, Captain Wentworth, a product of upward social mobility, “glows” with a more attractive countenance.

Austen uses Anne’s conversation with a naval officer—Captain Harville—to link themes of upward social mobility with the novel’s broader preoccupation with romantic constancy; in this conversation, Austen intertwines the language of passivity and agency, using the dialogue as a space for the two modes to interact. Harville asks, “Do you claim that for your sex?” He gives Anne the agency to make a “claim” for her gender, rather than simply accepting an old conjecture. She responds with a “claim” that is ironically passive, rejoining, “We certainly do not forget you, so soon as you forget us. It is, perhaps, our fate rather than our merit” (187). The act of “forgetting” is hardly an act at all; instead, it is an evanescence of the memory, implemented by the passage of time. Anne even references “fate”—the most essential control over human agency—in her support of feminine devotion. She effectively lists her reasons for the strength of women’s constancy, but she does so by way of the rhetoric of passivity. She continues, “We *cannot help* ourselves. We live at home, quiet, confined, and our feelings *prey upon us*. You are *forced* on exertion” (187, emphasis added). Anne links a woman’s solitude—which she “cannot help”—with the “exertion” on which men are “forced.” Neither instance allows for agency. A woman is relegated to a quiet home while a man is “forced” into “profession, pursuits,” and “business of some sort or other” (187). Certainly, women endure this passivity in a separate and often more mundane sphere, but the lack of an actively chosen pursuit is simultaneously a feminine and masculine concern.

Austen continues to play off of this rhetoric of passivity in Harville’s initial response to Anne. He explains, “as our bodies are strongest, so are our feelings; capable of *bearing* most rough usage, and *riding out* the heaviest weather” (187, emphasis added). Despite

the more “robust” nature of his examples, they still indicate an instance that is acted upon. If we are to equate agency with a kind of “determination” (not so far from what Wentworth claims to seek in a mate), it is not necessarily present in this exchange—yet. At the close of the conversation, Anne agrees that many of the “songs and proverbs . . . all talk of women’s fickleness” and that these specific texts “were all written by men” (188). The ability to comment upon “woman’s inconstancy” limits itself to a single sex, placing the “pen” in “[men’s] hands” (188). Anne concludes, “we never can expect to prove anything upon such a point,” putting the conversation’s passive rhetoric on hold in a moment of stagnancy—there is nothing to prove in either case since both are stifled by an idea so rooted in a “bias toward [their] own sex” (188-89). Anne seems to imply that romantic constancy—although very much bound up in patience and passivity—transcends the simplest dichotomy of active versus passive, pointing to a deeper sensibility which is unhindered by the passage of time or by gender. Her mention of these biases prompts Captain Harville to respond by wishing that he “could convey to [Anne] the glow of his soul” when a naval officer sees his family again “after a twelvemonth’s absence” (189). He continues, “If I could explain to you all this, and all that a man can *bear and do*, and glories *to do* for the sake of these treasures of his existence” (189, emphasis added). Harville’s most powerful response to Anne’s inferences points to “bearing and doing,” combining a sense of passivity and agency in one’s constancy to a spouse.

Austen’s structure of this particular exchange serves the intricacies of romantic constancy, ironically allowing Wentworth to “drop his pen” while he crafts the letter that will place the initiation of an engagement in Anne’s own hands (188). Austen permits such a conversation to precede Anne’s reading of his proposal, preparing the reader for a complete shift in Anne’s passive characterization of constancy to her sudden possession of all the romantic agency. Perhaps this exchange is also indicative of Anne’s perception of constancy as a vital component of her intact

self. Marilyn Butler points to this same sense of selfhood, noting, “All Anne’s characteristics find expression in this conversation: her fortitude, gentleness, modesty, integrity” (283). Butler continues, “The ideal Wentworth outlines in the conversation she overheard, when he spoke of the hazel-nut, comes vividly to life” (283).

Anne’s fluid conversation with Harville is a marker of her own emotional relationship to constancy; she can discuss that which she understands clearly with great volubility, revealing an expression of the self that is linked to her intransigent affections.

This determination that arises in the preceding conversation catalyzes Wentworth’s proposal spurred by Anne’s discussion of constancy. Wentworth begins his letter by rejecting his own passive condition, stating, “I can listen no longer in silence. I must speak to you by such means as are within my reach.” He entreats Anne to “tell [him] that [he] is not too late, that such precious feelings are gone forever,” pushing her to actively respond to his affections (191). He combines the passive and active functions of “hearing” and “distinguishing” respectively when he writes, “I am every instant hearing something which overpowers me . . . you sink your voice, but I can distinguish the tones of that voice, when they would be lost on others” (191). Wentworth’s constancy implies a romantic language that is particular to him and Anne, deciphering that which “would be lost on others.” At the close of his proposal, Wentworth provides Anne with the tools for agency, writing, “a word, a look will be enough to decide whether I enter your father’s house this evening or never” (191). This “language” is almost completely devoid of speech, bound up in silent communication. Wentworth’s transcendent language is reminiscent of the surpassing quality of Harville’s final conclusions on constancy, linking both passivity and agency in the nature of romantic constancy. Wentworth’s letter lends itself to this complexity, actively writing a proposal that resigns him to play a passive role to Anne’s agency.

The relationship between the navy and the aristocracy implements a new power dynamic within nineteenth century England, blurring

social distinctions in a way that will inevitably affect the marriage market for women like Anne. Alistair M. Duckworth points out, “Anne’s task in *Persuasion* is not, then, to reclaim Kellynch . . . but to discover new possibilities of accommodation for herself” (192). Anne is no longer limited to the constraints of the aristocracy; instead she is allowed to consider “the risks and uncertainties of life at sea or among sailors” (192). Duckworth asserts that the contrast between the navy and the aristocracy is not a portent of social upheaval; rather, it provides a new world of “accommodation for the marginal woman” (193). The Elliot family, although it maintains its name, engages in a slow financial ruin through the vanity of Sir Walter. Austen’s representation of the aristocracy does not dissolve, but it gradually loses its favor in the eyes of the reader. Anne—constant in her affections toward Wentworth despite his social standing—is eventually rewarded by a position within this new “accommodation.” Constancy is profitable for Anne; it allows for her to take her place in a changing social climate without compromising her affection for Captain Wentworth.

When we consider Anne and Wentworth’s constancy juxtaposed with this maintenance for social “distinction,” two very different forms of constancy arise: one serves progress while the other serves stagnancy. Anne and Wentworth’s constancy is a manifestation of the inevitable intermingling of the classes, eliminating barriers of wealth and social opinion in a changing world. Sir Walter’s constant attention to his social status is a vain attempt at maintaining a fading tradition. Austen emphasizes this needless attempt in her characterization of Sir Walter as a vain, self-interested man, unaware of the progress that surrounds him.

Austen’s intermingling of social spheres in *Persuasion* becomes even more evident when we encounter Mrs. Smith. This representation of the true “marginal woman” complicates a positive reading of England’s social change in Austen’s novel. Mrs. Smith, although she survives the loss of her husband and financial ruin, is still on the outskirts of society. She is by no means destitute, but the

narrative seems to indicate that the changing times have dealt her a significant social blow. The distinction between Anne and Mrs. Smith is most apparent when Anne meets her old school friend for the second time in the novel. Mrs. Smith asks Anne, "Did you observe the woman who opened the door to you, when you called yesterday?" Anne replies, "No. Was not it Mrs. Speed, as usual, or the maid? I observed no one in particular." Mrs. Smith rejoins that it was her "friend, Mrs. Rooke" (Austen 159). Anne overlooks Mrs. Rooke in her visit to Mrs. Smith, relegating the nurse to a state of little consequence. We see, however, that Mrs. Smith aligns herself with Mrs. Rooke, indicating a variance in one's relationship to the working-class. The two women—although one is an employer and the other is an employee—are friends; Mrs. Smith's loss of stature in the social sphere allows her to foster a relationship with one of inferior class standing, providing one of the few instances in Austen's novels where a servant is explicitly befriended.

The purpose of Mrs. Smith in the novel is vague; as readers, we are confident that Anne would reject Mr. Elliot without Mrs. Smith's revelation of his character. K. K. Collins supports this incongruity, noting, "If Jane Austen has included Mrs. Smith to release vital facts that are made to fall sterile on the action, the character is a grim flaw indeed. Either Mrs. Smith has some purpose outside of the plot proper or she has little purpose at all" (384). If anything, Mrs. Smith reveals Anne's inability to truly reconsider her affections for Wentworth. After listening to Mrs. Smith's encouragement for a marriage between Mr. Elliot and Anne, Anne replies, "upon my word, he is nothing to me. Should he ever propose to me (which I have very little reason to imagine he has any thought of doing), I shall not accept him" (158). Mrs. Smith's eventual disclosure of Mr. Elliot's faults is irrelevant to Anne; perhaps this full disclosure is only a tool for the reader, revealing that Mr. Elliot was hardly worth consideration for our well-reasoned heroine.

Anne's constancy is resilient, but her discourse with Mrs. Smith alludes to a different sort of agency for the "marginal woman." Mrs. Smith's connection to Nurse Rooke and her remarkable attention to the activities of the wealthier classes expose a new way to engage in the changing social world: gossip. After Anne discovers that Mrs. Smith does not know Colonel Wallis personally (only through word of mouth), Mrs. Smith explains, "It does not come to me in quite so direct a line as that; it takes a bend or two, but nothing of consequence. The stream is as good as at first; the little rubbish it collects in the turnings is easily moved away" (165). This "stream" that contains a "little rubbish" is the tool by which Mrs. Smith connects herself to the upper class, and she uses it to actively intervene on the part of her acquaintances. For Anne, this intervention is useless; however, it displays Austen's juxtaposition of two very different forms of agency in a woman's world. Anne maintains her constancy; Mrs. Smith chats.

In terms of the novel, Anne's choice of agency is rewarded by her marriage. The agency of constancy (in an ideal resolution) produces an institution in itself—marriage. Austen's "reverse" courtship novel presents the solidarity of marriage as the "roots" in a revitalized England. Anne's constancy works as a connective tool throughout the plot, transcending the segregation of the aristocracy and the navy with an inveterate affection for her old love. Marriage is not only a source of cohesion in these changing times, but it is also the way by which the social classes will legally and romantically intertwine; thanks to Austen, Anne Elliot and Captain Wentworth are a clever manifestation of this new "twist."

In early nineteenth-century England's shifting social landscape, we see a redefinition of class distinction, characterized by the upward social mobility of the changing times. Austen poignantly presents a heroine who bridges the gap between the old and the new, solidifying this connection through a resilient romantic constancy toward Captain Wentworth. This constancy remains

unhindered by the passage of time, representing a present-driven motif of earnest emotion and affection. *Persuasion* is a victory in terms of “courtship”—although it excludes the courtship altogether. It is a novel of reconciliation, sparked by the inveterate connection between two former lovers and carried out through the interplay of romantic agency and passivity. Wolfe’s “abiding integrity” is a resilient advocate for the rewards of an intact self; both Anne and Wentworth participate in romantic agency through an unalterable predilection toward one another and subsequently carve a respectable space for themselves within Duckworth’s new “accommodations.” Perhaps Austen suggests that this reconciliation of Anne and Wentworth is applicable to the larger reconciliation between England’s class distinctions, asserting a social constancy that patiently awaits revival. Constancy is the fresh form of agency in a “new” England, representing an earnest steadfastness in the swift transformation of a society.

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The Blues as Replacement Model of the Universe in Ralph Ellison's *Invisible Man*

| Stephen Barker

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Once, the world made sense. Medieval doctrine and common knowledge, according to C.S. Lewis, had satisfactory answers for practically every question that a medieval person could ask about the world. This commonly accepted and complete view of the world, Lewis explains in *The Discarded Image*, was a “model” (5) that medieval artists could peacefully contemplate and artistically elaborate within their works. As Lewis states, “this Model of the Universe is a supreme medieval work of art, [and] it is in a sense the central work, that in which most particular works were embedded, to which they constantly referred, [and] from which they drew a great deal of their strength” (12). This discarded model looms in the background of every work on the modern condition, especially Ralph Ellison's *Invisible Man*, since its protagonist tries on and rejects various models of ordering his experience. His testing of different models of experience knits together what would otherwise be merely a loose string of picaresque episodes. In each section of the novel, the Invisible Man inhabits the worldview of one of his role models until its failure to completely reflect his lived experience causes him to reject it. These role models are symbols, almost allegories, of the worldviews they represent: Mr. Norton represents misguided, overbearing, white philanthropy; Trueblood—the ignorant, ingenious storyteller rewarded for his incest—shows the fruits of that philanthropy; Dr. Bledsoe shows the entrenched territoriality of some of those who have succeeded in a tough world; and the blind

preacher Homer Barbee seems to represent the views of Booker T. Washington, which the Invisible Man once held dear. The list goes on: the paint mixer Kimbro, the members of the Brotherhood, Ras the Exhorter, Tod Clifton, Rinehart, and others are all replacement models the Invisible Man sees, tries, and rejects. Ultimately, the Invisible Man chooses the blues as his replacement model, using them to cope with the world as faced by the modern artist and other sufferers. In opposition to the artists of the medieval period (at least as Lewis represents them), the Invisible Man “is confronted with a reality whose significance he cannot know, or a reality that has no significance. . . . It is for him, by his own sensibility, to discover a meaning—or at least a shape—to what in itself had neither” (204). The Invisible Man’s blues partially fulfill his need for a model of the universe that will allow him to contemplate the world and escape his pain, but they ultimately paralyze him. Despite his desire for action, the Invisible Man remains underground—the best he can do is to write out his pain. His success, like the success of any blues artist, must be gauged by the power of his art to inspire action or change in others.

In *The Discarded Image*, Lewis convincingly argues that the medieval worldview synthesizes and harmonizes all the elements of human experience. The medieval worldview combines philosophers’ thought on astronomy, biology, psychology, cosmology, religion, dreams, aesthetics, education, and even fairies, demons, and angels into a hierarchically-organized, harmonious whole, or as Lewis puts it, “All the apparent contradictions must be harmonised. A Model must be built which will get everything in without a clash; and it can do this only by becoming intricate, by mediating its unity through a great, and finely ordered, multiplicity” (11). This organized whole may be most easily seen in the idea of the Great Chain of Being. Lewis does not name the concept explicitly, but he constantly implies it. For instance, he explains that in the medieval imagination (based on the ideas of Aristotle), the source of the universe was the Unmoved Mover. Medieval thinkers incorporated into their model

Aristotle's idea that the universe is inspired to move out of love for God. In Theseus' First Mover speech in "The Knight's Tale," for example, Chaucer makes the love of God's perfection the principle that orders and binds together everything in the universe. He goes on to state the idea that everything descends in ordered hierarchy from God:

Wel may men knowe, but it be a fool,
 That every part deryveth from his hool;
 For nature hath nat taken his bigynnyng
 Of no partie nor cantel of a thyng,
 But of a thyng that parfit is and stable,
 Descendynge so til it be corrumpable;
 And therefore, of his wise purveiaunce,
 He hath so wel biset his ordinaunce,
 That speses of thynges and progressiouns
 Shullen enduren by successiouns,
 And nat eterne, withouten any lye. (l.2148-57)

From the uttermost end of the cosmos to the atom, God has ordered the universe according to his delight: perfection and stability. Because of these qualities, the Great Chain of Being is the perfect model of experience that eliminates confusion and doubt and serves as the archetype for the elusive explanatory model that the Invisible Man is trying to find.

The modern novel offers fragmented solutions to the problem of ordering experience. Questions that for the typical medieval author had standard answers—Where does evil come from? Why do the bad prosper and good suffer? What happens when we die?—cause much angst for the modern. Technological change, existential and eschatological doubt, the dissolution of hierarchies (which, though limiting, can create satisfaction with one's position in society and the universe), the absence of justice, and the disintegration of scientific models all contribute further to the confusion of the Invisible Man and other modern protagonists.

The idea that the blues are the Invisible Man's ultimate response to the modern condition is well-established within the novel and Ellison's other writings. As Raymond Olderman noted soon after the novel was published:

The Blues express all the ambiguities, contradictions, possibilities, hopes and limitations that lie in the human circumstance. They offer the opportunity to soar free of tradition . . . and they expose the limits of this freedom. They are a joke at the core, but a joke that mocks and transcends the very meaning of its lyrics. They are a human assertion and they sing of the flux and variety of the human soul; they cry despair, hope, joy, sorrow, love, loneliness, pride, and disappointment all in one glorious ambiguous voice. (143)

The blues thus conceived are no longer music but a complete model of experience. As I made evident in the introduction, the Invisible Man moves through different ways of understanding the world as represented by the many different characters. As he experiences the failure of other models of experience to satisfactorily account for all the details of his life, he moves from naïveté to cynicism, becoming by the end of the novel, a “blues-toned laughter-at-wounds who include[s] himself in his indictment of the human condition” (xviii). He has the blues because he is a black man in America with all the associated burdens of that status: spite, scorn, limited access to cultural, economic, and political resources, and a multitude of other things. But existential angst is not limited to those who are young or male or black—the Invisible Man also has the blues because he is a human being in a confusing, pain-filled world and because he lacks a satisfactory model to explain away his pain and confusion.

Instead, he uses the blues as a soporific—at least at first. For example, when the Invisible Man listens to the blues while hibernating in his warm, well-lit hole eating “vanilla ice cream and sloe gin” (8), he is almost at peace. But blues artists (as opposed to ordinary people with the blues) do not think of themselves as merely

dwelling on pain; they wish to do something about their blues. More precisely, the blues artist wants to “keep the painful details and episodes of a brutal experience alive in [his] arching consciousness, to finger its jagged grain” (Ellison, *Shadow and Act* 90) but not to wallow in the pain. Rather, as Shelby Steele cogently explains, the blues artist wants to transcend his experience “based on the individual’s capacity to redefine his own suffering and to draw from it a way of life that meets his needs yet is not dependent upon the world making any radical changes in his favor” (158). The art of the blues acts as more than a coping mechanism: it comforts, but it also provides a means of acting when action seems impossible.

The blues thus partially resolve the Invisible Man’s existential crisis by helping him cope with his frustration and anguish at being invisible, helping him cope with despair by offering a simulacrum of action within inaction. That is, just like his hole in the ground, the blues offer both comfort and the perpetual promise of future action: “The point is that I found a home—or hole in the ground, as you will. . . . Mine is a warm hole. And remember, a bear retires to his hole for the winter and lives until spring; then he comes strolling out like the Easter chick breaking from its shell” (6). In his hole, listening to the blues, the Invisible Man tells himself that “a hibernation is a covert preparation for more overt action” (13). That promise of future action is contained in the blues. As the stoned Invisible Man listens to Louis Armstrong, he feels he is descending “like Dante” into several different prophetic visions, including one in which the Invisible Man talks to a spiritual-singing woman, who tells him that her freedom lies in loving her slave-master (9-10). To the Invisible Man, the visions underneath the blues “demanded action, the kind of which I was incapable, and yet had I lingered there beneath the surface I might have attempted to act. Nevertheless, I know now that few really listen to this music” (12). In other words, the pain that the blues cover up calls people to action, but the music simultaneously prevents action because it transmutes that pain into laughter and joy—an aesthetic rather than

a visceral sorrow.

The song of the robin represents the Invisible Man's conception of powerlessness:

O well they picked poor Robin clean
 O well they picked poor Robin clean
 Well they tied poor Robin to a stump
 Lawd, they picked all the feathers round from Robin's rump
 Well they picked poor Robin clean. (193)

The Invisible Man has just found out that all his efforts to get a job in New York have been in vain because of Bledsoe's letter of dis-recommendation. He is angry and begins his struggle to change society with the Brotherhood because he does not yet appreciate the blues: he still thinks he has power to change the world. But the blues song was created to change his perception of his fate, to make his powerlessness pleasurable:

What was the who-what-when-why-where of poor old Robin . . . and why had we sung of his fate? It was for a laugh, for a laugh, all the kids had laughed and laughed, and the droll tuba player of the old Elk's band had rendered it solo on his helical horn; with comical flourishes and doleful phrasing. (193-94)

This blues artist does not care about change but about enjoying the moment. He takes no steps to strike at his powerlessness, the root of his pain, letting a *carpe diem* attitude simulate productive action.

Action within inaction—the phrase calls to mind many other characters who are linked to the blues within the novel: the man with blueprints that the Invisible Man meets on the streets of Harlem when he first arrives, Mary Rambo, and the Harlem rioters. They are all relatively powerless, and they all use the blues in slightly different ways to divert their pain. First, the man with the blueprints puzzles the Invisible Man with his blues song, singing:

She's got feet like a monkey
 Legs like a frog—Lawd, Lawd!
 But when she starts to loving me

I holler Whoooo, God-dog!
 Cause I loves my baabay,
 Better than I do myself (173)

With its emphasis on his lady's deformities, the cartman's blues lyric indicates the desire to live and love despite an imperfect world. His disregard for the cartful of blueprints he carries, which themselves pun on the blues, represents a blues-inflected attitude towards people's futile plans to change the world in which they live. About his "hundred pounds of blueprints," the cartman says, "I asked the man why they getting rid of all this stuff and he said they get in the way so every once in a while they have to throw 'em out to make place for the new plans. . . . Folks is always making plans and changing 'em" (173). To a person living in blues mode, the cartman indicates, the world cannot be appreciably improved, so everyone may as well stop making plans and live day-by-day, taking and celebrating whatever pleasure there may be in it, as he does with his frog-and monkey-like woman.

The last glimpse of the blues outside of the Invisible Man's hole comes during the Harlem riots, and they show most fully the failure of the blues to cope fully with the modern world. As the rioters pour kerosene on their own homes in a desperate and futile attempt to escape the conditions of their world, a woman "shout[s] passionately in a full-throated voice of blues singer's timbre":

If it hadn't been for the referee
 Joe Louis woulda killed
 Jim Jefferie
 Free beer!! (544)

The allusion to the blues explains why the crowd is burning its own homes. It is an attempt to act, even if irrationally, in the face of barely livable conditions. Harlem is the blues, and its people feel they have no power, yet they feel compelled to act anyway. The conflict within the blues between action and inaction has led the community to the breaking point. In one sense, the pain that lies beneath the blues provokes action, yet its despairing *carpe diem*

attitude reacts against meaningful action. These two forces build up until the people cannot take it anymore and explode into violent, meaningless action that will only further cement the community's troubles.

Though he seems unable to act, the Invisible Man can still turn his sufferings into art, which enables him to answer the pain that lies beneath the blues. Because he is a writer, not a musician, he makes something different of his blues than the typical blues artist. His dream vision of pain and suffering "had demanded action, the kind of which I was incapable" (12). In the world, this statement is true, which he proves by trying and failing to take effective political action to save Harlem. The one thing he can do is tell his story, and in telling it, he has succeeded in beginning to overcome it. He says, "The very act of trying to put it all down has confused me and negated some of the anger and some of the bitterness" (579). His task of getting his pain written down accomplished, he seems to be slipping into the passivity characteristic of the bluesman. He is skeptical of the possibility of change and content merely to enjoy life's pleasure—he is a survivor whose pain has been turned into art. Once he transforms his pain into art, he no longer has anything to struggle against.

However, a possibility remains for a greater achievement than passive survival. The Invisible Man hints at this at the end of the book when he talks about his feeling of social responsibility. He says, "Perhaps that's my greatest social crime, I've overstayed my hibernation, since there's a possibility that even an invisible man has a socially responsible role to play" (581). The Invisible Man's blues may touch a nerve among people whose outlook is not governed by the blues, the people in power who believe in the Western models of the universe—the Great Chain of Being and its successors: science, evolution, modern religions, etc. Oddly, our perception of the narrator's success in the fictional world is governed by Ellison's actual success. Invisible Man has been hugely popular, especially in the classroom. Since he is now part of the canon of twentieth

century American literature, those who read him must see him as a success. His voice has been heard.

Ultimately, the blues are a realistic and skeptical, yet paradoxically joyful, philosophy of life. They contrast with the Great Chain of Being's idealistic, optimistic philosophy, though ironically, both posit an essentially unchanging world: the blues conditions a person to avoid change because the world is bad, while the Great Chain of Being implies that the world is perfect as it is—the best of all possible worlds, as Voltaire's Pangloss says. The blues are not as all-encompassing, either; they do not reach the existential questions, leaving them to religion, nor do they meddle in science. The blues form a model of experience sharply focused on the world in the here and now. Some might call it a blinkered view, while others would say it is realistic and true. Either way, it consoles the angst caused by the problems, while at the same time leading to a passive apathy. In the blues, because actively seeking change would leave a person open to the kind of loss that the blues mentality conditions people to avoid, consolation and passivity are inextricably bound together.

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The Uncanny, Castration, and Sight as Perceived Remedy in Stanley Kubrick's *Eyes Wide Shut*, *A Clockwork Orange*, and *Full Metal Jacket*

| Wil Norton

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Developing the term from the writings of Ernst Jentsch, Freud's essay "Das Unheimliche" defines the uncanny as "that class of the frightening which leads back to what is known of old and long familiar," and describes the state as a fear-rendering or unsettling experience that results when the customary becomes distorted (1). Freud notes that the uncanny makes itself "powerfully felt" in aesthetic forms, and he uses Hoffman's literary work *Nachtstücken* to demonstrate both how the eerily lifelike dolls in the story channel the sensation of the "uncanny" as well as how Coppola's removal of the dolls' eyes reflects a male castration complex (1). According to Freud, what is visually frightening in the uncanny reflects a fear of blindness, and the terrifying force challenges the spectator's sight as well as the cognition whether what is seen is real or manifested in the mind. Furthermore, the uncanny unsettles the individual's confidence in sight, causing the spectator to question whether anything he or she has ever seen is accurate or whether everything has previously been a kind of "blindness." Freud explains, "a study of dreams, phantasies, and myths has taught . . . that anxiety about one's eyes, the fear of going blind, is often enough a substitute for the dread of being castrated," binding anxiety over blindness or sight with fear of castration (5).

Recently, modern scholars have continued to develop Freud's work on the uncanny by finding new situations that channel these experiences. Jo Collins and John Jervis explain that Freud's

“Das Unheimliche” “led a suitably subterranean existence for its first half century” and only returned to popularity in the 1970s where it became “widely read throughout the humanities and cultural studies” (1). They speculate that the uncanny became popular due to its “distinctively modern” characteristics as the “‘phantasmagoria’ of city life” allows for a transformation of the urban world into a “visual and spatial spectacle inhabited also by the shadowy hauntings of the fleeting and insubstantial” (1). Collins elaborates that the uncanny is an elusive experience that transcends “boundary-defining” aspects of thought (12). The uncanny is “experience . . . which is neither inside nor outside, self or other, or both at once . . . thus the very *registering* of these experiences as experiences can contribute to our regarding them as ‘uncanny’” (12). Hélène Cixous discusses the *Unheimliche* (the “uncanny”) as “not unreal: it is the ‘fictional reality’ and the vibration of reality” (93). She claims that the uncanny reminds individuals of death and castration, unsettling the “repression of death or of castration” that “betrays death (or of castration) everywhere” (94). Cixous reinforces Freud’s claim that the uncanny unsettles male sexuality by reminding them of the typically repressed castration fear, forcing others to either accept their castration or fight to regain their male sexuality.

One major form of typified masculine sexuality perpetuates in the pattern of phallogentric behavior that maintains male hegemony over women. In Laura Mulvey’s “Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema,” the “paradox of phallogentricism” is that it depends on the image of the castrated woman in order to “give meaning and order to the world” (133). To a patriarchal world demanding “meaning and order,” women must remain in their passive and submissive state denoted by their “castration,” and when women stray from expected behavior, men become uncomfortable in their masculine roles. In order for men to subjugate women as the “castrated female,” Mulvey explains:

Woman then stands in patriarchal culture as signifier for the male other, bound by a symbolic order in which man can

live out his phantasies and obsessions through linguistic command by imposing them on the silent image of woman still tied to her place as bearer of meaning, not maker of meaning. (134)

Mulvey claims that one predominant method of maintaining patriarchy is through scopophilia, the act of looking (the “gaze”) for sexual pleasure (135). Freud’s connection between male sight loss and castration finds its inverse in scopophilia, which becomes a tool males utilize to “prove” their virility and social dominance, wielding the gaze upon women as a patriarchy-maintaining technique and controlling women through objectification.

Stanley Kubrick often depicts sexuality and the objectification of women in his films. Known as a versatile director who created films in diverse genres such as *film noir*, science fiction, period pieces, war movies, suspense, and black comedy, Kubrick constantly returns to themes of masculinity and male sexual hegemony. From the boxer Davey Gordon’s peeping-tom scene in *Killer’s Kiss* to General Turgidson’s sexual relationship with his bikini-clad secretary in *Dr. Strangelove* to the French Army’s forcing a German girl to perform for them in *Paths of Glory*, women are treated as loci of ocular desire in the films. However, Kubrick confounds the code of sexuality in his films by introducing complications that fluster males’ confidence in their sexual and social dominance. Kubrick uses depictions of the female figure as the uncanny, resulting in fear and castration anxiety in males. In Kubrick’s *Eyes Wide Shut*, *A Clockwork Orange*, and *Full Metal Jacket*, male sexuality breaks down in a phallogentric culture. Further, Kubrick depicts women as the uncanny to unsettle males’ confidence in their sexuality, and as a result, men must utilize sight and the gaze to restore their concepts of masculine authority over women.

In *Eyes Wide Shut*, Kubrick demonstrates the primacy of sight for maintaining the status quo of male sexuality and the unsettling effects of the uncanny in the relationship between Dr. Bill Hartford and his wife, Alice. *Eyes Wide Shut* opens with the image of a nude

Alice posing in front of a mirror as she prepares to go to a party with Bill. Framed within a doorway, Alice becomes objectified in the spectator's gaze, establishing the film's themes of sight and sexuality. After the party, Bill and Alice discuss the nature of sexual desire as they jealously prod each other with questions about their respective seducers. "Tell me something," Alice asks Bill, eyes closed and speaking slowly, challenging Bill about male sexual desire, "Those two girls . . . at the party last night . . . did you by any chance, happen to fuck them?" Bill establishes the typified male response as he admits that though he would never cheat on his wife, he occasionally does desire other women. Alice then surprises her husband as she retells a sexual fantasy she had about a naval officer, telling him that if the man had wanted to "she would have given everything up" just for one night of sex. The camera reverses to portray Bill's shocked expression as he becomes unsettled in his own sexual confidence. Kubrick's cinematic and narrative contributions lend to creating a sense of the uncanny. One manifestation of the uncanny, as Elizabeth Bronfen mentions, is nighttime, which "shifts between the familiar and the unfamiliar" (51). Alice seems to become a part of this shifting familiarity as she sits framed by an open window that covers her in unnatural blue light, turning her into an eerie, same-but-different figure, and while she smokes marijuana, Alice's voice becomes slow and unnatural, sounding increasingly distant. The blue filter of the camera and the slow churning sounds of an orchestral soundtrack render discomfort, and as Alice speaks, Bill experiences the uncanny in his wife, and her otherworldly nature metaphorically castrates him as he doubts his own ideas of how men and women operate in desire. Rather than attempting to understand Alice's sexual desires, Bill decides that he must prove his own virility immediately.

The next night, Bill retaliatorily pursues his own sexual escapade. Interestingly, he appears to be only capable of gazing upon women in a bizarre, all-night sexual adventure where Bill steeps in scopophilic fantasies in an effort to reestablish his ideas

of sexual power over women. At a costume shop, he views the owner's daughter with two naked men from behind a glass wall, which creates a frame that distances Bill from the action and emphasizes his role as solely a sexual spectator. In the climax of the film, Bill infiltrates a masquerade-themed orgy that places all the women in a circle where they disrobe and present themselves to a large ring of male spectators, naked save for an identity-concealing mask. As Mary Ann Doane explains, the masquerade "confounds the masculine structure of the look," and turns the women into purely sexual beings that Bill can gaze upon without attaching pathos to the individuals (66). As the event begins, Kubrick leads a camera through the mansion, transporting the audience into Bill's sight as he watches the orgy. Here, Kubrick's portrayal of viewing demonstrates repeatedly how men reinforce the typified structure of masculinity when threatened by the uncanny. Bill's actions establish Kubrick's connection that, for men, sight is directly related to establishing sexuality.

In *A Clockwork Orange*, Kubrick manipulates the *mis-en-scene* to suggest that for the protagonist, Alex, sight is directly associated with virility. The first scene opens with a close up of Alex's face with one chillingly blue eye framed by mascara, foregrounding sight's importance in the film. Alex unblinkingly and confidently challenges the audience as he stares into the camera, demonstrating that he wields power over his world as well as the spectator's. The camera zooms out to reveal that Alex is in a milk bar where all the furniture is made in shapes of sexually submissive naked women. Throwing his leg on the female-shaped furniture and gazing at the viewer, Alex connects his gaze to his dominance over men and women. Sight and sexuality fuse again in the scene where Alex and his droogs laugh and enjoy the sight of another gang raping a girl on a stage in an abandoned playhouse. Later, when Alex and his droogs infiltrate a house to rape a woman, Alex cuts off the woman's clothing while singing "Singin' in the Rain," creating for his droogs a performance to be watched, emphasizing once again sight and

spectatorship as directly related to male sexuality.

Alex's experience with the uncanny occurs when he is imprisoned and undergoes the Ludovico technique, a form of aversion therapy that will cause Alex to become a "normal" member of society. In this process, Alex is forced to watch images of violence and sex while given a serum that will sicken him when he feels urges of violence and sexuality. For Alex, viewing a sort of *döppelgänger* gang creates a sense of the uncanny. As he is forced to watch a girl being raped by an altered double of his gang, Alex becomes disoriented and distressed, and through this process, he becomes blinded to his desires. Alex's sexuality only returns when doctors restore him, and he immediately envisions a scene where he and a naked woman are having sex, surrounded by spectators who applaud the intercourse. "I was cured, all right!" Alex narrates, and for him, returning to a state of performance-based sexuality becomes emblematic of his notions of virility. Alex uses sight as his sexual hegemonic tool, counteracting the uncanny images within aversion therapy that inverted his idea of masculine sexuality.

Finally, *Full Metal Jacket* continues Kubrick's yoking of the uncanny and sexuality, as the film follows the training of a U.S. Marine Corps and their experience in Vietnam. In boot camp, the soldiers undergo the abuse of Gunnery Sergeant Hartman, who not only trains them how to fight, but also indoctrinates the men in misogynist, phallogocentric language. Calling the recruits "girls," he questions their sexual orientation, threatening them with violence if they do not respond correctly. In marches, Hartman often shifts into call-and-response chants enforcing patterns of male sexuality, rebuilding their psyches with violent masculine sexuality; these traits become apparent when they arrive in Vietnam. Two out of the three women they meet in Vietnam are prostitutes, and the Marines conduct transactions while seated, collectively watching the prostitute "perform" in her negotiations. In Vietnam, sexuality is inseparable from group dynamics, where spectatorship implies male virility. Joker and Rafterman take photos of themselves with a

prostitute, objectifying the woman as well as symbolically using the camera as a method of the gaze. Later, a group of soldiers negotiate with a pimp and his prostitute, and when African-American Marine Eightball tries to take her and she refuses on the fact that he is too “bookoo,” or large, he stages a sexual act by showing her and the Marines his penis. For the Marines, aggressive masculinity has become so indoctrinated that war-struck Vietnam is also a place of rampant sexual performance.

The Marines’ sexual confidence throughout the film wavers as a Vietnamese sniper threatens to compromise their mission to march through a demolished city and simultaneously challenges the Marines’ sexual hegemony. As Lusthog Squad attempts to traverse the city, Eightball walks down a street. The camera angle cuts to the view of the sniper’s gun, turning the soldier into a mysterious, terrifying figure, and Kubrick forces the film spectator to passively watch the Marine walk into the sniper’s aim. The unseen sniper shoots Eightball through the rear, and the bullet penetrates through his phallus in a blatant act of castration. Evoking Freud’s concepts of blindness and castration anxiety, the soldiers fearfully and blindly retaliate with excess and futile gunfire, haphazardly shooting the cityscape while the unseen sniper, on the other side of the buildings, is completely safe. As the Marines cautiously enter the sniper’s edifice, they enter a hellish burning wasteland of a building that is terrifying, otherworldly, and uncanny in nature. As the killer turns around, Kubrick edits the scene so the soldier’s pigtailed swivel around in slow motion, dramatically revealing that the sniper is actually an armed girl. The girl contorts her face in terrifying anger as she shoots her machine gun at the soldiers. Joker fearfully drops his gun, and the girl, shooting at the Marines, demonstrates the momentary reversal of female sexual power and emphasizes Joker’s sudden castration anxiety. Kubrick uses the murderous young girl as an uncanny figure and films the reflection of fire in the girl’s eyes and face paired with her twirling pigtailed to emphasize her aggressive femininity. With her uncanny violence, the female sniper both

physically threatens to castrate the males and additionally reverses the status quo of masculine hegemony over females in demonstrated in earlier scenes.

Kubrick makes the Marines' connection between sight and sexual power clear as they overpower and kill the girl sniper. After Rafterman shoots her, the Marines form a circle around the girl. The camera points up from her position to the staring eyes of the Marines, who silently gaze upon her dying body. As she lies on the ground wheezing in pain, Rafterman gloats, "I fucking blew her away! Am I a life taker? Am I a heart breaker?" Rafterman cheers his first kill as if it were a sexual experience, seeking approval for his "first time." Kubrick orchestrates the Marines' dialogue as they discuss the dying girl in phallogentric language. "No more boom-boom for this baby-san," another soldier claims, and Animal Mother dismisses her, saying, "Fuck her. Let her rot." The castrating fears the Marines previously experience when challenged by the uncanny female sniper turn into hypersexual gloating, and by seeing and confronting the female sniper, the Marines restore confidence in their roles as subjugators of both Vietnam and the women inside the warzone.

Kubrick's ability to create situations that eerily stretch reality is a major characteristic of the director's style, and the uncanny becomes an effective way to break into characters' psychology. The director dismantles ideas of male sexuality in his films by demonstrating the castrating effect of the uncanny on men as well as their need to reassert confidence in their masculinity through the use of the gaze. Kubrick's *Eyes Wide Shut*, *A Clockwork Orange*, and *Full Metal Jacket* all demonstrate these notions, and the uncanny and blindness provide alternate states to "standard" existence that allow the audience to become detached observers of a sexual system where men struggle to assert dominance in both physical and sexual realms. Laura Mulvey warns that in many films, identification with the "erotic identity of the subject from the object on the screen" can lead to the spectator associating with the sexual identity of the

protagonists, and that typically, a male spectator might associate with the attempts of the male characters to find their sexuality through the gaze (136). However, Kubrick uses Freudian psychology of the uncanny, as well as the narrative and visual power of the cinema, to generate dissonance and discomfort with the male characters' misogynist use of sight, reminding the audience that concepts of phallocentrism are largely constructs of sexual hegemony that are volatile and constantly susceptible to disintegration.

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“Resplendent with Charms, Scant of Attractiveness”: Woman’s Power in Petrarch and Christina Rossetti

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Literature is engaged in a constant intertextuality with other literature. In a way, anything written—from the great works to the long-forgotten ones—is an answer to what has already been written. Christina Rossetti’s 1881 *Monna Innominata*—a fourteen-poem sequence of sonnets, explicitly mirroring the fourteen lines in one sonnet—employs a more intense intertextuality: she literally answers her illustrious antecedents. In her sequence, she quotes poems by Dante Alighieri and Francesco Petrarch and responds to them directly. She uses the same language, the same poetic structures, and the same references as her predecessors. More significantly, Rossetti chooses sonnets as her medium, the very form that the men whom she answers essentially invented, the form that Petrarch himself refined and perfected (Durling, Sadlon). The conventions of Petrarch’s poetry, from style to subject matter, have become so influential that they have lived on through the centuries as Petrarchanism. In Petrarch’s *Rime sparse*, as in the centuries of imitative poetry it spawned, woman is the passive object; furthermore, these poems ultimately prove to be more about the speaker than the beloved that they claim to so glorify. In Rossetti’s sonnet sequence, woman operates as the subject of the poem itself and as an agent of action. In this way, Rossetti reconfigures a centuries-old Petrarchanism through her reimagining of his own works in his own form, ultimately decentering the sonnet’s voice from the poet to the beloved.

Petrarchanism itself has held its share of adherents and challengers. One critic describes the poetic practice particularly well:

To praise, serve, and suffer for a mistress who is adored in language stolen from the church; to catalogue endlessly the physical, physiological, and moral effects of this devotion . . . and to do it all with melodious fluency and the rhetorical flamboyance of the ‘conceit.’ (Waswo 1)

Waswo’s description of Petrarchanism is an apt one; he, like Petrarch, emphasizes the worshipful devotion, the epic emotive power, of love, rather than its honesty, sincerity, or realism. Countless poets after Petrarch continue the tradition, writing of their own beloveds as perfect madonnas, ideal in every way. Laura—Petrarch’s poetic object of choice and the single woman to whom he wrote hundreds of poems—was almost definitely Laure de Noves, wife of a rich and powerful man. She once lived, once possessed real feelings and real intellect (Durling, Sadlon). She, like any other person, had faults, problems, and personal tragedies that tempered and sweetened her triumphs. However, the poetic Laura is forced into two-dimensional virtuousness and faultlessness; now, simply because of Petrarch’s reputation as a great poet, she will be forever remembered and never truly known. She is one of the *monna innominata*: one of Rossetti’s unnamed women.

The very premise of Rossetti’s sonnet sequence—a fourteen-poem “Sonnet of Sonnets,” answering for Petrarch’s Laura and Dante’s Beatrice—points to a new era. These two women, says Rossetti in her preface to the *Monna Innominata*, have “paid the exceptional penalty of exceptional honour, and have come down to us resplendent with charms, but (at least, to my apprehension) scant of attractiveness” (86). In the tradition of Petrarchanism, when to praise a woman is to endow her with ultimate and everlasting perfection, this idea of the poetic beloved being “scant of attractiveness” would be unlikely. Rossetti begins her revision of the poetic beloved even before the poems start: in her opening, she introduces “Laura, celebrated by a great . . . bard,” understood to be Petrarch—though she states Laura’s

name and merely implies Petrarch's (86). She thereby implicitly records Laura—generally only considered significant because of her relationship to the great poet—as the more significant historical figure. She further says of these women that “had such a lady spoken for herself, the portrait left us might have appeared more tender, if less dignified, than any drawn even by a devoted friend” (86). Here, she clearly shows her preference for the portrait rendered “more tender . . . [and] less dignified”: the portrait drawn by a lady with the ability to describe herself. Rossetti never questions Petrarch's motives; indeed, she recognizes him to be a “devoted friend” and ardent follower of his beloved. Yet still, Rossetti argues, Petrarch's fondest words about the beautiful Laura are not what she would have written for herself, and so she remains silenced.

The medium of expression for both Petrarch and Rossetti—the sonnet—proves perhaps the most intriguing insight of all. Petrarch perfected and more fully utilized the sonnet form than any before him (Durling 11); in writing all of his sonnets to one woman, he created a lasting convention carried on by hundreds of memorable descendents. By writing a series of sonnets, Rossetti places herself into the tradition—an intimidating place to be. As she answers Dante and Petrarch, her poems cannot help but continually engage Wyatt, Surrey, Milton, Shakespeare, Spenser, Wordsworth, Browning, and the countless others that make up the tradition.

As an example, in Petrarch's “Soleasi Nel Mio Cor,” the 294th poem in his *Rime sparse*, he uses very few lines to describe the actual woman in question:

She ruled in beauty o'er this heart of mine,
A noble lady in a humble home,
And now her time for heavenly bliss has come,
Tis I am mortal proved, and she divine. (1-4)

The four lines in which he discusses his beloved are certainly flattering, but it is important to note what we actually know of this woman: we know she “[rules] in beauty,” as “a noble lady”; she now resides in “heavenly bliss,” where she is “divine.” These

characteristics are mere archetypes of women, serving primarily as a contrast with the way Petrarch describes himself: “mortal.” The rest of the poem does not give depth to the two-dimensional view of Laura, since it describes only the speaker; he grieves that “ears are deaf / Save mine alone” (9-10) and laments that “naught remains to me save mournful breath” (11). Another translation just as quickly moves away from Laura into these lines: “My soul, despoiled and deprived of all its wealth . . . ought to break a stone with pity” (472). This prose rendering reaches a climax in the statement, “nothing is left to me but sighing” in a fate of suffering (472). Regardless of the translation, this example of Petrarch’s *Rime sparse*, which is itself highly representative of the rest of his body of work and of the work produced by Petrarchanism as a literary movement, concerns itself far more with the poet than with the beloved, using the beloved as no more than a trigger for the speaker’s own emotional turmoil.

While as Petrarch’s poem is about him and not his muse, Rossetti’s poems tend to be the opposite. The first line of Petrarch’s sonnet says that Laura “ruled in beauty o’er this heart of mine”; this line has a clear comparison in a line from Rossetti’s eighth poem in her sonnet sequence, “She vanquish’d him by wisdom of her wit” (10). The full sonnet is as follows:

‘I, if I perish, perish’—Esther spake:
 And bride of life or death she made her fair
 In all the lustre of her perfum’d hair
 And smiles that kindle longing but to slake.
 She put on pomp of loveliness, to take
 Her husband through his eyes at unaware;
 She spread abroad her beauty for a snare,
 Harmless as doves and subtle as a snake.
 She trapp’d him with one mesh of silken hair,
 She vanquish’d him by wisdom of her wit,
 And built her people’s house that it should stand:—
 If I might take my life so in my hand,
 And for my love to Love put up my prayer,

And for love's sake by Love be granted it!

The poem, a creative rendering of Esther's saving of her people, is in itself a proto-feminist treatise, given its treatment of a situation involving a historical woman: "If I perish, perish"—Esther spake" (1). Esther, with a literal voice as well as a strong metaphorical one from the very first line of this poem, takes her destiny into her own hands: "She put on pomp of loveliness, to take / Her husband through his eyes at unaware" (5-6). This poem bears a number of similarities to Petrarch's, as in each poem a woman rules over a man with her beauty. Petrarch describes beauty as the one attribute of a woman that could own him and rule over him: such a way of ruling does not prove any true power, but rather a certain cloying sway over the senses and nothing more. The power belonging to Rossetti's woman lies not only in her beauty but also in the "wisdom of her wit" (10). Rossetti's heroine "spread abroad her beauty for a snare, / Harmless as doves and subtle as a snake" (7-8); essentially, she—powerful and self-aware, though morally ambiguous in her manner of attaining power—is able to look upon her beauty as more than good fortune: it is her weapon. The convention holds that the beloved must be silent, passive, powerless. Esther is none of these: her "mesh of silken hair" (9), instead of harmlessly beguiling the man, "trap[s] . . . vanquish[es]" him: a trap set with her intellect, using beauty as a tool rather than a defining characteristic. Esther's attractiveness is not her definition and it is not passive: her wit and wisdom govern her beauty, not the other way around.

In a Petrarchan sonnet, the first eight lines, known as the octave, stand as a separate entity from the remaining six, the sestet. This eighth sonnet, then, is even more significant in its triumphantly feminine tone, as it represents the summation of the poetic movement of the octave. The ninth poem of the fourteen, then, is the "volta," or the turn—the line (or in this case, the poem) that turns into the sestet and into the concluding idea.

Thinking of you, and all that was, and all
That might have been and now can never be,

I feel your honoured excellence, and see
 Myself unworthy of the happier call:
 For woe is me who walk so apt to fall,
 So apt to shrink afraid, so apt to flee,
 Apt to lie down and die (ah, woe is me!)
 Faithless and hopeless turning to the wall.
 And yet not hopeless quite nor faithless quite
 Because not loveless; love may toil all night
 But take at morning; wrestle till the break
 Of day, but then wield power with God and man:—
 So take I heart of grace as best I can,
 Ready to spend and be spent for your sake. (91)

Coming from the triumph and power of *Esther*, Rossetti's ninth sonnet proves far more somber. This tone is set up by the poem's beginning: the Petrarchan epigraph in this poem is translated "the spirit most on fire with ardent virtues" (462). These words prove strangely at odds with Rossetti's poem, especially the first few lines: Rossetti's miserable dwelling upon "all / That might have been and now can never be," (1-2) her double exclamation of, "woe is me," (5, 7) her apprehension of herself as "apt to lie down and die" (7) all speak against a spirit on fire. While these lamentations lighten somewhat during the rest of the poem, the uncertainty and insecurity remain: the speaker is "[faithless and hopeless turning to the wall. / And yet not hopeless quite nor faithless quite," writes Rossetti in the eighth and ninth lines—the last line of the octave and the first of the sestet—effectively conveying a sense of confusion within the poem. Rossetti's use of enjambment, as in the phrases "all / That might have been" (1-2) and the later "break / Of day" (11-12) seem to indicate a spirit of brokenness, a faltering of the courage that is so clear in the previous poem. Joseph Phelan cites this poem as evidence that Rossetti "cannot become an 'Esther' . . . she finds herself forced, in the concluding 'sestet' of poems, to resign herself to a fruitless, unrequited love" (122). Furthermore, she seems to indicate a certain poignant disappointment in this role,

especially after the triumph that Esther represents. In many sonnets, the “volta” answers a question that has been asked, provides a solution to a posed problem, or simply comes to terms with what has been discussed in the octave. In Rossetti’s “volta” poem, however, she reverses the upswing that the sequence has been taking as she draws it downward into desolation—even as she renounces the customs and established conventions of romantic love by finding herself “unworthy of the happier call” (4) of love. Even the final image of hope, ending with the courage-rallying “So take I heart of grace as best I can, / Ready to spend and be spent for your sake” (13-14), is a hope that must come from being “spent” as a person, a line that conjures up death and depression, as in the Miltonic spending of light. Ultimately, in the larger poem’s sestet, beginning with this ninth poem as a representation of a sonnet’s ninth line, Rossetti begins the final stretch toward hopelessness.

This determination continues in sonnet ten’s “Time flies, hope flags, life plies a wearied wing” (1) and through sonnet twelve’s act of releasing the beloved “to that nobler grace, / That readier with than mine, that sweeter face” (4-5) of another lover, ending in the question of sonnet fourteen: “Youth and beauty gone, what doth remain?” (9) and its tragic answer, the final line of the final sonnet: “Silence of love that cannot sing again” (14). Indeed, this portrait of the female lover is as Rossetti predicts in her introduction: more tender, less dignified, than those drawn by the devoted friends of the past. The Petrarchan figure of the beloved—“resplendent with charms, but . . . scant of attractiveness”—receives a radical conversion from the unnamed woman into a subject: flawed and damaged, but real; making up in depth and power what she lacks in exalted perfection. Ultimately, it is this disparity in the construction of the poetic beloved that leads to the most profound and meaningful intertextuality: the conversation between Petrarch and Rossetti, spanning centuries and cultures and generations of poets, that examines the relationships between man and woman, writer and reader, lover and beloved.

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“The one unknown rare woman”: Augusta Webster’s “Circe” Giving Voice to Women in Victorian Poetry

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It is a truth universally acknowledged that popular Victorian poetry is for the most part dominated by male writers. The few female writers who broke into the male literary world either did so under male pseudonyms, such as the three Brontë sisters, or, if they published under their own names, were looked down upon by male litterateurs. Even later in the Victorian period, when female authors—rather, “authoresses”—were no longer stared at quite so incredulously by the rest of the literary world, they were, as early feminist critic Elizabeth Robins writes, “still held to be in no way so highly flattered as by hearing that men can hardly credit [their] book to be the work of a woman” (5). Robins goes on to write, “to say in print what she thinks is the last thing the woman-novelist or journalist is commonly so rash as to attempt. In print, even more than elsewhere (unless she is reckless), she must wear the aspect that shall have the best chance of pleasing her brothers” (6). Female authors of the time primarily did their best to imitate, not create. It was the prerogative of male authors to give “voice” to women, creating fantastical fictions of Victorian women that are well-known today: Tennyson’s despondent Mariana and his doomed Lady of Shalott and Rossetti’s sleeping prostitute, Jenny. Those male poets were praised for their imagination, while women’s writing was always believed to be born of personal experience and “a naïve attempt to extend her own little personality” (Robins 7). The fact that male authors rarely gave their women real voices—Tennyson’s Mariana speaks only to moan in despair, the Lady of Shalott sighs in

her boredom and cries in her doom, and Rossetti's Jenny is sleeping throughout the entire poem—is rarely mentioned nor even seen as important. The thoughts the writers impose on the women, as most clearly exemplified by Rossetti's speaker, who creates a whole life for the woman sleeping on his knee, say nothing real about them; instead, they only impress upon the woman what they believe a woman to be. Lesser-known poet Augusta Webster, however, writes as a woman about women. Though at first she, like many other female writers of the time, published under a male pseudonym, the poetry she is best known for was published under her own name. Many of her widely successful dramatic monologues, often compared to Robert Browning, were about women—not merely about any women but prostitutes and other “fallen” women, including those of Greek mythology. Many of her characters had never been written about before, or if they had, they were never given a voice (such as Rossetti's Jenny); in giving them a voice—often the only voice present in the poem and often a very sensual voice—and writing them as flesh-and-blood women, Webster began to undermine the strict social rules of Victorian femininity and silence, as well as make a powerful claim for female authorship.

Born in the late 1830s, Augusta Webster, née Davies, had a childhood that was very different from most girls of the time. Because her father was a naval officer, the Davies family moved up and down the British coast until she was 14, when her father took an inland post in Cambridgeshire. Webster read widely and learned several languages; in Cambridge she was known as “one of the brilliant daughters of Admiral Davies” (Watts-Dunton, qtd. in Bianchi). Even so, when she embarked upon a literary life with her first poetry collection, *Blanche Lisle*, published in 1860, she felt the need to publish under the male pseudonym “Cecil Home.” According to biographer and critic Kathleen Hickok, *Blanche Lisle* contained “mostly melancholy lyrics and narratives of bereavement, romantic misunderstanding and loss, humbled pride, and wronged innocence—poems of courtship and love gone wrong”—and was

“poetically undistinguished, [but] well received.” Webster was recognized in Cambridge as the author of the book in spite of the pseudonym. Webster probably felt compelled to publish under a male name due to the condescension with which female poets were treated by male reviewers, as well as wanting to avoid the autobiographical connections reviewers were sure to do their best to find, for as Robins ironically observes, the idea that a woman writer may *not* be writing from her own experience would mean that she had an imagination, “which is plainly preposterous” (8).

One of the foremost male poets of the time, with the glorious title of Poet Laureate, was Alfred, Lord Tennyson. Before he wrote his famous *In Memoriam*, which gained him the Laureateship, his poetic work was chiefly characterized by what are now known as “lady poems.” These were female-centered lyrics whose titles were taken “from the heroines of Shakespeare and Spenser, modern and classical authors, and [allowed to] evolve, as [Tennyson] put it, ‘like the camel, from my own consciousness’” (Peterson 25). Though these poems had women as central speakers, many of the women in his early “lady poems”—in particular Mariana—are more expressions of what men think women should be rather than real women in their own right. Mariana is trapped in her moated grange, either unable or unwilling to leave. She watches the day sink into night through the window of her decaying cottage, hoping that her beloved will come to her and rescue her, which of course he does not: “Then, said she, ‘I am very dreary, / He will not come,’ she said; / . . . ‘Oh God, that I were dead!’” (81-84). John Hughes describes her cottage in the moated grange as “a psychic prison, but one whose provenance in this reading of the poem derives from a patriarchal order whose constraints are inescapable” (110). He goes on to quote fellow Tennysonian critic Isobel Armstrong: “Hidden from [Mariana], but not from the poem, the barriers are man-made, cunningly constructed through the material fabric of the house she inhabits, the enclosed spaces in which she is confined. *It is the narrative voice which describes these spaces, not Mariana as speaker*” (110,

emphasis added). Mariana only speaks four lines throughout the poem, though they are often repeated, and those lines only express her sorrow and misery. Tennyson may be trying to express or explore “a pressing Victorian concern with the social roles and contributions of women,” as Linda Peterson argues (26), but his Mariana is put solidly indoors—a rather drooping Angel in the House, if you will—as all ideal Victorian women were. Peterson writes, “‘Mariana’ can be instructively read as . . . unrequited erotic desire,” adding to this that Mariana, through her lack of a husband, cannot fulfill her wifely duties in care of house and home and therefore lets it rot (29-30). Tennyson, then, can be said to be making a claim for a woman’s proper place as a wife, and the lack of a man ruins her prospects for a happy, useful life, sending her into floods of tears. Not, probably, what many Victorian women would have written and claimed about themselves, if given the proper chance.

Poet and artist Dante Gabriel Rossetti also wrote several poems containing women as central characters. One of these, and one of his most famous, is *Jenny*, a monologue spoken by a young man about the prostitute he has just visited and who is sleeping on his knee throughout the poem. This poem, as risqué as it was then, is yet another prime example of men speaking for women with the belief that they have the right to do so. Though the subject was daring and modern, the actual reviews were mixed but not outright hostile. One reviewer wrote that the poem was a “curious study . . . of a life which upon the whole, perhaps, is best left unrecorded” (Skelton, qtd. in Seigel 680)—pointing to the fact that even hearing about such a woman was too much for the men of the day, even if she herself said nothing. Given Victorian views on sex and prostitution, it is no surprise that Rossetti should have been so fearful of the poem’s reception; it was daring enough for him to write *about* a prostitute. It would have been too much to have her speak. Christine Sutphin takes a less kind view: “Not only is Jenny never given voice in the poem, she falls asleep in the middle of it, suggesting her ‘unconsciousness’ of the weighty moral dilemma

her customer is capable of discussing" ("Human Tigresses" 513). Jenny remains silent while the man muses upon what she must be thinking:

If of myself you think at all,
 What is the thought?
 . . . perhaps you're merely glad
 That I'm not drunk or ruffianly
 And let you rest upon my knee. (59-60, 64-66)

The speaker imposes his own beliefs upon the prostitute he has just visited, which boost his own ego while dragging Jenny down. He says that she sleeps "just as another woman sleeps" (177), which on the one hand reminds the readers that there is no real difference between Jenny and another woman, but on the other hand reminds the readers that there is no difference between a whore and a "decent" woman. All women seem to have the seeds of "fallenness" within them, and Jenny is not allowed to speak to protest her case. Critic Jules Paul Seigel writes that this poem cannot be a dramatic monologue, because Jenny is asleep and there is no listener: "she does not hear what he says (actually it makes little difference to the young man whether she hears)"; instead Seigel calls the poem a "romantic lyric," where the speaker talks "about himself by talking about an *object*" (685, emphasis added). In making Jenny an object rather than granting her any subjectivity, Rossetti's speaker strips much of the humanity from her.

Unlike her male predecessors, who used female personae as functions of their own views on what women should be, Webster used her female-centered dramatic monologues both to give women an authentic voice in literature and to critique the Victorian social order. Critic Glennis Byron writes:

The dramatic monologue would certainly appear to be a useful form for early women poets given the traditional gendering of the speaking subject as male and the tendency to associate women writers with the personal and self-representational. Speaking in the voice of a dramatised

'I' allows women to assume the position of the authoritative speaking subject while insisting that the voice is not to be identified as her own.

Webster began publishing poetry under her own name in 1864, but in publishing dramatic monologues—where clearly she herself could not have been the speaker—she could neatly sidestep the critics' condescending hunt for "personal experience." Even so, it has been noted by some critics that "while in men's monologues poet and speaker are sharply differentiated, in women's dramatic monologues the two blur together" (Byron). However, this might give the female poet some real authority over her subject, as Christine Sutphin writes in her article on Webster's famous and daring "A Castaway": "if Eulalie [the prostitute] is 'bad,' the woman who created her had to be above reproach to obtain a hearing. Webster used her own respectability to enable her disreputable persona to speak" ("Human Tigresses" 514). As a respectable woman and a known reformer, Webster had the right to speak of such matters, for the poem could be taken as her own dramatized views on prostitution. Unlike Rossetti's Jenny, Eulalie is not sleeping throughout the poem but actually speaking; she is not presented as a poor victim but "articulates a sense of agency and choice at the same time that she offers a devastating critique of the way in which *laissez-faire* economics commodifies women" (Sutphin, "Human Tigresses" 522). In having Eulalie be the only speaker in this poem, Webster allows her shocked Victorian readers no convenient way out; she forces them to make their own judgment upon this woman. Webster acts as a simple mouthpiece for a flesh-and-blood woman even if that woman exists only on the page. Eulalie speaks through her with a strong voice that Webster did not allow to be stifled by prospective critics' disapproval.

Prostitutes were not the only marginalized women that Webster gave voice to. In her monologue "Circe," Homer's evil sorceress not only defends her actions but also contributes to the discourse on female sexuality. The language she uses reveals her as a proud,

sensual woman, who makes no apologies for the beasts into which she has turned previous visitors to her island. Though she is trapped on an island, she is not entirely bound in one place; she spends most of her time outside looking towards the restless ocean instead of sitting inside weaving. She longs for change and is not satisfied with her seemingly charmed life:

I am too weary of this long bright calm;
 always the same blue sky, always the sea
 the same blue perfect likeness of the sky,
 one rose to match the other that has waned,
 to-morrow's dawn the twin of yesterday's;
 . . . Give me some change. (33-37, 48)

The storm that is approaching throughout the poem is, according to Sutphin, not an unprecedented Victorian “trope for growing sexual longing,” but “the fact that Circe herself uses it to describe her desire allows her a rare consciousness and acceptance of her own sexuality” (“Representation” 374). Moreover, this Circe springs from a woman’s mind instead of a man’s; as with prostitutes and views on prostitution, most literary and artistic views on female sexuality came from and were criticized by men and not women. Webster, however, wrote directly from Circe’s point of view instead of acting as an outside observer, and even though Circe is a figure from myth and therefore not a Victorian female, Webster constructed a view of female desire and sexuality that put “female desire at the center of revised myths that criticized conventional heterosexuality, not only in an imagined ‘classical period’ but in her own” (Sutphin, “Representation” 380). Circe wants a man—presumably Odysseus—who will meet her in her passion and be her equal. She is not shy about this desire nor about her knowledge of her own beauty: “Why am I so fair,” she asks, “And marvellously minded, and with sight / Which flashes suddenly on hidden things / . . . But for the sake of him whom fate will send / One day to be my master utterly?” (98-100, 110-11). There must be some man somewhere who is good enough for her. Sutphin argues that in implying that this perfect

man is Odysseus and in suggesting that the coming storm will bring him to Circe, Webster “undermine[s] a powerful myth of heterosexual romance: that lovers are all in all to each other, that once love is found, they need nothing else” (“Representation” 383). After all, Odysseus will sail away, leaving Circe alone again. Webster thus may be warning women against “centering one’s being on the desire for an ideal lover” (Sutphin, “Representation” 383-84). Yet the knowledge that readers have of the end of Circe and Odysseus’ relationship does not make the poem, or Circe herself, any less powerful. Circe is a woman of passions, and even if she will be left alone again, her strength will endure. It is a hopeful image, perhaps, that romantic love is not everything and that women are stronger than they may believe. It is hard to imagine Webster’s Circe as beaten down by loneliness, for in the poem she rails against it with every word. In creating such a powerful woman, Webster not only vindicates the Circe of Homeric myth but creates a space for female sexual passion all under the guise of mythology. Sutphin argues that Webster might be making the point that Victorian women of her day may have “lost a great deal of the power to express desire and assert [their] own view of the world” (“Representation” 389), but “Circe” can just as easily be read as a beacon of hope and a call to arms. Women today, Webster seems to argue, have just as much right to express their desires as women of antiquity and should not allow men to take it away.

In creating women who speak with voices as powerful as those of any man, Webster helped to unravel many of the bastions of Victorian society. “A Castaway” proposed the unwelcome idea that prostitutes were human and clever enough to “reflect on both individual responsibility and on the society that both ostracizes and depends on [them],” as well as pointing out “spurious constructions of female sexuality and morality” (Sutphin, “Human Tigresses” 527). A prostitute had never been “heard” to speak in literature before, and certainly not so bluntly and unapologetically. The title character in “Circe” speaks just as frankly about female desire and sexuality,

which was hardly ever discussed in Victorian society—and certainly not by women, or at least not by good women. But Webster created a strong, powerful woman who had no shame about her desires. In fact, Circe’s desires only make her stronger. In speaking through other women as a female poet, Webster forced her critics not to “conflate author and speaker” (Sutphin, “Human Tigresses” 513), as men were wont to do when faced with female authors. In so doing, then, she made the claim that women not only had true imagination and could actually create not only out of their own experiences but that they had the right to do so. Women had the right to speak about themselves far more than any men did; women, and Webster specifically, wrote about real women in the guises of fictional figures, while poets such as Tennyson and Rossetti wrote about fictional figures in the guises of real women. The women in Webster’s poetry, though lost with the advent of the *fin de siècle* and the age of the aesthetes, speak with all the change-bringing power of the glorious storm Circe longs for. In speaking so boldly, they undo the strict Victorian rules of silence and patience that so characterized women of that time. Webster helped give those women voice, and other women have followed in her footsteps and never stopped speaking.

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The Chutnification of History: Salman Rushdie's *Midnight's Children*

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At the exact stroke of midnight, August 15th, 1947, Saleem Sinai was born—a twin of the newly independent nation of India. Thus begins Salman Rushdie's sprawling and richly complex novel *Midnight's Children*, celebrated as his greatest work and winner of the Booker Prize in 1981. At the beginning of the novel, Saleem, the novel's narrator, unabashedly proclaims that he has been “mysteriously handcuffed to history, [his] destinies indissolubly chained to those of [his] country” (3). From that moment on, the novel follows its convoluted path through the twinned histories of Saleem's family and India itself. Yet Saleem's narrative often veers widely from the commonly accepted order of events, causes, and results that make up India's pre- and post-Independence years. The mistakes, elisions, exaggerations, and solipsism that litter the book, however, are not simply the result of a foolishly unreliable narrator. Not only are these alterations and additions intentional on Saleem's part, but they are intentional on Rushdie's part as well. In his book of essays entitled *Imaginary Homelands*, Rushdie states that he made Saleem “suspect in his narration” through “mistakes of a fallible memory compounded by quirks of character and of circumstance” to show the inevitable problems in any historical discourse (10). Throughout the novel, Rushdie consistently works to deconstruct not only the established method of historical discourse but also to question the very notion of what *History*, in its broadest sense, even means. In its place, he offers up Saleem's narrative—expansive, meandering, and at times fantastic—to attempt a new way of writing

one's own history, one which allows for the infinite variety of experiences, lives, cultures, and perspectives that make up our world.

For the past several centuries, the Western historical discourse has been concerned with creating and maintaining grand, overarching narratives that give an entire nation a single, unifying identity. Tim Gauthier argues that the Western historical academy has been obsessed with these “all-encompassing, totalizing, and teleological constructions” because they “imbued our lives with transcendent metanarratives of eventual human emancipation” (2). The long political dominance of the West over the rest of the world has ensured its philosophical and *ideological* dominance, which manifests itself in the commonly accepted views of the general sweep of history. History created by the West—in its most idealized form—is a linear and progressive narrative of colonization and civilization, expansion and profit. It was engineered in the Enlightenment to explicate and justify the dominance of certain peoples and the subjugation of others. At its worst, the overarching metanarrative of world history is, as Michael Dash claims, nothing more than a “fantasy peculiar to the Western imagination in its pursuit of a discourse that legitimizes its power and condemns other cultures to the periphery” (qtd. in Gikandi 7). In a similar way, postcolonial nations are now trying to establish their identities by addressing the past, yet they still must use the Western discourse in order to do so. Rushdie contends, then, that the majority of narratives written about India's own post-Independence history have been intended to construct “India, the new myth—a collective fiction in which anything was possible, a fable rivaled only by the two other mighty fantasies: money and God” (150). *Midnight's Children* is an effort to envision a history of India which does not simply replicate the “received history, the story of the nation as made by middle-class nationalist politicians, some version of which citizens are taught in schools and everyone knows” (ten Kortenaar 31). That national story, since it must fit within the strictures of Western historical discourse in order to be legitimate, has a “well-defined

narrative form: established origins, turning points and climaxes, and an agreed chronology of significant events” (ten Kortenaar 31). Anything written outside of these particular strictures gets branded as “fiction” or “myth,” thus removing all legitimacy or potential truth.

Yet with the increasing body of work exploring the postcolonial experience, both in literary and historical fields, these assumptions about the nature of history are being called into question. A growing willingness of the historical academy to face the horrors of the past, as well as its own role in perpetuating them, has revealed just how falsely optimistic the metanarratives are. The dream that society on a whole has been constantly improving now proves itself to be faulty, as this progress has always been based on subjugation and inequality. For the colonized subject, that version of history created a “feeling of inevitability or irreversibility [that] often contributed to an overwhelming sense of pessimism among those” people who held no power in society (Gauthier 134). The metanarrative of world history had no legitimate place for the citizens of the colonized peoples; in those stories they were either savages, slaves, or simply forgotten. Rushdie claims that such “progressive” histories are “fundamentally untrue and repressive—untrue in that it does not accurately speak for the multitudes, repressive in its attempt to eradicate those differences that undermine its wholeness” (Gauthier 136). According to Rushdie then, these progressivist histories must necessarily include a “cleansed reading of the past that simply washes away whatever does not accord with the imagined national narrative,” thus negating the supposed historical value of such readings (Gauthier 144). These purified stories of a nation’s history are simply incomplete if they ignore either the trauma of the past or the lingering inequality in society.

Furthermore, the rise of postmodern thought in the late twentieth century has worked to completely destabilize and decenter these essentialized myths about national and cultural history. Postmodern theorists argue that absolute truth can never be found,

even through supposedly objective historical research. Michael Reder states, “the whole notion of truth and reality is relative and dialogic—not absolute and monologic, to use Bakhtin’s term. It is the job of the artist—of the writer of ‘fiction’—to bring these ‘truths’ to light” (239). Reder goes on to argue, “beyond the cold, vacant ‘truth’ preserved by the pure logic in philosophy and mathematics, truth is no more than memory. Memory mimics the artistic process” (240). Rushdie, a dedicated advocate for plurality of meaning, echoes these statements. In *Imaginary Homelands*, he says, “History is always ambiguous. Facts are hard to establish, and capable of being given many meanings. Reality is built on our prejudices, misconceptions and ignorance as well as on our perceptiveness and knowledge” (25). In addition to his exploration of the impossibility of absolute truth, Rushdie embraces the postmodern concept of the hybrid. According to Meenu Gupta, Rushdie “privileges a postmodern space or third principle that blends both sides of binaries: east/west, secular/religious, real/fantasy, and colonizer/colonized and foregrounds hybridity over clarity and open-endedness over closure. In this the work is adaptable, creative, fluid and imaginative” (32). Just like Rushdie himself, Saleem is a perfect representation of the hybrid man, born with “multiple allegiances and identities” (Gupta 32). He is a character of mixed backgrounds—the son of a colonial named William Methwold and a poor Indian woman, yet raised as a son by the middle-class Sinais.

Working from the position that both progressivist and essentialist historical discourses are limiting and incomplete, Rushdie writes Saleem’s story. He emphasizes and exploits the weaknesses of traditional historical narratives, often embracing the postmodern ideal of the indeterminacy of truth. Rushdie’s intention, however, is not to completely *negate* the typical Western historical discourse but rather to *decenter* it. Reder states that Rushdie “wants to open up the notion of one ‘Truth,’ showing the many versions of possible truths” (234). Throughout *Midnight’s Children*, Saleem alters the facts of India’s history, mixing up dates or changing around the reasons

and consequences in order to fit the specific story he wants to tell. While some of these errors could be attributed to Rushdie's mistake or Saleem's ignorance, many appear to be quite intentional. An example of this is when he mentions the assassination of Mahatma Gandhi. As he reveals to the audience a few pages later, however, he had (perhaps intentionally?) mixed up the chronology of how the assassination fit with the events in his life. Yet he claims that in "his" India, "Gandhi will continue to die at the wrong time" (230). Saleem wonders at first, "Does one error invalidate the entire fabric?" (230). He later decides, however, that the error is simply a part of his narrative, indicative of the true nature of memory. He explains: "Memory's truth, because memory has its own special kind. It selects, eliminates, alters, exaggerates, minimizes, glorifies, and vilifies also; but in the end it creates its own reality, its heterogeneous but usually coherent version of events" (292).

This postmodern destabilization of traditional historical discourse is also explored in the focus of Saleem's narrative. As he proclaims on the first page of the novel, his story tells of the life of India, not just his own. Yet, the story is extremely egocentric, constantly connecting Saleem to the major events of the post-Independence years. Saleem's self-centered view of his own importance to India is clearly represented through his role as the most powerful of the "Midnight Children," the 581 children born during the midnight hour of August 15, 1947, all of whom have fantastic powers. These Midnight Children symbolize a new, hopeful generation of Indians. Yet Saleem sees his own version of the story to be more important than the external history, such as when he narrates the moment of Independence of India:

for the moment, I shall turn away from these generalized, macrocosmic notions to concentrate on a more private ritual . . . I shall avert my eyes from the violence in Bengal and the long pacifying walk of Mahatma Gandhi. Selfish? Narrow minded? Well, perhaps; but excusably so, in my opinion. After all, one is not born every day. (150)

Furthermore, though Saleem asks the readers how “the career of a single individual [can] be said to impinge on the fate of a nation,” he declares that he is indissolubly linked to the fate of India (330). He claims he is “linked to history both literally and metaphorically, both actively and passively” (330). Reder states that Rushdie suggests that individual history—where the individual privileges his own experiences and interpretations—can be an “alternative historiography for the recapturing of Indian history” (228). The individualized nature of this historical discourse “avoids creating a version of history that homogenizes as much as it defines” (Reder 228). This opens up space for experiences that do not fit within that progressive or pure image of a nation. Ultimately, Saleem’s individualized perspective suggests a new way of seeing history, one that embraces the inevitable influence of a narrator on a story.

Though the novel is expansive and varied enough to qualify for several different genres—fantasy, magical realism, historical novel, autobiography, political allegory, and so on—perhaps the categorization that best illuminates the novel’s relationship to history is “historiographical metafiction.” Metafiction is a particularly postmodern approach to literature which discusses the idea of writing fiction within the fiction itself. Historiographical metafiction works, then, are novels that feature “conscious self-reflexivity and concern with history. . . . [They] are ‘novels that are intensely self-reflexive but that also re-introduce historical context into metafiction and problematize the entire question of historical knowledge’” (Gupta 16). Not only does Saleem alter the facts of the story or focus on himself—actions which go entirely against the traditional sort of historical discourse—but he frequently remarks on the very nature of history and historical discourse, questioning his role as a narrator. *Midnight’s Children* contains a frame story in which Saleem is able to step outside the story and comment on the process of writing the narrative. Nearing the end of his thirtieth year, Saleem owns a pickle factory in Bombay that makes famous chutneys.

He writes his story in the factory office at night and narrates it to a factory worker named Padma. Since the entire novel is being narrated to a specific person, Saleem frequently makes comments about what he includes or leaves out of the story and why, justifying himself to Padma. Meenu Gupta states:

thus it can be said that historiographic metafiction is closely related to the problematic and intricate relationship between real-seeming versions of the past and reality.

Through self-reflexive techniques, it stirs us to question our own credibility of interpretation of the history. . . .

Historiographic metafiction emphasizes that all past events are those that are *chosen to be narrated*. (Gupta 16-17)

Padma's presence even affects Saleem's ability to tell his story. He feels off-balance when she leaves for a while, stating, "I feel cracks widening down the length of my body; because suddenly I am alone, without my necessary ear, and it isn't enough" (207). This need for an audience once again emphasizes the narratological nature of any historical discourse. Without an audience, Saleem's story has no meaning.

Saleem's metafictional asides extend a step beyond Padma to the readers themselves, since he is attempting to write a grand narrative of post-Independence India. He says, "I reach the end of my long-winded autobiography; in words and pickles, I have immortalized my memories, although distortions are inevitable in both methods. We must live, I'm afraid, with the shadows of imperfection" (642). Thus, once again, Saleem deliberately emphasizes the flexibility of memory and narrative. According to Gauthier:

these metafictional asides, as Saleem well knows, simultaneously question the veracity of any historical reconstruction, thereby investing Saleem's own narrative with as much probability as that of the dominant discourse. All Saleem wants is for his listeners to consider and not discount the conceivability of the story he tells, for in doing so he makes us question those narratives we have simply

come to accept unconditionally as official and historical Truth. (134)

Ultimately, the historiographical metafiction as displayed in *Midnight's Children* allows Rushdie to openly address the issues plaguing historical (and literary) discourse today: how should it be written, what should it include, and, most importantly, who gets to write it? Saleem's story, though full of conflicting statements, asides, tangent storylines, and self-referential comments, offers a glimpse of a new type historical narrative, free from old limitations or expectations. His history is expansive yet intensely personal, one of the millions of possible versions of India.

At the end of the novel, Rushdie's postmodern, hybrid, and imaginative form of historical discourse is summed up in a single image. Saleem equates the project he had undertaken—to tell the story of his and India's lives, with all of the density, variety, and plurality he so loves about the nation—to that of the pickling process of creating chutney. According to Reder, "History, like making chutney, involves both preserving and combining a finite number of ingredients from an almost indefinite number of choices. It also involves the altering of form, changing yet preserving" (242). Saleem, when setting out to tell his tale, echoes this feeling of the infinity of possibilities: "And there are so many stories to tell, too many, such an excess of intertwined lives events miracles places rumours, so dense a commingling of the improbably and the mundane!" (4). Yet through this new type of historical discourse, he can attempt to express the whole of the story. Saleem claims, "Every pickle jar (you will forgive me if I become florid for a moment) contains, therefore, the most exalted of possibilities: the feasibility of the chutnification of history; the grand hope of the pickling of time! . . . in words and pickles, I have immortalized my memories" (642). This "chutnification of history" represents a way of writing history that purposefully celebrates diversity, imperfections, and the contributions of imagination. Thus, "to pickle is to give immortality . . . and above all . . . to give it shape and form—that is to say,

meaning” (644). Gauthier says that Saleem is driven by a feeling that “what makes India truly India is slowly being eradicated by reductionist/essentialist/communalist tendencies with the country,” particularly as it emerged during the time of Emergency under Indira Gandhi. Saleem seems to hope that his story will give an alternate history of India, which, despite the difficult bits, will in the end represent it more fully and honestly than the types of histories its leaders may think it needs. He says, “One day, perhaps, the world may taste the pickles of history. They may be too strong for some palates, their smell may be overpowering, tears may rise to eyes; I hope nevertheless that it will be possible to say of them that they possess the authentic taste of truth . . . that they are, despite everything, acts of love” (644).

Midnight's Children does not offer any simple answers; even the symbol of the chutney is extremely complex and varying. Instead, it suggests a new way to view the past, one that turns from the essentializing and exclusive history of colonization and progress to an always-evolving, ever-expanding narrative of the nation. In the novel, Saleem hopes that by “recreating the nation in his own image, he may be empowered to propose some alternate paths for the nation’s future. By taking control of the narrative, by investing himself with narratorial agency, Saleem becomes the subject rather than the object of history” (Gauthier 155). This opens up incredible possibilities for all postcolonial subjects, then, not just for Indians. The chutnification of history allows those who never found themselves within the traditional historical discourse to write their own stories, to embrace their diversity or reconcile themselves to the suffering or joy of the past. Furthermore, a celebration of hybridity and diversity in history will ultimately open a place for the growing number of migrant or transnational people, such as Rushdie himself, who do not fit into expected national or cultural categories. The constant revision, additions, and emendations that are perfectly acceptable in this type of historical discourse will ultimately keep history alive, because it will be flexible enough to change as the world changes.

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The Angel in the Allegory and the Monster in the Middle: Feminist Theory in Edmund Spenser's *The Faerie Queene*

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Edmund Spenser's *The Faerie Queene*, conventionally read as an allegorical text, moves beyond its figurative nature to reveal consummate, patriarchal archetypes ascribed to women. The divinely depicted, irreproachable Una and the egregiously characterized, malevolent Duessa seemingly represent two androcentric, polarized feminine paradigms. According to Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar's *The Madwoman in the Attic*, these two classifications are the angel-woman and the monster. According to Gilbert and Gubar, "for every glowing portrait of submissive women enshrined in domesticity, there exists an equally important negative image that embodies the sacrilegious fiendishness of what William Blake called the 'Female Will'" (819). The angel, attributed with "virtues of modesty, gracefulness, purity, delicacy, civility, compliancy, reticence, chastity, affability, politeness" is placed in the life of the male to guide and act as a spiritual refuge (816). Una, the traveling companion of the Red Crosse Knight, is conventionally viewed as such a woman through her roles of heavenly teacher and virtuous lover. Critics, however, commonly define Duessa, the manipulative seductress, as the monster-woman. This monster-woman is touted as evil for "assertiveness, aggressiveness—all characteristics of a male life of 'significant action'" (819). Gilbert and Gubar's assertion that there exist two types of female in every literary work also leads them to assert that perhaps the angel "can manipulate; she can scheme; she can plot—stories as well as strategies" (818). Gilbert and Gubar clearly assert that the angel-woman and monster are singular,

distinct creatures. However, Una is given seemingly “masculine” characteristics, while Duessa is capable of embracing the angel as a means to an end. Spenser’s Una and Duessa do not defy the idea that there is an angel and monster. Instead, the two central female characters represent the idea that the angel-woman and the monster possess both flaws and attributes. Una’s assertiveness with the Red Crosse Knight and Duessa’s manipulation of the angelic ideal dispel the notion that the angel and monster are two separate entities. Instead, the two opposing patriarchal projections unite in the women of Book I of *The Faerie Queene*.

The angel-woman projection is commonly associated with appearance. Anne Paolucci asserts, “The immediate visual impact is, for Spenser, the most important single indicator of character and constitutes the central motif in his delineation of women” (22). Paolucci’s argument strengthens the idea that Spenser’s male views determine what characteristics are present in a woman who is portrayed as a figure of divinity. Many of the attributes ascribed to Una by Spenser are those that may be found in the angel-woman. In a clear example of angel-like features, Spenser describes Una, writing,

A lovely Ladie rode him faire beside,
 Upon a lowly Asse more white then snow,
 Yet she much whiter, but the same did hide
 Under a vele, that wimpled was full low,
 And over all a blacke stole she did throw” (I.1.28-32).

Joan Fitzpatrick argues that Una’s physicality is “associated with whiteness and purity, which is another link with Elizabeth the ‘Virgin Queen’” (14). While Una’s “much whiter” appearance can be associated with Elizabeth, Spenser writes of her chastity first, suggesting that her virginity is paramount to her other characteristics. Spenser attributes Una with purity, one of the most common idiosyncrasies of the angel-woman.

As Spenser characterizes Una’s virginal countenance foremost, he places particular emphasis on the method in which she outwardly,

actively represents her purity. Una is clad in clothing that illustrates her personal modesty. Her face is under “a vele, that wimpled was full low” (I.1.31). The inclusion of the veil in Una’s visage seemingly denotes her modesty and her attempt to cover her beauty. In “Chaste but Not Silent: Reading and Female Piety,” Caroline McManus asserts that Una “strives to keep her body inviolate and hidden (especially her face), and yet reveal enough of her truth and beauty” (228). By modestly hiding her beauty through the veil, Una reveals the patriarchal hegemonic ideal of a woman. The concealment of her beauty is a potential means of power. In denying herself the influence of her beauty, Una rejects a portion of herself to conform to the ideal. In Spenser’s letter to Raleigh, he states, “The generall end therefore of all the booke is to fashion a gentleman or noble person in vertuous and gentle discipline” (716). Una’s description is a method in which Spenser displays the correct method of “fashioning” a “noble” woman. The praise of Una’s chastity and the inclusion of her modesty make her the ideal angel-woman of Spenser’s time, a model that he is trying to “fashion” for other women.

McManus’s assertion that Una must conceal her beauty and truth stems from *Canto 6*. The canto is the most overt representation of how Una not only physically appears as the angel-woman but also how she performs the role of the angel. Gilbert and Gubar state that, based on conduct books, the female “should become her husband’s holy refuge from blood and sweat that inevitably accompanies a ‘life of significant action,’ as well as, in her ‘contemplative purity,’ a living memento of the otherness of the divine” (816). While not directed at a husband, Una’s actions in *Canto 6* reflect her angelic quality of being a “holy refuge” and a humanly divine figure. After the Red Crosse Knight departs from Una because of her alleged, treasonous sexuality, the heroine comes to a place inhabited by a “troupe of Faunes and Satyres” that saves her from being raped by the Sarazin, Sansloy (I.6.61-72). After her rescue, Una becomes a goddess figure for the troupe, a position she

does not accept willingly.

During which time her gentle wit she plyes,
 To teach them truth, which worshipt her in vaine,
 And made her th' Image of Idolatryes;
 But when their bootlesse zeal she did restraine
 From her own worship, they her Asse would worship
 fayn (I.6.167-71).

Catherine G. Canino asserts that this passage corroborates her ideas that the creatures become “docile and respectful” in the presence of Una (120). Canino simplistically states that Una’s very presence transforms the creatures. In saying so, Canino detracts from Una’s action during her time in the wood. Una’s mere presence does not calm the creatures, and while her beauty does place them in a state of awe, the most significant aspect of Una’s stay is her angelic performance while attempting “To teach them truth” (I.6.168). Spenser’s *The Faerie Queene* pre-dates the idea of the angel-woman, but the idealized angel is the domesticated maternal figure found in the home. Though Una is not specifically located inside of the domestic sphere, her typographical maternity is demonstrated in her attempt at instruction. Sarah Plant states, “Spenser draws upon traditional imagery in the absence of an established English Protestant tradition and conflates this image with the developing one of women’s role as spiritual helpmate and educator of the young” (52). Plant asserts that Una’s instruction is a result of the absence of the church and an emerging feminine role of spiritual guidance, a function present in the characterization of the angel-woman. Though the creatures’ “bootlesse zeal” prevents them from accepting her message, Una continues to perform her angelic duty. Una’s performance is one that characterizes her both maternally and divinely as she is at once nurturing the troupe and enlightening them concerning the identity of the true deity.

Critics commonly consider Duessa, a woman with dual identities, to be Una’s monstrous opposite. When talking to the archaic spirit Night, Duessa speaks, “I that do seeme not I, Duessa

am” (I.5.231). Though she utilizes a form similar to Una when first introduced, Duessa’s true appearance reveals her nature that is significantly divergent from Una’s own:

That her misshaped parts did them appall
 A loathly, wrinckled hag, ill favoured, old
 Whose secret filth good manners biddeth not be told.
 Her craftie head was altogether bald,
 And as in hate of honorable eld,
 Was overgrowne with scurfe and filthy scald;
 Her teeth out of her rotten gummes were feld,
 And her sowre breath adhominably smeld;
 Her dried dugs, like bladders lacking wind,
 Hong downe, and filthy matter from them weld;
 Her wrizled skin as rough, as maple rind,
 So scabby was, that would have loathd all womankind.
 (I.8.412-23)

Critics compare Duessa’s false form to that of Una’s natural physicality. Joan Fitzpatrick writes, “Duessa is the opposite of Una whose outward beauty is a manifestation of inner goodness” (21). Fitzpatrick compares Duessa’s “seeming” fair appearance to Una’s patriarchal projected image. In doing so, Fitzpatrick does not equally compare the two women, as she does not examine the two real forms against one another. Thus, the comparison does not truly illustrate how vilely Duessa is characterized. Seemingly the monster, Duessa is stripped of both her outer beauty and her traditionally feminine maternity.

While appearing in her real image, Duessa is wrinkled with scabby skin, a bald head, and no teeth. Sheila Cavanagh describes Duessa, “As the villain with a thousand faces, Duessa magnifies the dangers often perceived as inherent within the female sex” (329). By creating a woman so hideous that even all womankind would hate her, Spenser detracts from Duessa’s power. The witch’s greatest asset is her ability to manipulate those around her, and without her false angelic appearance she is incapable of doing so. In disposing of

her beauty, Spenser displays a projection of male fear upon women. Through Duessa, beauty acts as a method through which women are capable of subverting men. Spenser betrays a patriarchal fear of the power of beauty and a man's inability to control that power.

Not only does Spenser strip any form of self-authority from Duessa, but he also portrays her as barely a woman at all. Spenser takes away what should be her inherently feminine ability to mother children, a trait found and praised predominately in the angel. Fradubio, the man now trapped as a tree, describes one of Duessa's most monstrous features:

A filthy foule old woman I did vew;
That ever to have toucht her, I did deadly rew.
Her neather partes misshapen, monstrous,
Were hidd in water, that I could not see,
But they did seeme more foule and hideous,

Then woman's shape man would beleeve to bee. (I.2.359-64)

Fradubio's revelation about the woman in whose company he had been illustrates how Spenser desexualizes Duessa to create a more masculine figure. Gilbert and Gubar utilize Duessa and the Queen of the House of Pride, Lucifera, when they state, "The secret, shameful ugliness of both is closely associated with their hidden genitals—this is, with their femaleness" (820). Spenser's distortion of Duessa's "neather partes" and his description of her "dried duggs" not only contributes to her hideous façade but also implies an inability to mother. The "dried duggs" are an overt commentary on her inability to lactate and sustain life. In characterizing her this way, Duessa becomes an understandable choice for *The Faerie Queene's* monstrous woman.

Una's beautiful physicality and maternal performance compared with Duessa's manipulation of men and hideous exterior allow the simplistic labels of angel-woman and monster to be applied. These labels, however, do not account for deviations in character nor do they explain the influence of patriarchal ideals on women. Una, while truly beautiful and pure, does contradict her position as the

angel when she affirms her authority as both an intelligent woman and assertive female. Duessa, who exerts manipulative power and overt sexuality, attempts to conform to the boundaries placed upon women much like the angel.

McManus concludes, “The role of spiritual guide thus seems to have been embraced enthusiastically by many early modern Englishwomen, perhaps because this was one area in which they could openly excel” (226). Una is a peculiar spiritual guide for the Red Crosse Knight, as she is at once meant to be his submissive betrothed and a divine influence. Contrary to her traditional label as the angel, Una does not conceal her ideas or her superior intelligence:

“Yea but,” quoth she, “the perill of this place
 I better wot then you, though now too late
 To wish you backe returne with foule disgrace,
 Yet wisdomes warnes, whilst foot is in the gate,
 To stay the stepe, ere forced to retrate.
 This is the wandring wood, this Errours den,
 A monster vile, whom God and man does hate:
 Therefore I read beware.” (I.1.109-16)

Una’s second warning serves as a means of asserting her ideas despite the Red Crosse Knight’s disagreement. In response to her first plea, her partner replies, “‘Ah Ladie,’ said he, ‘shame were to revoke / The forward footing for an hidden shade’” (I.1.106-07). Despite his disapproval, Una stands firm in her belief. Though acting for her betrothed’s own good, Una still breaks free of her angelic bonds that call for submission to his will. Gilbert and Gubar state, “Assertiveness, aggressiveness—all characteristics of a male life of ‘significant action’—are ‘monstrous’ in women precisely because ‘unfeminine’ and therefore unsuited to a gentle of ‘contemplative purity’” (819). Una takes “significant action” when she not only warns the Red Crosse Knight but also explains to him that she is perhaps more intelligent. Una declares that she is “better wot” than her companion. In doing so, she reveals her own ability to

manipulate when stating that her mind is perhaps more keen than the man whom she accompanies. Una's angelic form is not wholly pure; instead, her character has a monster which "resides within" herself (Gilbert and Gubar 820).

Gilbert and Gubar's statement that assertive behavior creates a monster characterizes Duessa as a malevolent female. However, the authors describe the plight of the angel-woman, stating, "The aesthetic cult of ladylike fragility and delicate beauty—no doubt associated with the moral cult of the angel-woman—obliged 'genteel' women to 'kill' themselves (as Lederer observed) into art objects" (817). The angel is required to manipulate her exterior to please male dominated society. Duessa, whose true form is hideous, manipulates her identity to travel alongside men, "A goodly lady clad in scarlot red, / Purpled with gold and pearle of rich assy, / And like a Persian mitre on her hed / She wore, with crownes and owches garnished" (I.2.110-13). Duessa has "killed" herself into an art object, the very action that the angel is known to do. Though Spenser draws overt connections to the biblical whore of Babylon in order to contrast her with Una, Duessa is nonetheless conforming to the hegemonic ideal of a female. Spenser begins the description of Duessa by stating that she has a "faire companion," much like the beginning of Una's own description. Through the personal choice to distort her own natural person, Duessa is able to perform the angel-woman by killing herself into one, a task well known to many of these idealized women.

Both Una and Duessa possess distinctive qualities that create the inclination of critics to label each quickly in the simplistic categories of angel-woman and monster. Una, with her beauty and virtue, corresponds with Gilbert and Gubar's characterization of the angel-woman. Duessa, customarily seen as Una opposite, is hideous in her true form and through her actions, appears as the logical choice for the monstrous figure in Spenser's *The Faerie Queene*. The labels of angel-woman and monster, however, are not incompatible. Instead, both Una and Duessa capture aspects of both angel-woman

and monster. Through assertive behavior and her own intelligence, Una attempts to garner control over a life-threatening situation. Duessa, by manipulating herself to conform, “kills” her true form to adopt a patriarchal aesthetic. By simply applying these labels, the complexities of Una and Duessa are bypassed, and the complexities of women are pushed aside into categories that create simple stereotypes.

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“A Most Recalcitrant Patriot”: Oscar Wilde’s Irish Vision of Socialism

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Oscar Wilde is remembered for his witty aphorisms, his society plays, his role in the aesthetic movement, and his affinity for fashion. What he is less known for is political commentary. Yet the human condition in Victorian England is the theme of Wilde’s lengthy essay, “The Soul of Man under Socialism.” First printed in the *Fortnightly Review* in February 1891, “The Soul of Man” appears to be more concerned with aestheticism and art than politics, as Wilde concludes, “Socialism itself will be of value simply because it will lead to Individualism” (CW 1080). Fulfillment of individual artistic purpose in a socialist society, he argues, can only occur when humans no longer have to perform mindless manual work; that, he decides, “must be done by machinery” (1089). Despite Wilde’s focus on aestheticism in the latter half of the essay, “The Soul of Man” begins by tackling more serious social concerns, namely the rampant poverty and starvation in Britain that has resulted from industrialization and the economic depression of the late nineteenth century. It is these issues that socialism will resolve, Wilde claims, although he does not have any suggestions as to how the transition from the present social order to this idealized future society is to be achieved.

Critics have traditionally read “The Soul of Man” as merely the naïve musings of a London dandy or as a contribution to the Utopian discourse about “post-capitalist society that characterized

the *fin de siècle*" (Beaumont 14). In so doing, however, they neglect a key factor in Wilde's politics: his Irish heritage. Wilde was not, as Declan Kiberd presents him, a "militant Irish republican" (qtd. in Fhlathúin 341); he was, rather, a self-described "most recalcitrant patriot" (CL 371). But given that Wilde's mother was a nationalist poet and that Wilde himself sympathized with Home Rule for Ireland, supported Charles Stewart Parnell, and frequently derided the English in his writing, it is impossible not to see an underlying connection between the text of "The Soul of Man" and the influences of Wilde's upbringing in Ireland. Drawing upon the essay itself as well as biographical materials, personal correspondence, and criticism, this essay will demonstrate how Wilde's Irish heritage informed his socialist politics in "The Soul of Man."

It is evident from his biographies and writings that one of the most significant influences in many aspects of Wilde's life was his mother. Lady Jane Francesca Wilde, who went by the *nom de plume* Speranza, was a vocal proponent of the Irish nationalist cause. She published poetry in support of Home Rule and the Young Ireland Movement, once declaring, "I express the soul of a great nation. Nothing less would content me, who am the acknowledged voice in poetry of all the people of Ireland" (Ellman 9). With motherly and nationalist pride, Speranza claimed to have reared Oscar to be "a Hero perhaps and President of the future Irish Republic" (21), an ambition which could have had no little impact on her son, who witnessed public adulation of his mother. Máire Ní Fhlathúin cautions that readers cannot view Speranza's ambitions for her son as "a vital element of the picture of Wilde himself" (341). Conversely, Jane Yolen argues, "If one remembers that his mother was a politicized Irish nationalist prosecuted for publishing seditious materials, Oscar's political background becomes foreground. . . . Lady Wilde's influence on her son was enormous" (245). Wilde clearly respected his mother; as Patrick Horan points out, he ranked her intellectually with Elizabeth Barrett Browning, one of the most

respected Victorian female intellectuals, in his essay “De Profundis” (115). Further, in his youth, he demonstrated a desire to emulate her by being a political critic and attempting to write “political” sonnets (50).

Speranza’s influence on her son is evident in the similarities between her writing and several of the ideas he discusses in “The Soul of Man.” According to Richard Ellmann, Speranza claimed “she loved ‘to make a sensation’” (8). Thus, it is not surprising that sensationalism characterizes her nationalist poetry. For example, in “The Famine Year,” she describes the suffering of the poor at the hands of the English during the Great Irish Famine:

There’s a proud array of soldiers—what do they round your door? They guard our masters’ granaries from the thin hands of the poor. Pale mothers, wherefore weeping?—Would to God that we were dead—Our children swoon before us, and we cannot give them bread. (1.5-8)

Her description of the “pale mothers” watching their children starve to death plays on readers’ emotions and incites them to action.

Wilde echoes the idea of a dramatic appeal to human emotion in “The Soul of Man” when he writes:

The majority of people spoil their lives by an unhealthy and exaggerated altruism—are forced, indeed, so to spoil them. They find themselves surrounded by hideous poverty, by hideous ugliness, by hideous starvation. It is inevitable that they should be strongly moved by all this. The emotions of man are stirred more quickly than man’s intelligence . . . it is much more easy to have sympathy with suffering than it is to have sympathy with thought. Accordingly, with admirable, though misdirected intentions, they very seriously and very sentimentally set themselves to the task of remedying the evils that they see. (CW 1079)

Wilde puts a negative spin on the altruism that results from pity, but his sentiments about the effectiveness of appealing to emotions sound as though they could have been written by Speranza herself;

her influence is apparent.

Owen Dudley Edwards observes that in “The Famine Year,” Speranza was also “assailing suffering in her own country, and charging her own caste and their English cousins with its responsibility” (53). The wealthy English and Irish landowners exported food from Ireland during the famine for profit, hence Speranza’s accusatory lines: “Fainting forms, hunger stricken, what see you in the offing? / Stately ships to bear our food away, amid the stranger’s scoffing” (1.3-4). In a similar fashion, Wilde blames the institution of private property and the unequal distribution of wealth, which are primarily enjoyed by his class and the aristocracy, with the “horrible evils” (i.e. poverty, hunger, homelessness) that exist in their society (CW 1080-81).

In another of her poems, “The Brothers,” Speranza declares that death is preferable to veritable enslavement at the hands of the English aristocracy who control her native country: “Those pale lips yet implore us, from their graves, / To strive for our birthright as God’s creatures, / Or die, if we can but live as slaves” (10.6-8). Wilde uses a similar sentiment to argue against charity in “The Soul of Man” when he writes that the demoralizing effect of altruism creates a sort of psychological enslavement for the recipients:

Charity they feel to be a ridiculously inadequate mode of partial restitution, or a sentimental dole, usually accompanied by some impertinent attempt on the part of the sentimentalist to tyrannise over their private lives. . . . As for the virtuous poor, one can pity them, of course, but one cannot possibly admire them. They have made private terms with the enemy, and sold their birthright for very bad pottage. (CW 1081)

Here Wilde suggests that it would be better for the poor to resist the charity that sustains them than to accept it and be under obligation to those who provide it. Although the subject matter is her son’s, once again, Speranza’s nationalist influence helps to shape his philosophy.

Much as she influenced him directly, Wilde's mother helped mold his philosophies indirectly as well. An avid socialite, Speranza hosted weekly salons in Wilde's childhood home at 1 Merrion Square in Dublin that were frequented by famous literary and political figures. Her guests encompassed a diverse array of artistically innovative thinkers such as George Bernard Shaw, Aubrey de Vere, John Hogan, George Petrie, Henry O'Neill, William Rowan Hamilton, and John Butler Yeats, father of William Butler Yeats (Coakley 28, 36; Edwards 57). Although a child, Wilde was permitted to interact with the guests, so he was exposed to a wide variety of opinions on political, scientific, artistic, cultural, and philosophical topics. As an adult, Horan finds, Wilde often restated Speranza's guests' ideas in his own fashion (27). According to Horan and Matthew Beaumont, "The Soul of Man under Socialism" was born from Wilde's fascination with Shaw's theories of socialism and his desire to try his hand at socialist writing (27, 15).

Through Speranza, Wilde became very familiar with Irish nationalism and even got to meet members of the Young Ireland movement in his home. These social revolutionaries, particularly the Young Ireland poets, had a significant impact on Wilde's political development, as a lecture he gave on Irish poetry in San Francisco (5 April 1882) clearly proves. In his speech, Wilde criticized poets who lacked nationalist pride and praised the writers of the 1848 rebellion: "As regards these men of '48, I look on their work with peculiar reverence and love, for I was indeed trained by my mother to love and reverence them, as a Catholic child is the Saints of the Calendar" (qtd. in O'Neill 30). He went on to list among his heroes William Smith O'Brien, John Mitchel, John Savage, Charles Gavan Duffy, Thomas Davis, and James Clarence Mangan.

The influence of the revolutionaries in Wilde's youth remains evident in his adulthood. Although "a most recalcitrant patriot" himself, Wilde consistently supported Home Rule for Ireland, Irish nationalists, and revolutionaries in general. When his compatriot

George Bernard Shaw circulated a petition in the late 1880s calling for a reprieve for the Irish-American anarchists involved in Chicago's Haymarket Riots, Wilde was the only man of letters in London who signed the document (Nolan 104). Revolutionaries, or "agitators," he argues, are fundamental members of a society:

What is said by great employers of labour against agitators is unquestionably true. Agitators are a set of interfering, meddling people, who come down to some perfectly contented class of the community and sow the seeds of discontent amongst them. That is the reason why agitators are so absolutely necessary. Without them, in our incomplete state, there would be no advance towards civilisation. (CW 1082)

By writing "The Soul of Man," Wilde places himself among the ranks of agitators who are leading humanity towards civilization but in a less direct way than the Irish nationalists he admired as a boy.

One agitator in particular drew significant support from Wilde. According to Davis Coakley, when Anglo-Irish tensions increased during the 1880s, Wilde openly backed Charles Stewart Parnell, a Protestant landowner and leader of the Home Rule party (2). Living in London at the time, Wilde attended meetings of the Parnell Commission, an investigation into numerous criminal charges against the Irish parliamentarian and his party (Ellmann 289). Wilde also owned the tremendous volumes which comprised the Commission's report (289). Parnell was eventually vindicated in this case, but he was shortly thereafter named as a correspondent in the divorce proceedings of Captain O'Shea and his wife, Kitty, with whom Parnell had a long-term affair (290). The case received significant newspaper coverage and Parnell died in shame in 1891, but not before his party was divided and many of his political accomplishments negated. The incident elicited further sympathy from Wilde, who lashes out at the media in "The Soul of Man":

The harm is done by the serious, thoughtful, earnest journalists, who solemnly, as they are doing at present, will

drag before the eyes of the public some incident in the private life of a great statesman, of a man who is a leader of political thought as he is a creator of political force, and invite the public to discuss the incident, to exercise authority in the matter, to give their views . . . in fact, to make them selves ridiculous, offensive, and harmful. The private lives of men and women should not be told to the public. The public have nothing to do with them at all. (CW 1095)

Wilde's unwavering support for Irish nationalists such as Parnell is a testament to the tremendous influence they had on his politics.

In "Mr. Froude's Blue-Book," a review published in the *Pall Mall Gazette* (13 April 1889), Wilde writes of England, "If in the last century she tried to govern Ireland with an insolence that was intensified by race-hatred and religious prejudice, she has sought to rule her in this century with a stupidity that is aggravated by good intentions" (CW 476). He may have lived in England for the latter part of his life, but Wilde had no problem being critical of the empire that was guilty of "seven centuries of injustice" in his homeland (qtd. in McCormack 84). Such harsh words are not surprising when one takes into consideration the atmosphere of nineteenth century Dublin and post-Famine rural Ireland in which Wilde was raised.

In this context, Richard Pine argues that speaking of "hunger and poverty and a 'ceaseless quest for property' as the background to Wilde's *Soul of Man under Socialism*, without looking at the Irish Famine and Land War for a possible cause of preoccupation with land and survival, is like discussing Wordsworth without recourse to nature" (5). Of course there was poverty, hunger, and homelessness in London in 1891 and that is ostensibly Wilde's subject matter; however, through a post-colonial lens, portions of "The Soul of Man" can clearly be read as a scathing critique of English landlords who were overcharging their impoverished tenants in Ireland:

What are called criminals nowadays are not criminals at all. Starvation, and not sin, is the parent of modern crime.

That indeed is the reason why our criminals are, as a class, so absolutely uninteresting from any psychological point of view. They are not marvellous Macbeths and terrible Vautrins. They are merely what ordinary respectable, commonplace people would be if they had not got enough to eat. (CW 1088)

By sarcastically decriminalizing the behavior of the impoverished—people Wilde observed as a child in the rural communities of western Ireland and those he witnesses around him in London—he places blame for the state of society on those who have the power to improve conditions but do not: the English aristocracy. Similarly, Wilde asserts that it is from the collective force of the poor that humanity prospers materially while the poor person himself is unimportant: “He is merely the infinitesimal atom of a force that, so far from regarding him, crushes him: indeed, prefers him crushed, as in that case he is far more obedient” (CW 1080). It does not take much imagination to figure out what the “force” is that prefers “crushed” and “more obedient” workers. Superficial charitable efforts, Wilde argues, do not solve the problem but treat the symptoms while contributing to the perpetuation of the underlying issues. He proposes that organized social reform is necessary, or changes of a more revolutionary nature are inevitable:

Why should they [the poor] be grateful for the crumbs that fall from the rich man’s table? They should be seated at the board, and are beginning to know it. As for being discontented, a man who would not be discontented with such surroundings and such a low mode of life would be a perfect brute. Disobedience, in the eyes of any one who has read history, is man’s original virtue. It is through disobedience that progress has been made, through disobedience and through rebellion. . . . Under the new conditions Individualism will be far freer, far finer, and far more intensified than it is now. I am not talking of the great imaginatively realised Individualism of such poets as I have

mentioned, but of the great actual Individualism latent and potential in mankind generally . . . The true perfection of man lies, not in what man has, but in what man is.

(CW 1081, 1033)

It is not just for himself that Wilde desires the “new conditions.” In a passage reminiscent of fellow Irishman Jonathan Swift’s treatise “A Modest Proposal,” Wilde observes, “the majority of people . . . find themselves surrounded by hideous poverty, by hideous ugliness, by hideous starvation” and by “people living in fetid dens and fetid rags, and bringing up unhealthy, hunger-pinched children in the midst of impossible and absolutely repulsive surroundings” (CW 1079-80). When these unfortunates do find work, “being always on the brink of sheer starvation,” they “are compelled to do the work of beasts of burden, to do work that is quite uncongenial to them, and to which they are forced by the peremptory, unreasonable, degrading Tyranny of want” (CW 1080). Although Wilde does not use the word “alienation,” Aaron Noland argues, “the impact of all this on the individual, as Wilde described it, merits the term” (102). Like the Irish, poor people were also disenfranchised in Victorian society.

In “The Soul of Man under Socialism,” Wilde strayed from his more successful milieu of art criticism, poetry, and drama to try his hand at political nonfiction. It almost seems as though he were trying to be someone else, to emulate one of the social critics he looked up to, such as John Ruskin, Walter Pater, or Thomas Carlyle, and the result was not one of his best works. In Wilde’s terms, he donned a mask that did not suit him. Regardless of the quality of social reform philosophies it contains, “The Soul of Man” is valuable for its illustration of the extent to which Wilde’s Irish heritage played a role in his politics.

1. Wilde described himself as “a most recalcitrant patriot” in a letter dated 1888 to James Nicol Dunn, managing editor of the *Scots Observer*, when he declined to be a contributor for the newspaper, known for its anti-Home Rule position.

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The Transformation of Snow White into the Evil Stepmother in Anne Sexton's "Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs"

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In *The Second Sex*, Simone de Beauvoir defines the Eternal Feminine as unattainable standards of femininity created by the patriarchal world. When a woman cannot measure up to these impossible standards, it is the woman, and not the standard, that is at fault. These standards appear in binaries: "The saintly mother has for correlative the cruel stepmother, the angelic young girl has the perverse virgin" (Beauvoir 254). These binaries, as seen in fairy tales, are further defined by Caroline King Barnard Hall: "Bad women are witches, ugly and scheming, wielding over other women and men alike . . . some kind of power. Good women are quiet, domestic, and submissive; they take care of children and/or home while their men go out and 'work'" (109). These limiting gender stereotypes are perhaps best illustrated in the Grimm brothers' tale "Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs." This tale presents the reader with the "angelic young girl" in the character of Snow White: innocent, pure of heart, virginal, kind, and naïve (Beauvoir 254). Furthermore, in Hall's terms, Snow White is a "good woman," as she quietly and submissively cares for the house of the dwarves while they work in the mines. She is the victim of her stepmother's jealousy, the jealousy of a "bad woman," but eventually, with the help of the dwarves, she arrives at her destiny and is rescued by the handsome prince to live happily ever after.

In Anne Sexton's version of this tale, her poem "Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs," she twists the details of this story, creating

an alternative narrative in which Snow White is less than exemplary and the dwarves are less than altruistic. As Hall points out, Sexton “deflates characters’ pretensions, undercuts most expectations held by readers of Grimm, and rebuilds in their place her own view of things” (118). Snow White is no longer the heroine who, after many trials, achieves her dream, but rather an empty-headed virgin who is beautiful and vain and little more. The dwarves, in comparison, become authoritatively oppressive as they take in Snow White, making her their housekeeper and ultimately viewing her as a possession. With these twists, Sexton criticizes the values of patriarchal society by revealing the falsity of the Eternal Feminine through the exaggeration and blurring of the qualities of the angelic virgin and evil stepmother. She brings attention to the subjugation of women while at the same time revealing the role women have played in perpetuating the stereotypes of patriarchal society.

Sexton’s revised version of “Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs” exposes the underlying patriarchal message of feminine passivity by creating a satiric feminist revision of the story. Traditional fairy tales, such as those circulated by the Grimm brothers, were written to reinforce bourgeoisie ideals by presenting a model of acceptable behavior to children. Many of these acceptable behaviors are defined by the sex of the character, and in this way, as Marcia K. Lieberman indicates, they “are almost constantly predictable” (195). According to Lieberman, when it comes to the “sexes of the rescuer and the person in danger,” very few fairy tales stray from the story in which “men come along to rescue women who are in danger of death or are enslaved, imprisoned, abused, or plunged into an enchanted sleep which resembles death” (195). In short, the heroic prince rescues the damsel in distress.

Because of this unchanging and constant gender role division, young girls are taught that their ideal role in society is that of inaction and self-sacrifice; they are the helpless damsels awaiting the rescue of handsome princes, a plot that unfailingly results in marriage. Catherine Lappas describes this idea more dramatically:

“Like virginity, the passive female is expectant, that is, she awaits for seemingly a whole life for the prince to give her life” (113). In this manner, the woman does not truly exist without the man. According to Karen E. Rowe, the “tales which glorify passivity, dependency, and self-sacrifice as a heroine’s cardinal virtues,” as the fairy tales of the Grimm brothers do, “suggest that culture’s very survival depends upon a woman’s acceptance of roles which relegate her to motherhood and domesticity” (210). Sexton satirizes the fairy tale of Snow White in order to reveal this patriarchal message conveyed by the Grimm brothers’ fairy tale.

Sexton begins “Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs” with her sardonic description of a virgin, which is a “lovely number” to anyone (2). She continues her description with a surprising simile: “cheeks as fragile as cigarette paper” (3). Cigarette paper, while indeed fragile, also brings to mind the ideas of smoke and black lungs, not a very pure or virginal image; she thus suggests that virgins are not as pure and innocent as fairy tales have depicted them. Sexton continues with some more conventional descriptions of feminine beauty: porcelain arms and legs, wine colored lips, and china blue eyes. However, her blue eyes are also “rolling . . . / open and shut” (6-7). The virgin is like a doll in appearance but also doll-like in her lack of thought or will as her eyes roll open and closed. Sexton further questions the virtue associated with virginity with the final line of her first stanza: “She is as white as a bonefish” (13). Bonefish in fact are not white; indeed, they are a silvery, grey color. With this comparison, Sexton moves the virgin into a grey area in which she is neither evil nor innocent, but rather a mixture of the two. She is no longer compatible with the patriarchal society’s definition of the Eternal Feminine.¹

Sexton’s revision of the relationship between Snow White and her vain stepmother is introduced in the next stanza. The stepmother is not evil at this point in the tale; her only apparent fault is vanity. Despite the great beauty of both of these characters, vanity appears to be a characteristic of the stepmother only, as

she consults her mirror for confirmation of her beauty that, when confirmed, has the effect of “pride pump[ing] in her like poison” (33). Meanwhile, Snow White, as the pure virgin, is still without flaws. She is also without motherly (or stepmotherly) attention; the stepmother, obviously lacking in maternal feelings, has thought Snow White “no more important / than a dust mouse under the bed” (38-39). This lack of attention from her stepmother, however, is probably a blessing, as lack of attention from a stepmother is preferred over the attention of a stepmother that, as far as traditional fairy tales go, is always evil or fatal, a point that Sexton’s rendition of this fairytale reinforces.

Along with vanity and a lack of maternal feeling, consumption, in various forms, appears to be another characteristic of the stepmother. When Snow White’s beauty surpasses that of her stepmother, the stepmother’s jealousy is awakened and her age is made visible to her own eyes: “But now the queen saw brown spots on her hand / and four whiskers over her lip” (40-41). The stepmother calls for Snow White’s death and her heart so that she can “salt it and eat it” (45); this consumption of Snow White’s heart is also a consumption of her youth and beauty as the stepmother strives to be the fairest in the land and fight ageing. Therefore, the stepmother is not only consumed by age (“eaten . . . by age”) and by vanity and jealousy, but she also desires the consumption of Snow White’s youth, beauty, and heart (19). Furthermore, like the disease consumption, these consuming forces lead to the stepmother’s eventual death.

Escaping death, thanks to the sympathetic hunter, Snow White enters into a world of masculine temptation and danger that eventually leads her to a traditionally submissive and isolated role in the house of the dwarves. As Snow White walks through the forest, she encounters sexual temptation in the form of the “hungry wolf, / his tongue lolling out like a worm” (54-55), the “lewdly” (56) calling birds, and the “snakes hung down in loops, / each a noose for her sweet white neck” (58-59), each attempting to entrap this

“lovely virgin” (14). While the element of fatal danger is present in the hunger of the wolf and the noose of the snakes, sexual danger is also prominent. The lolling of the wolf’s tongue and the lewdness of the birds are salacious, while the presence of the snake symbolizes temptation and corruption as seen in the Garden of Eden. However, these snakes are tempting and corrupting a *virgin*, and so their threat takes on a sexual connotation. Snow White must protect her virginity from these temptations by repressing her sexual desires in order to maintain her angelic status and to avoid becoming the “perverse virgin” (Beauvoir 254).

The arrival of the dwarves maintains the masculine danger of the woods, but, unlike the sexuality of the wolf, birds, and snakes, the dwarves present a different masculine danger of authority leading to submission. When the dwarves discover the sleeping Snow White in their house, Sexton provides an uncharacteristic description of these diminutive men; she refers to them as “hot dogs” (69). This phallic symbol associates the dwarves with the patriarchal society, which allows them to have the authority to subjugate Snow White, in all her empty-headed, virginal glory. The dwarves “wattled like small czars” (72), representing absolute authority or even tyranny. They ask Snow White “to stay and keep house” and warn her, “While we are away in the mines / during the day, you must not / open the door” (78, 84). In this way, the dwarves have put Snow White into a woman’s traditional role of housekeeping drudgery. They have also attempted to effectively isolate her by warning her away from visitors, although this proves to be unsuccessful. They have no compunction in taking control of Snow White’s life in her time of need.

As Snow White’s passivity allows the dwarves to take control of her life, it becomes obvious that Sexton has provided the reader a Snow White devoid of common sense and intelligence, whose sole driving influence is vanity. As the stepmother’s jealousy and pride causes her to obsess over and attempt the murder of Snow White, new facets of the personality of Snow White become apparent. This

innocent virgin's vanity is slowly revealed as she falls into the traps of the stepmother, buying "a bit of lacing" (92) and then a large "eight-inch" "comb" (109, 108), her vanity overcoming her common sense as she continues to risk her life. Sexton further depicts Snow White's superficiality with the description that she "was as full of life as soda pop," (100) which expresses activity, but an activity that lacks substance or drive. Snow White is also described as "Orphan Annie" and a "dumb bunny" (113, 117), showing that she is naïve and innocent but also a piece of fluff, lacking in intelligence.

Snow White's superficiality is reinforced as she is described both as a "plucked daisy" and a "gold piece" while she is lying unconscious on the floor (97, 128). In this way, Sexton reminds the reader of not only Snow White's but any virgin's importance in the patriarchal society: her beauty and her commercial value. In society, the virgin is an important commodity, her usefulness great in the forming of alliances between families. A virgin's beauty serves to increase her commercial value and is therefore a valuable asset as well. As Lieberman points out, this focus on the commodification of beauty is characteristic of the fairy tale genre in general, which depicts "beauty as a girl's most valuable asset, perhaps her only valuable asset," allowing her to be "chosen" by the prince without having "to show pluck, resourcefulness, or wit" (188). With this role in society, the virgin, and Snow White, does not need intelligence or even personality. She is fulfilling all expectations by being merely virginal and beautiful. As Beauvoir points out, "Thus the supreme necessity for woman is to charm a masculine heart; intrepid and adventurous though they may be, it is the recompense to which all heroines aspire; and most often no quality is asked of them other than their beauty" (291). Nothing more than beauty is required or, in some cases, desired of Snow White.

This idea of a woman's commodification is further demonstrated in the second to last stanza. Snow White, too pure to be buried in the "black ground" (130), is instead put on display "so that all who passed by / could peek in upon her beauty" (133-34); again, her

beauty is her value and what draws the attention of the prince. She is like a piece of art put on display, first by the dwarves and then later desired by the prince for this purpose. The idea of a woman as a possession, such as work of art, is also reinforced by Sexton in this stanza: "The dwarfs took pity upon him / and gave him the glass Snow White / . . . / to keep in his far-off castle" (139-42). Snow White is the possession of the dwarves, an object of exchange that can be given to another at their discretion. This idea directly connects to Sexton's description of the dwarves as "czars" (72); they have absolute control over Snow White as they decide upon her body's display and her existence as a gift to a traveling prince.

Snow White does not attempt to be anything more than a beautiful object; she has not matured or learned anything through her trials. According to Wolfgang Mieder, the Grimm brothers' story of Snow White is a "tale of narcissism, beauty, jealousy, competition, temptation and eventually maturation" (95). All of these descriptions are true of Sexton's poem except the latter; no character, least of all Snow White, matures by the end of the poem. As far as intelligence and common sense goes, she is still that thoughtless doll she was at the beginning of the tale. In fact, a man has rescued her from every trial: the hunter from the original death sentence, the dwarves from the disguised stepmother's trickery, and the prince (or rather the clumsiness of his men) from the final trickery of the apple. Snow White appears satisfied to remain the beautiful, vacuous virgin that she has always been.

The innocence expected of a virginal beauty, however, seems to have been corrupted as Sexton's Snow White sits upon her throne, "rolling her china-blue doll eyes open and shut / and sometimes referring to her mirror" as she observes the death of her stepmother (162-63). While poetically just, the stepmother's death at the wedding feast is torturous, especially as she is made to dance at the wedding feast by "red-hot iron shoes" (150), transforming her death into a form of entertainment. Throughout this macabre spectacle, Snow White does nothing but refer to her mirror, as was the habit of her

stepmother. Carol Leventen conveys this development nicely: “her future is her (step)mother’s past” (144). Snow White is no longer the angelic virgin, but rather a perversely vain and empty-headed girl who is following in the footsteps of her stepmother.

In Beauvoir’s “myth of woman,” stereotypical versions of femininity become the true identity for women as far as society is concerned. While fairy tales provide these absolute types of woman, such as the “virgin [of] pure spirit” and the “cruel stepmother,” Sexton has confused the lines between these archetypes (Beauvoir 254). She has shown the cyclical nature of these stereotypes by blurring the myth of woman through her creation of an innocent virgin who, through her own lack of intellect and common sense, is destined to become the cruel stepmother; her purity is being stained throughout the tale. Snow White has become a princess, is to become queen, and in so doing she will, following this same trajectory, become the jealously vain queen her stepmother was. Pride will, or perhaps already has begun to, “pump in her like poison” (33) and she will eventually become as consumed by vanity and jealousy as her stepmother. The cycle is being repeated as Snow White is too dumb to realize it or even to care.

Sexton ends this poem by applying this vanity not merely to the stepmother and Snow White but to all women as Snow White refers to “her mirror / as women do” (163-64). “As women do” is the final line of the poem and because of this position receives emphasis. Ellen Cronan Rose argues that while the “cool mockery of Sexton’s tone might seem to be directed against women,” there is “evidence in the prologue and throughout the poem that the cause of female narcissism is a male-dominated culture that perceives women as objects and conditions them to become objects” (215). However, Snow White is not merely the product of the patriarchal society. She has actively participated in her oppression through her choice of passivity and inaction. According to Beauvoir, “For a great many women the roads to transcendence are blocked: because they do nothing, they fail to make themselves anything”; this is very true of

Snow White's situation (258). Throughout the tale, she makes no attempt to rise above her circumstances or to learn from her mistakes. In fact, she does not respond to anything, merely floating through her life and doing as she is told; there is not a single thought in her pretty head, as Sexton has indicated throughout the poem.

Snow White cannot be considered an equal in patriarchal society until she starts acting as an equal. Her chosen role of the thoughtless and beautiful virgin is taken directly from the Eternal Feminine, permitting her treatment as an object of beauty and possession. Beauvoir explains, "Few myths have been more advantageous to the ruling caste than the myth of woman: it justifies all privileges and even authorizes their abuse" (255). Snow White willingly follows the role assigned to her by patriarchal society; there is no questioning of the correctness of her inaction. As the huntsman, the dwarves, and the prince save her life throughout the poem, she steadfastly does nothing, following the conventional rule of the "man is busy, the woman idle" (Beauvoir 258). In this way, she is partially responsible for her oppression, and her lack of thought is leading to the perpetuation of this masculine oppression as she follows her stepmother's path into vanity.

This final line, then, is a call for the ending of the cycle of vanity and consequently a call for feminine solidarity. Women need to lose their vanity as their beauty is what is valued within the patriarchal society and serves no other function than to attract male attention and to bring value to the woman within this society. Vanity also leads to jealousy, leading women to fight among themselves to be the most beautiful, an occurrence that Lieberman refers to as the "beauty contest" (187). Lappas agrees, explaining, "the message that to be beautiful is to be chosen creates . . . jealousy and discord because in every beauty contest there can only be one winner" (28). If all women believe that beauty is what matters, that intelligence is unimportant, then society will not change and women's role within that society will remain the same. If the cycle of vanity and jealousy should continue, the masculine oppressors will have no resistance

as the women fight among themselves to be the fairest in the land. According to Rose, the “mirror represents the alienation of women from each other in patriarchal culture” (215). This may be true, but only if women allow it to be true by giving in to patriarchal standards of beauty and accepting the veracity of Beauvoir’s Eternal Feminine. The poem’s final line brings new significance to the tale of Snow White, extending the themes from fairy tale and bringing them into reality. Sexton’s “Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs” is a warning against vanity and rivalry, a cautionary ending to a satirical version of Snow White.

1. A different but intriguing reading of this introductory stanza is provided by Ellen Cronan Rose, who views this stanza as the voiced opinions of various men. In her reading, these voices blend together “to create the persona of the speaker of the prologue” as they discuss the virgin as an item to be bought and sold by men (213). She categorizes these voices as the huckster, the connoisseur, the pimp, and the sportsman.

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The Pardoner, a Castrato: A Critical Essay of Geoffrey Chaucer's *The Canterbury Tales*

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In Geoffrey Chaucer's *The Canterbury Tales*, the sexuality of the Pardoner is a contentious topic among literary scholars. These scholars speculate the Pardoner as a eunuch, a homosexual, or possibly both. Chaucer himself thinks of the Pardoner as a eunuch or a homosexual: "I trowe he were a gelding or a mare" (1.693). In *Eunuchs and Castrati: A Cultural History*, Piotr O. Scholz states, "When we picture the middle ages, we envision monks and monasteries, knights, castles, and troubadours as well as the Inquisition, alchemists, witches, and Jongleurs. However, we must bear in mind that emasculated men, who had been mutilated either voluntarily or by force, also belonged in this group" (240). Among the ranks of these emasculated men were the castrati. The castrati were male vocalists who were castrated before reaching the age of puberty to preserve their soprano and alto voices. After both researching the use of castrati in the Church and a close examination of Chaucer's Pardoner, it is my hypothesis that this character was amongst the ranks of the castrati. This hypothesis is supported by both the character's description and his interaction with the other pilgrims in the company.

Although the Catholic Church did not officially admit to employing castrati until 1599 (when they went public with Giovanni Pierluigi da Palestrina), Scholz believes eunuchs sang in the Vatican in Rome prior to this admission: "The tradition of angelic voices produced by castration goes back to the beginnings of church music" (272). In the twelfth century, women were banned from singing in church choirs by Pius X. According to Uta Ranke-Heinemann,

author of *Eunuchs for the Kingdom of Heaven*, “women were not to have any liturgical function. . . . Since the singers in church occupy a liturgical office, women’s voices may not be used in church music. . . . In the past, the way to block women here was the choir of castrati” (134). As women were not allowed to participate in sacred song, young boys provided the vocals for several events. However, young boys do not have the lung capacity or the diaphragm development to sing these complicated harmonics; thus, it was necessary to find an alternative solution in the eunuch.

The practice of sacrificing the testicles of young lads for the sake of music in the Christian world did not take hold until the sixteenth century. However, the vocal talents of eunuchs are known from antiquity. As Albert Innaurato explains, “Pagans noticed that musically inclined eunuchs developed strong, very flexible, high voices. It was a short step from looking for talented eunuchs to creating your own.” The craze that led Europe into the age of the castrati singing opera must have been introduced somehow, and history reveals the Church as the main authority. Church officials dictated public music. If a piece of music did not meet the standards set by the Church, it was not performed. Scholz claims, “An incisive reform of church music that shaped the course of European musical life for centuries to come began with Pope Gregory the Great” (273). Pope Gregory the Great studied music for six years in Byzantium (Eastern Roman Empire) where the castrati had been popular for centuries. He brought these studies back to the Vatican, and Gregorian chant was born. Gregorian chant, named for Pope Gregory the Great, is the earliest form of recorded music discovered thus far. This music was written with “notations, indicated pitches and coloratura that could be sung only by castrati” (Scholz 273). Coloratura is “the ornamentation of music written for the voice with florid passages, especially trills and runs” (“Coloratura”). Because Gregorian chant became the official music of the Church, finding talented eunuchs to sing these parts would have been vital.

It is not known whether the Pardoner was castrated of his own free will or by force, but the evidence is strong toward his lack of testes. The loss of one's testicles at a prepubescent age leads to the lack of testosterone. Testosterone is the male sex hormone responsible for the physiological changes characteristic of the male body during puberty. A male who suffers prepubescent castration will never develop pubic hairs, experience voice change, or develop muscle bulk. Secondary to the lack of necessary sex hormones during puberty, the joints of the skeleton will harden but the long bones will continue to grow. This is a condition known as epiphysis. Epiphysis leads to the elongation of the rib bones. A larger ribcage allows for greater lung development, giving the castrati an unmatched vocal range (Sundberg, Trovén, and Richter 2). The Pardoner has all of these characteristics, and Chaucer mentions each one. Most likely, he did this to provide sufficient evidence for his earlier claim, "I trowe he were a gelding or a mare." Chaucer describes, in great detail, the physical attributes of the Pardoner without directly saying the word *castrato*.

Chaucer details the Pardoner's hair with the qualities of a youthful child's. He describes it as blonde, fine, and hanging in pretty ringlets one-by-one over the Pardoner's shoulders, "it heeng as dooth a strike of flex; / By ounces heenge his lokkes that he hadde, / and therewith he his shuldres overspradde, / but thin it lay by colpoons, oon by oon" (1.676-79). Chaucer not only calls attention to the Pardoner's lack of facial hair, "No beard hadde he," but reveals that he shall never have one, "ne nevere sholde have" (1.680). Had Chaucer left readers with only the description of the Pardoner's hair (or lack thereof) the case of the *castrato* may be weakened; however, Chaucer includes other clues for his readers such as references to the Pardoner's voice.

Chaucer describes the Pardoner's voice as that of a vocally trained eunuch's. Francis Rogers claims, "It was long ago discovered—when or how, none can say—that when a boy is castrated mutation never takes place and his voice retains its boyish pitch and

quality indefinitely. It was found also that with maturity . . . such a voice gained greatly in volume” (414). Rogers is not alone in his studies of vocal preservation. J. S. Jenkins writes about the physiological transformation of the male vocal cords during puberty, stating, “the male vocal cords increase in length by 67% in adult men compared with pre-pubertal boys . . . an increase in vocal cord mass is responsible for the lowering of pitch.” He goes on to inform readers, “the high pitch was accompanied by fully grown resonating chambers and a large thoracic capacity, giving rise to the unique voice of the castrato.” Chaucer claims the voice of the Pardoner was high-pitched like a goat’s: “A vois he hadde as small as hath a goot,” yet he sang full and loud. Moreover, no trumpet could sound half as good as the pardoner’s singing, “nevere trompe of half so greet soun” (1.676). Anyone who hears the music of a trumpet is familiar with the distinct sound. It is loud, brassy, and high pitched. Chaucer elucidates the Pardoner’s duet with the Summoner, claiming the Summoner provided the Pardoner with a stiff baritone to compliment his high pitch in the song “Come Hider, Love, to me” (1.674-75). The vocal talents of the Pardoner greatly resemble the tone and qualities described by both Rogers and Jenkins.

Chaucer also reveals to his readers that the Pardoner is not from England; rather, he has come straight from the Vatican in Rome where he was employed as a noble “ecclesiaste” (1.673, 1.710). An “ecclesiaste” is a person of the liturgical order and as previously addressed, the choir was considered a liturgical office. Chaucer goes on to explain how the Pardoner employed his greatest talent of all—singing the offertory. The more silver his words won, the louder and merrier he sang (1.712-16). Why did Chaucer not just come out and say the Pardoner is a castrato?

Bear in mind that during the Council of Nicaea in 325 A.D., self-emasculations or castrations were outlawed. The Council decided those who were neutered were not whole, and thus unholy. According to Scholz, “Had these not been practiced regularly, the Council of Nicaea would not have needed to prohibit them” (177).

The carving of one's testicles is now considered piracy and is prohibited by law. However, as piracy is a lucrative business, and this law was made one thousand years before Chaucer's time, the Vatican chose to keep the use of the castrati a secret.

They spoke of singers only as sopranos and falsettos or as "Spanish voices," or the "Spagnoletti." The celibate circle of the Sistine Chapel had elements of a secret covenant; admission required an oath never to reveal its secrets, which explains the difficulties we encounter in tracing the history of the vocal castrati in the Catholic Church choir.

(Scholz 275)

Although the Council condemned emasculation, by banning female voices they created a great market for it (Rogers 413). It can be assumed that when comparing the use of eunuchs to the use of women in the choir, the eunuchs were the lesser of the two evils, perhaps a necessary evil as the Church saw it.

The Church experienced deep corruption in the Middle Ages and Chaucer uses *The Canterbury Tales* as a satire against this. He brings to light the corruption within the Church through both the physical descriptions of the pilgrims and through the moral stories each of them tells. Therefore, the possibility of the Pardoner as Chaucer's lampoon on the Church for employing a castrato is more than likely. Chaucer elaborates on his spoof in the epilogue to "The Pardoner's Tale." After the Pardoner is finished telling his moral story, he asks his fellow companions who would like to be the first to buy a pardon or a relic. Then he turns to the host and inquires if the host, being the most latent with sin, would like to go first. The Host becomes irate and blurts out in anger:

"But, by the crois which that Sainte Elaine foond,
I wolde I hadde they coilons in myn hond,
In stede of relikes or saintuarye.
Lat cutte hem of: I wol thee helpe hem carye.
They shall be shrined in an hogges tord."

This Pardoner answered nat a word:

So wroth he was no word ne wolde he saye. (1.663-69)

The Host alludes that were the Pardoner to have testicles, he would rather have them in his hands opposed to relics or pardons. Then he could help “hem” cut them off. To add insult to injury, the Host proclaims, he would feed them to a hog to be enshrined inside the hog’s turd. Chaucer’s choice of the word “shrined” also carries an ironic religious connotation as to “enshrine” means to hold as sacred. As previously addressed, the Council of Nicaea declared testicles were sacred because men who lacked them were considered unholy.

Chaucer elaborates on the situation by pointing out the laughter of the company: “Whan that he sawgh that al the peple lough,” the chaste knight intercedes and he tells the Host and the Pardoner, “Namore of this, for it is right ynough” (1.672-74). What does the Knight mean by “it is right [e]nough”? I believe “it” is referring to the satire itself. The knight seems to be confirming the Pardoner’s state of castration and is imploring the others in their company not to chortle over “it.” When the Knight makes the two adversaries kiss and make up, he seems to sympathize with the Pardoner: “Sire Pardoner, be glad and merye of cheere” (1.675). Hence, the Host’s insult is more damning than the Pardoner’s treachery for it is the Host whom the Knight places with the burden of the makeup kiss: “And ye, sire Host that been to me so dere, / I praye you that ye kisse the Pardoner, / and Pardoner, I pray thee, draw the neer” (1.676-80). Although the Pardoner instigates the situation by accusing the Host—in hopes of extorting money from him—the Pardoner is the one rescued by the chaste Knight.

There are those who believe this kiss links the Pardoner to homosexuality; however, there is sufficient evidence in Chaucer’s text to prove otherwise. Within the Pardoner’s own tale, he does claim to “have a joly wenche in every town” (1.165). He also refers to an interest in marriage in the Wife of Bath’s prologue. “I was aboute to wedde a wif; allas / What sholde I bye it on my flesh so dere? / Yit hadde I levere wedde no wif to yere” (1.172-75). Here the Pardon-

er is telling the Wife of Bath how he, himself, was about to wed, but now after hearing her boast of working and sexing five husbands to their graves, why would he want to invite such abuse upon his own flesh! Thus, he would rather not take a wife this year. According to Michael Penn, author of *Kissing Christians: Ritual and Community in the Late Ancient Church*, early “Christians also emphasized the kiss as an indication of mutual forgiveness (it’s from here that we get the term ‘kiss of peace’).” Knowing this, it may be a safer route to attribute the kiss to Christian custom rather than sexuality.

The Pardoner’s sexuality may long remain a debate among scholars, but there is strong evidence to support the hypothesis of castrato. Chaucer makes it evident that the Pardoner sells his pardons and relics for money, exploiting his church position. Be that as it may, Chaucer leaves clues to hint toward the satire running deeper than selling pardons and relics. Ergo he mentions the Pardoner’s other church position as “ecclesiaste” singing in the Vatican. He elaborates on the sound and quality of the Pardoner’s voice, especially in his duet with the Summoner. Moreover, he attends to specific detail in the Pardoner’s physique. Individually these clues may lead readers nowhere; on the other hand, when these clues are collected as a whole they reveal a complete picture—the picture of a castrato.

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Between Color and Black-and-White in Film

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Filmmakers have an abundant array of visual techniques at their disposal to assist in constructing a narrative. These can range from simple, like a fade, to more complicated, like a montage. A relatively uncommon technique involves switching either from color film to black-and-white film or the reverse. Though a wide variety of films use this technique for a wide variety of purposes, shared traits exist among them. Many of these films have been thoroughly analyzed individually, but a comprehensive investigation of the technique itself has not been undertaken. Indeed, many analyses of films which use this switch neglect to mention it at all or brush it aside as merely a “plot trick” (Ghislotti 90) or a structural crutch. This minimizes the significance of the technique which, since it has such a variety of implementations, deserves closer attention.

Black-and-white and color are effectively opposites in terms of the range of visual information which can be conveyed. One contains no visible colors, the other contains all visible colors. Both effectively transmit the size, shape, and texture of objects, but color more accurately shows what the object would look like if the viewer saw it himself. Black-and-white even distorts some aspects of color, causing certain colors to appear to be the same, or making objects look darker or lighter than they might appear if shown in color. According to Rudolf Arnheim, “The reduction of all colors to black and white . . . very considerably modifies the picture of the actual world” (15). This dichotomy between color and black-and-white provides a unique ability to contrast subjects shown sequentially in either style.

Films that switch between color and black-and-white vary considerably in form, style, and subject, but several common motivations for using a switch arise from an examination of individual films. When a color shot is followed by a black-and-white shot, or vice versa, the switch between film styles attaches meaning to each side of the switch. Given the innate contrast between color and black-and-white, the two sides of the switch are easily seen as different from each other. The exact meaning is dependent on the narrative of the film and also relies on various connotations conventionally associated with black-and-white relative to color. For example, black-and-white juxtaposed with color could be seen as making the black-and-white subject seem inferior to the color one, since the lack of color in the black-and-white subject suggests a lack in some other area. Other connotations, such as a connection to the past or an implication of authenticity, may also be present. Each meaning associated with a switch provides an opportunity for a specific “type” of switch.

Several types of switch, which I refer to here as *pejorative*, *revelatory*, and *temporal*, are discussed below. The first of these is used to show one subject (typically in black-and-white) in a less favorable manner than another. A *revelatory* switch uses either color or black-and-white (typically color) to show information which is not available in the other format. *Temporal* switches show differences in time between color and black-and-white shots. Many of these types are used together. Indeed, it is important to note that these categories are not exclusive and frequently overlap. For example, *The Wizard of Oz*¹ uses a switch which is simultaneously pejorative, because color Oz is more desirable than black-and-white Kansas, and *revelatory*, because Dorothy is able to see things in Oz that she previously could not in ways that she previously could not.

It is also important that these labels be applied to the switch itself, rather than to either the color or the black-and-white parts of the film. This enables the term to be applied to films which do not necessarily attach similar meanings to the color and the black-and-

white sides of the switch but which compare the sides in a similar way. Comparison is the fundamental feature of a switch between color and black-and-white.

The process of constructing meaning from visual elements is accomplished in films (and in visual narratives generally) by using those elements in a structured and predictable way. Much of this has to do with conventions, which serve as “codes which normalize [a visual language’s] parameters” (Kostelnick 1), but film is also uniquely able to allow the viewer to identify with what he is seeing. “In film, . . . identification is an insistent force, sometimes leaving the viewer no choice but to identify [with a character in the film]” (Blakesley 130). This identification extends to the use of a switch between color and black-and-white, which gives the viewer a visual shorthand he can use to understand and identify with a particular contrast in a film.

Temporal switches highlight some aspect of a character (or event, object, or something more abstract) that has changed over time between the two shots. The black-and-white character changes in some way to become the color character, for example. Other techniques can be used to show the passage of time, such as fade-outs or captions, which accomplish similar goals, but do not as effectively highlight differences between the two times. While a fade-out might highlight the passage of time, switching from black-and-white to color makes it clear that something relatively profound has changed in the story. This difference is frequently negative but need not be, just as negative switches need not be *temporal*—and negative switches which are temporal may still be predominately negative, their temporal qualities less significant.

The film *American History X* switches to black-and-white in a series of flashbacks which show the main character, Derek Vinyard, a reformed neo-Nazi, before and during his time in prison, where he eventually sees the error of his ways and resolves to save his younger brother Danny from going down the same path. The switch is clearly *temporal*, but it is also *pejorative*. The black-and-white scenes show a

significantly less appealing version of Derek than the color ones. In black-and-white, he is the violently racist ringleader of a group of young neo-Nazis, and in color he is a well-mannered man attempting to help his younger brother.

The film begins in black-and-white and continues in black-and-white through the introductory scene before switching to color, when the film establishes its timeline and informs the viewer when the main narrative takes place. Before the film switches to color, the viewer is unaware that the initial scene is actually a flashback, since it is the only scene so far in the film. So when the film first switches to color, the most readily apparent quality of the switch is its *pejorative* nature. The film cuts from Derek (in black-and-white) violently assaulting a black man in slow motion to Danny's principal (in color) arguing that Danny's racist beliefs and family history are not enough justification to simply give up on him. The influences on Danny have improved dramatically between the two scenes. In the first, Danny looks on speechlessly as his brother kills three men, and in the second he is guided toward a more constructive future.

The next two distinct sequences which contain black-and-white shots both show Derek as the center of conflict in the black-and-white flashbacks. This is contrasted with Danny (in color) reminiscing and beginning to write the paper his principal assigned about his brother and the events leading up to his incarceration. The contrast shown in the subject matter of the color and black-and-white shots is heightened by the visual contrast between the presence and absence of color in the frame. All of the black-and-white shots before Derek goes to prison are confrontational and very negative. As Derek spends more time in prison, he begins to change his attitude, but the full extent of this change is not seen in any black-and-white shot—only in color does Derek begin to vigorously oppose his former way of life.

Pejorative switches highlight a lack of something desirable, which is present in either the color or black-and-white shots and not in the other. Typically the color shots are more desirable than the black-

and-white ones, since color itself and the ability to see in color is generally preferred to black-and-white and the disability to see in color. As with all switches between color and black-and-white, *pejorative switches* require two relatively disparate elements on either side of the switch. In this case, the difference between the two sides is their desirability to the viewer.

This contrast is usually nondiegetic—it is not visible to the characters, only to the viewer. The switch highlights something present within the story world but is not itself shown to be in that world. In some cases, however, the preferable characteristic represented by the switch is more tangible to the characters in the film, and the switch may even represent a physical change inside the story world. Then the switch is more focused on this change and the new information brought with it, rather than the *pejorative* nature of the switch, though it may still be present.

As with *American History X*, the film *Wings of Desire*, which centers around a pair of angels as they observe humanity, starts in black-and-white but remains without color for a significantly longer period of time. Indeed, almost half an hour passes before the first color shot, which only lasts ten seconds. The next, about ten minutes later, is only slightly longer—about a minute and a half. Both of these initial switches are point of view shots from the perspective of the main character, an angel called Daniel. Angels in *Wings of Desire* cannot see color (as explicitly stated later in the film), but Daniel sees these two glimpses of color—the way humans see the world. The switch here is *revelatory*, though it is also slightly *pejorative* since Daniel seems to prefer the color humans can see (and all that comes with it) to his usual black-and-white sight. The revelation of new information can be accomplished in a variety of ways, but switching from black-and-white to color causes the revelation to be more connected with vision and simulates the way in which an actual “revelation” might take place.

The first two switches are Daniel’s first encounters with an unspecified sense of “human-ness,” which he finds instantly allur-

ing. During his normal duties as an angel, wandering the streets of Berlin and listening to the thoughts and dreams of humans, Damiel encounters a trapeze artist. As he watches her rehearse for her performance that night, the film cuts from a shot of his face (in black-and-white) to a shot in color of the trapeze artist as she flies across the frame. The shot quickly ends and returns to a black-and-white shot of Damiel, an expression of amazement on his face. Damiel follows this woman back to her room and examines her possessions, attempting to uncover the meaning behind them. He watches the woman as she undresses, and the film cuts from a shot of Damiel (in black-and-white) as he watches her to another black-and-white shot of the woman which slowly fades to color. Then the film cuts back to black-and-white.

This fade is particularly unusual. A film cannot typically fade between two identical shots—such a fade would be unnoticeable. It must either fade out (to black or white or a color), or fade to another shot. But here the film fades within the shot—the only change is the introduction of color. Fades frequently represent the passage of time, showing that the amount of time between two shots is longer than the amount of time which passes for the viewer. But this clearly cannot be the case here, since the fade occurs within a continuous shot. Fades between shots can also cause the shots to become more closely associated with each other. Since the subjects of both shots occupy the same space for a period of time, they can be seen as the same in some sense. In this case, the subject is the same, but black-and-white slowly switches to color. So the ability to see in black-and-white (by angels) and the ability to see in color (by humans) is shown to be similar in some way. Perhaps being an angel is not as different from being human as Damiel believes.

The lack of vision associated with black-and-white is particularly profound since the angels are able to see behind the scenes, to hear humans' thoughts, and witness events with detached objectivity. And humans are unable to see the angels, who pass among them invisible. Color then represents not just an ability to see, which the

angels clearly possess to a high degree and which humans are somewhat lacking of in the literal sense, but to see with emotion and with personal investment in the person or thing being seen. This is, in the film, an innately human quality, and as such is one that the angels do not have. They are required to merely observe, to “assemble, testify, preserve,” and to not interfere in any way.

The ability of humans in *Wings of Desire* to “see” in ways that the angels cannot would be difficult to show in a non-visual way, since sight is inherently visual. Clearly there is no visual element which can be shown to the viewer that is not within the range of what he can see. Modifying the way the viewer sees the film, then, can only remove information from what he can normally see in reality. So the film instead alters the way the angels see and shows their sight as more limited than human vision. This allows the viewer to identify with humans in the film and with Damiel after he becomes human, since the viewer is more familiar with color sight. However, there are still potential advantages to the angels’ sight. Humans can see the full range of colors, but the angels can see more objectively. The use of color and black-and-white is a simple, concise way to show this concept.

Revelatory switches, like *pejorative* ones, typically use color to represent something that the subject shown in black-and-white lacks, but which (unlike *pejorative* switches) may or may not be preferable and which is typically observed by the characters. This could be the actual ability to see color, though usually it is more conceptual. For example, in *The Wizard of Oz*, when the film switches to color it is not implied that Dorothy could not see color in Kansas but that she can now see things in a way she previously could not. The highly visual nature of the switch to color causes the contrast between the two settings to resonate more profoundly with the viewer. Not only can he see the physically different setting, but the way in which he sees it has also changed.

Contrast is the primary aspect of a switch between color and black-and-white, but such a switch is not simply used to highlight

any possible sort of contrast. Many films show contrast in other ways, such as with movement or lighting. Altering the saturation of the image is a particularly abstract method of showing difference. Any contrasts in the subject of the shot are assumed to be within the story world, but changing the type of film used to shoot a scene is completely outside it (although it may reflect diegetic information). The technique is also highly visual, so it is frequently connected to contrasts involving sight. Even the simple observation that the viewer is restricted in his ability to see color in the black-and-white shots is significant because it inexorably ties the technique to vision.

Color and black-and-white are also frequently opposed to one another. Both present views of the world with varying degrees of accuracy. But they cannot exist simultaneously, since one requires color and the other requires the absence of it. This struggle between two opposites provides a film with a powerful mechanism for creating a similar struggle between elements that are associated with color and with black-and-white.

These switches—*temporal*, *pejorative*, and *revelatory*—are clearly not the only ways in which color and black-and-white can interact in the same film. Many others exist and could be developed in a similar way as I have done with the *temporal*, *pejorative*, and *revelatory* types. Most films would likely be included in a relatively small number of types, but there could always be a film which defies categorization. The types presented here and other potential types I have not included are not meant to account for every possibility, but are rather an exploration of the technique and some common uses of it.

Regardless of the specific nature of a switch between color and black-and-white, the technique provides a uniquely visual way to indicate contrast between different shots. This contrast is rooted in the inherent difference between color and black-and-white and can be used to call attention to a variety of different aspects of a film. By analyzing various individual motivations for the switch, a grammar can be created to be used in analysis of other films with similar techniques. The ways that a particular film creates meaning out of

a switch are informed by the uses of similar switches in other films which form conventions, and a continuing exploration of these types would provide an increased understanding of the overall grammar used in a film to create a narrative.

1. *The Wizard of Oz* uses sepia toned film, not black-and-white. The difference is significant, but for the purposes of the discussion here, “black-and-white” is used to refer to monochromatic film, where all color relationships have been removed, regardless of whether the film is actually black-and-white. *Wings of Desire* is also filmed partially in sepia.

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The Pregnancy Problem: Complicating Unique Femininity in Contemporary Romantic Comedies

| Cady Haas

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The plight of an unwed woman enduring the trials of pregnancy and attempting to foster a relationship with the father has recently emerged as a highly popular cinematic narrative form, especially as a complication of the romantic comedy genre. Within this exploration of the comedic results of sexuality, both male and female characters typically follow the previously established normative gender roles within their relationships. *Juno* and *Knocked Up*, however, each present a female main character who initially either operates wholly in the typical male realm or simultaneously expresses characteristics of each gender. In contrast, the pregnancy of each woman forces both *Juno* and *Alison* into archetypal “female” roles. As the films progress, each presents the woman’s pregnancy as a state forcing women out of their previous androgynous state into accepting and operating within their normative gender role by disabling them from exhibiting the formerly unique (and often unfeminine) facets of their personality. Both films illustrate this by initially depicting their female character as pursuing independence and possessing characteristics foreign to womanhood and later depicting them as regressing into dependence on the male father character. Ultimately, *Juno* and *Alison*, though initially displaying masculine attributes, succumb to the traditional feminine role of necessitating a male counterpart. These pregnancy narratives all follow a specific plot progression in order to chronicle the pregnancy: the conception scene, the realization of pregnancy, the informing of the father character, the deci-

sion to give birth, the adjustment and complication of characters and relationships, and finally the birth scene. Through the use of this “pregnancy narrative” form, the films *Juno* and *Knocked Up* present pregnancy as a state resulting in alienation both emotionally and physically from the other non-pregnant characters through the modes of imagery, language, and character progression; in addition, the structure of the pregnancy narrative presents the pregnant female as necessitating a male’s presence.

Juno and Alison both reveal their inclination toward masculine mannerisms within their conception scenes by fulfilling the assertive role of sexual initiator. Traditional sexual scripts operate because “Men are socialized to initiate and orchestrate sexual interactions, and women are socialized to be restrictors or responders, meeting their partners’ sexual needs” (Dworkin and Sullivan 151). In her sex script, however, Juno stands opposite the brown chair in which Bleeker sits submissively awaiting her approach. The dialogue of the scene reveals her distance from the pivotal loss of virginity and her attempts at removing herself from heightened feelings of emotion and commitment—attributes reminiscent of archetypal notions of male responses to relationships. In the case of *Knocked Up*, Alison, too, displays sexual dominance and fulfills the role of initiator in her and Ben’s sex script. As he struggles to apply the condom, Alison, in a moment of sexual frustration, demands that he “just do it already.” Alison commands Ben, then, to respond to her desires and needs and to satiate them satisfactorily. Both Juno and Alison are sexually assertive and therefore adopt the role of a male in traditional sexual scripts.

In addition to these displays of affinity for masculine behavior through sexuality, *Juno* and *Knocked Up* also exhibit the main female characters’ masculine inclinations (and in the case of Juno, her attempts to retain a state of youth) through the timbre of their voices and iconic imagery connected with the characters. The low and coarse facets of Juno’s voice and speech patterns distance her from prototypical soft feminine characteristics. In addition, her baggy

clothes further disguise her feminine attributes, thus making her visually established gender ambiguous. Juno consciously connects herself with masculine and childish images throughout the film. Her mannerisms reveal her refusal to comply with feminine norms. In a tight close up on Juno at the onset of the film, the viewer sees her unmade-up expressionless face, thus emphasizing her lack of desire for pursuit of typical femininity. She stands in opposition to the chair in which she lost her virginity, placing her at odds with the object in which she willingly discarded a highly significant, and traditionally coded as female, part of her youth and unsexed state. In several scenes, *Juno* emphasizes this dissonance between youth and masculinity and Juno's current state by utilizing dissonant iconic imagery. As she informs Bleeker of the pregnancy, Juno sits casually in an armchair with one leg crossed over in the masculine manner. She makes the confession with an unlit pipe in her hand, alerting Bleeker of her decision to obtain an abortion. Thus, Juno, throughout the beginning of the film, reveals a desire to pursue at least a pseudo-masculine identity by operating against the normative codes of feminine behavior.

Alison, too, exhibits a desire to pursue typically masculine ambitions by focusing solely on her career. Like Juno's initially virginal state of youth, Alison begins as an unsexed character, although for her this stems from the intensity of her professional focus. When suggested by a coworker that pregnancy might serve as a possible explanation for Alison's recent sickness, she retorts, "That's impossible. You have to have sex to be pregnant." She reveals her self-admitted lack of previous (or at least recent) sex scripts, placing her in alignment with Juno as an initially unsexed character. The scene in which Alison reacts to an inconsolable Ryan Seacrest exhibits her position of authority and reason in the workplace and the mannerisms she adopts in order to operate within that space, thus setting the stage for a character transformation as a result of the pregnancy. In a scene of shot reverse shots, alternating between Ryan's absurd response to a tardy celebrity and Alison's falsely sympathetic nods,

director Judd Apatow emphasizes her rational and calm nature. Alison approaches him in a patronizing manner, resolving the issue by appeasing him with a cookie and thus aligning his behavior with the temper tantrum of an easily pacified child. This response to the unfounded emotion in her workplace environment places her in line with the male in typical relationship narratives: “The discourses offered different types of relationship narrative yet both tended to reproduce a gender status quo with ‘woman as emotional carer’ and ‘man as rational worker’” (Burns 169). Alison’s character, through the beginning of the film, operates within the latter role. The fact that her focus on career appears intentional removes her from the archetypal “spinster” category of woman. Through her commitment to her occupation, Alison reveals the characteristics she possesses that lend themselves to archetypal depictions of masculinity.

For these figures, however, the films construct pregnancy as a condition necessitating and facilitating change from a masculine associated identity. Alison struggles throughout her pregnancy narrative with the tension of maintaining the former role of “career woman” while existing simultaneously in the opposing category of pre-motherhood. Ultimately, Alison’s pregnancy highlights the impossibility posed by attempted reconciliation of these opposing concepts. The scenes depicting Alison’s interactions in the gynecologist’s office with the nurse and Ben present to the viewer a newly irrational and highly emotional Alison. The tensions in this scene initiate over Alison’s concern for her weight (a normative female behavior), as she responds to the nurse’s comforting phrases by retorting, “Are you fucking kidding me?” Her language and unfounded response to the situation remind the viewer of her previous encounter with Ryan Seacrest and highlight the new and opposing role adopted by Alison. Ben and Alison, however, continue on to ascribe this newly irrationally emotional state to the pregnancy and accompanying hormones. Alison states, “Do not make fun of me. OK? I am hormonal. I’m terrified. And I am falling apart.” Ben replies simply by attributing her erratic emotional behavior to her

hormones in a slurry of curse words saying, “You know what, I know this isn’t you talking . . . it’s your hormones, but I would just like to say, . . . ‘You are a crazy bitch, *hormones*. Not Alison, *hormones*. Fuck ’em.’” Both Alison and Ben cite pregnancy as the force placing Alison in her uncharacteristically irrational and emotional state. The pregnancy state depicted in *Knocked Up* renders Alison unable to function in her occupation—previously the focus of her life. The film reveals her resulting occupational ineptitude through various E! interview footage clips in which Alison either botches an interview as a result of physical compulsions (morning sickness) or her inability to control emotional responses as revealed in her red carpet interviews. This time, however, *she* fulfills the standard “hysterical female” role, as opposed to providing the detached and stable masculine response. Ultimately, at her employer’s discovery of the pregnancy, he relegates Alison to the position of interviewing other pregnant celebrities, thus illustrating her inability to function within the workplace unless confined to interactions with others subjected to her same category.

This progression from exhibiting independent masculine attributes to confinement within the female sphere occurs for Juno as well. Juno’s character makes a subtle shift from wholly encapsulating masculinity and youthfulness to highlighting the tension between her affinity for the two cultures and her pregnant state. J. L. Willis argues, “Juno exists between childhood and adulthood, neither sexless nor parental, neither completely innocent nor entirely beyond ‘redemption’” (242). Her argument focuses on the liminality and complexity of Juno’s physical state as pregnant, yet still considered in “girlhood.” Objects carried or utilized by Juno begin to depict the clash between these two states of behavior. The presence of the girlish underwear in her conception scene causes dissonance for the viewer in regard to her age and capacity for making decisions concerning her virginity. In the scene in which she learns of her impregnation at the convenience store, she purchases licorice rope on a whim before exiting. In this scene, Jason Reitman, director,

consciously zooms in on the contents of her two hands. In one, she holds the positive pregnancy test, while the other grasps the licorice rope. These objects symbolize the necessity for Juno to make her state of idyllic youth cohesive with her pregnant condition or to abandon one state in order to effectively preserve or eradicate the other. She reveals her decision by throwing away the positive pregnancy test, and throughout her abortion deliberation scenes, as previously detailed, she clings to and utilizes childhood objects in order to proclaim and finalize her decision. The prevalence of youthful images accompanying heavy subject matter recurs throughout the film. The licorice rope also accompanies Juno's uncomfortably comical consideration of suicide as she knots it into a noose and places it around her neck, only to decide the idea proves undesirable to her. Her iconic blue slushie also serves to highlight her pregnant state or her state of heightened struggles foreign to other girls her age by repeatedly serving as the substance that accompanies her morning sickness. The presence of these youthful images in conjunction with such adult struggles reveal Juno's efforts to preserve her beloved state of careless youth.

Juno does, however, exhibit an attempt to alter this girlhood and adapt to her newfound adult femininity. In so doing, she also breaks away from the masculine image she formerly perpetuated. Krin and Glen O. Gabbard explore the effects of pregnancy and motherhood on what they call "negative phallic qualities": "Once inserted into the realm of conventional, childbearing sexuality, women in dominant American myth seldom possess negative phallic qualities" (428). They establish these masculine qualities exhibited by both Alison and Juno as negative attributes for those in possession of "childbearing sexuality," thus illustrating the difficulty encountered by the now pregnant Juno, who initially exhibited masculine characteristics. In her visits to Mark, she makes a conscious effort to alter her appearance in order to appeal to his sex and age. In the few scenes in which Juno adds the skirt to her typical striped shirt and jeans ensemble, it appears she does so for the perceived benefit of Mark. She

stands on the doorstep and the camera focuses in tightly on her self-conscious tugging and adjustment of the skirt. She appears highly uncomfortable with the article of clothing, and once she leaves his home, she forcefully removes the skirt and tosses it aside before visiting Bleeker. Juno shifts her modes of gender expression between the two spaces: the youthful and masculine space of her own hometown and Bleeker's presence and the adult and feminine space of the home of Mark and Vanessa. Additionally, in several scenes before her approach to Mark's door, the camera zooms in to observe Juno's application of lipstick in the rearview mirror of her minivan, thus emphasizing her desire to appeal to his adult and masculine desires. Juno makes an effort to apply these feminine images to her appearance whenever entering the realm of "adulthood," thus illustrating the notion of adult femininity Juno feels her pregnancy and relationship with Mark necessitates.

The alteration of Juno's physical shape, too, affects her position as a woman and her ability to maintain a youthful or gender-blurred state. Juno repeatedly jokes concerning her irritation with the changes occurring to her body. Juno laments the development of her breasts, stating with exasperation, "I have to wear a freaking bra now." These changes, emotional and physical, and their effects on the women's ability to function in spaces in which they previously took pride reveal the limited and undesirable state in which pregnancy has placed both Juno and Alison. As a result of the feminine excess—the pregnant body—the women can no longer provide for themselves the masculine mental and physical attributes that they previously could exercise. Juno seeks this male comfort and body in Mark: she calls him from school payphones "just to talk." The relationship she fosters with Mark signifies her newly adult and feminine characteristics, as she does not seek this closeness with her father or with Bleeker. Alison, too, reveals this necessity for outside masculinity in her desperate call to Ben as she struggles to prepare herself for the birth of their child. Judd Apatow focuses for several moments on Alison's inability to pack her own bag or contact her

doctor, only to depict her succumbing to a reconciliation with Ben in order to acquire his masculine assistance, necessitated by her pregnancy. Both women's pregnant state renders them incapable of exuding simultaneous gender, as previously was the norm for both Juno and Alison. Alison's labor reduces her to the category of mother, and, as a result, she submits to archetypal feminine roles and weaknesses, as opposed to her initial existences in which she represented and expressed qualities of each gender. The final scenes of the "birth" portion of the narrative depict Ben as "arriving" as a fully developed dominating male figure: he takes charge of Alison, her sister, and the doctor in a forceful effort to "provide for" and "take care of" Alison. Juno, however, retains the ability and the freedom to return to her previously androgynous state. Her decision to allow Vanessa to keep the baby enables her to cast off the role of mother and to reenter her previous state of youthfulness and masculinity; although, her final decision to commit to relationship with Bleeker contradicts her previously independent state of masculinity. Clearly, the end of each film signifies a newfound necessity for each woman to commit to her male father counterpart.

The rendering of both Juno and Alison as ultimately desiring or necessitating the presence of true masculinity in the films *Juno* and *Knocked Up* serve to appease audiences and appeal to viewers. The genre in which the pregnancy narrative functions, the romantic comedy, necessitates this gender resolution as "the conservatism of the genre trumps the radical potential offered by the rupture of the typical plot" (Moddelmog 163). These quasi-romantic comedies accomplish this return to typical romantic comedy plot resolution by depicting pregnancy as a situation in which a female must restrict herself only to exhibiting female attributes and characteristics, despite any initial inclinations toward masculinity. Both films end by hinting at the permanent reconciliation of these romantic relationships complicated by pregnancy. These relationships initially proved unfeasible as a result of both Juno and Alison's complicated gender expression: Juno, by desiring some sort of independence or

self-sufficiency and Alison by her immersion in occupation. Aimee Carillo Rowe and Samantha Lindsey address women who repress archetypal femininity and film's necessity to resolve this repression in order to appease mainstream audiences: "We concur with the arguments that point to . . . strong femininity and the films' gender role reversal as potentially liberating impulses. . . . Film succeeds as a mainstream text because it resolves white male anxiety by disciplining . . . white femininity" (182). In both films, pregnancy works to alleviate these gender tensions by placing the women in a state of forced femininity, in which their previous modes of functioning become limited, impossible, or unreasonable, forcing them into a role more prototypically female and leading them to reliance on their male counterpart out of necessity, thus resolving the gender tensions for male romantic comedy viewers and allowing for the perpetuation of the "love story" necessitated in this romantic comedy genre.

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Jurors

Nic Brown's short story collection *Floodmarkers* was published in 2009 and selected as an Editor's Choice by *The New York Times Book Review*. His novel *Doubles* was published in 2010. His fiction has been nominated for the Pushcart Prize and has appeared in the *Harvard Review*, *Glimmer Train*, and *Epoch*, among many other publications. A graduate of Columbia University and the Iowa Writers' Workshop, he now teaches at the University of Northern Colorado.

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