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“It Was Because I Was Playing Double”: Conflicted Whiteness  
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Poet Laureate of Kansas (2017-2019), KEVIN RABAS teaches at Emporia State University, where he leads the poetry and playwriting tracks and chairs the Department of English, Modern Languages, and Journalism. He has nine books, including *Lisa's Flying Electric Piano*, a Kansas Notable Book and Nelson Poetry Book Award winner, and *Songs for My Father: poems and stories*. Rabas's plays have been produced across Kansas and in North Carolina and San Diego, and his work has been nominated for the Pushcart Prize six times. He is the recipient of the Emporia State President's Award for Research and Creativity and is the winner of the Langston Hughes Award for Poetry, the Victor Contoski Poetry Award, the Jerome Johanning Playwriting Award, and the Salina New Voice Award.

DENYS VAN RENEN is an associate professor at the University of Nebraska, Kearney. He teaches eco-criticism and long-eighteenth-century literature, specializing in the work of Aphra Behn, Daniel Defoe, and Dorothy Wordsworth. His book, *The Other Exchange: Women, Servants, and the Urban Underclass in Early Modern English Literature* (University of Nebraska Press) appeared in spring 2017, and a co-edited (with Maria O'Malley) volume of essays, *Beyond 1776: Globalizing the Literatures, Cultures, and Communities of the American Revolution*, will be published in 2018 (University of Virginia Press). His current project is an edited edition of Wordsworth's *Grasmere and Alfoxden Journals*.

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## “It Was Because I Was Playing Double”: Conflicted Whiteness in the *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*

Lorraine Dresch

*Lorraine Dresch, an English Major and Theatre Minor, will graduate in spring 2018 from the University of Virginia’s College at Wise. Last year, her creative non-fiction piece, “The Last Gift,” was published in The Sigma Tau Delta Rectangle, and she wrote the column “The Pretension Headache” for The Highland Cavalier, a student newspaper.*

Mark Twain’s *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* portrays black identity as viewed from a white boy’s conflicted perspective. Twain’s novel concerns itself less with the accurate representation of black people than it does with the depiction of whiteness asserting or suspending supremacy while interacting with blackness. In the antebellum South reproduced in *Huckleberry Finn*, whiteness functions as a guarantee of full humanity. Huck, a white boy, cannot interact with Jim—the novel’s primary black figure—without race presenting a barricade between them. Due to his social conditioning, Huck sees Jim as less than white and, therefore, less than human. Huck’s racial filter impacts his narrative voice as well as his dialogue, producing language that overtly and implicitly expresses his beliefs about Jim and blackness. As he grows closer to Jim through their shared experiences, Huck realizes Jim is more human and has a greater depth of feeling than he was led to believe. However, Huck does not have the ability to completely disregard his social conditioning. Jim shifts back and forth in Huck’s estimation: “now Jim is a person, now he is a nigger” in his mind (Jones 30). The result is a novel that wrestles with a conflicted white character who uses double-voice discourse. I propose that Huck both believes and disbelieves foundational principles that uphold black subjugation and, when caught between the white perspective and the black experience, uses his dual allegiance in double-voice discourse and other ways that benefit Jim.

Huck subversively views Jim as unique and tries to protect him by engaging in double-voice discourse, the practice of adjusting one's speech to appeal to an audience in pursuit of a desired result. American society in the antebellum era assumed that a single black slave did not differ greatly from white society's idea of black slaves collectively. Thomas Jefferson, for instance, writes in his *Notes on the State of Virginia* that black "griefs are transient. Those numberless afflictions, which render it doubtful whether heaven has given life to us in mercy or in wrath, are less felt, and sooner forgotten with them. In general, their existence appears to participate more of sensation than reflection" (qtd. in Smith 4). According to prevailing white-supremacist modes of thought, Jim could be interchangeable with any other black man: a less emotional, less rational creature—not a whole man. This reductive belief protected whites, allowing them to distance themselves from the horrific realities they inflicted on black Americans, and to refuse to acknowledge a black person's pains, fears, and desires. However, after spending significant time with Jim, Huck no longer shares this common view. He develops an individualized approach to black identity that acknowledges Jim's struggles. When Jim is separated and sold to Silas Phelps by the king, Huck tells the duke:

I says to myself, "They've got into trouble and had to leave; and they've took my nigger, which is the only nigger I've got in the world, and now I'm in a strange country, and ain't got no property no more, nor nothing, and no way to make my living;" so I set down and cried. I slept in the woods all night. But what did become of the raft, then?—and Jim—poor Jim! (263)

By bemoaning Jim's fate through personalized lamentations, Huck denies Jim's fungibility to the duke. In the space of three words, "Jim—poor Jim," Huck reveals his real opinion, which steps outside of the line of socially acceptable thought. Jim is important because of his individual relationship to Huck and Huck's understanding of his feelings in the situation, not merely because he represents attributes ascribed to all black Americans. However, Huck presents his situation to the duke in a manner aligned with common racial beliefs by portraying Jim as "the only nigger I had in the world, and

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the only property'" (263). Huck is skilled in double-voice discourse, performing white conventional ideology to gain knowledge that potentially benefits a black man whom he actually believes is more than an object.

Even though Huck recognizes Jim's individuality, Jim's identity in the novel is established entirely in relation to Huck, displaying Huck's failure to abandon white-supremacist language despite personal experiences with Jim. According to John Alberti, *Huckleberry Finn* is highly controversial due to "the brutal epithet that haunts the pages of this supposedly All-American epic: 'nigger'" (920). The racial slur carries a reminder of the horrific abuse of blacks by whites, and it was used in the novel's era to "put blacks in their place—to enforce the social hierarchy" (Green). White hegemony is present throughout the South and dominates its language. Huck uses the word "nigger" over two hundred times in *Huckleberry Finn* to refer to black people or specific black persons. Jim's name is replaced and defined by the offensive epithet so often that his character is often misremembered and written as "Nigger Jim," a mistake that began with "Albert Bigelow Paine us[ing] 'Nigger Jim' in his 1912 Twain biography" and that influenced Norman Mailer, Ralph Ellison, and Ernest Hemingway, who all used this appellation (Hearn 29). Even when Jim gains a more human connection to Huck, Huck's vocabulary limits Jim's identity to the role of property. For example, when Huck is reunited with Jim by the Grangerfords' slave, he exclaims that "by jings it was my old Jim" (199). This shift in diction, where "nigger" is replaced by the black person's name—while keeping the possessive pronoun when only black people are near—continues through the chapter as Huck refers to his loaned slave as "my Jack" when speaking to Jim (199). The possessive tendency remains while the overt racism briefly subsides in the presence of blackness, illustrating that Huck evinces a conflicted whiteness. Huck is more respectful of black identities while addressing them alone or with other black people, but he does not shake his assumed control over them, nor cease to use the derogatory slur altogether.

From Huck's perspective, if Jim has a distinct identity created from what he considers outside the range of the era's widely

accepted options for black emotion, his identity must be a white one. After Jim mourns for his family, Huck says “I do believe he cared just as much for his people as white folks does for their’n. It don’t seem natural, but I reckon it’s so” (226). Later, after Jim declares he would not leave the injured Tom behind, Huck notes “I knowed [Jim] was white inside” (299). These passages reveal that, from Huck’s raced perspective, Jim can have family attachments and heroic ideals as a black person, so long as he is like a white person inside. Huck relies on Jim’s underlying whiteness to identify Jim as a “good person,” because for Huck only whiteness can be associated with virtuous or fully human behavior. Huck equates Jim’s positive traits with internal whiteness, suggesting he’s fundamentally unaware that his idea of blackness was formed by hegemonic whiteness. He negotiates his conflictedness far enough to understand Jim does not act how the white popular imagination claims he should (and that he has feelings), but Huck cannot yet accept that blackness is just as valid as whiteness.

Most fundamental to the novel’s conflicted whiteness is the way in which Huck confuses white-supremacist beliefs about slavery and the role of black people in society with his personal conscience, recognizes this tension, and chooses. The entire moral dilemma hinges on Huck’s efforts to navigate competing forces: his allegiance through race to the oppressor, and by personal experience with the oppressed. Huck feels “trembly and feverish” when Jim mentions gaining freedom in Cairo (183). When Huck struggles with whether or not he is to blame for Jim’s anticipated emancipation, he labels the voice of white society as his personal conscience, which asks him accusingly:

“What had poor Miss Watson done to you that you could see her nigger go off right under your eyes and never say one single word? What did that poor old woman do to you that you could treat her so mean? Why, she tried to learn you your book, she tried to learn you your manners, she tried to be good to you every way she knowed how. That’s what she done.” (184)

Miss Watson acts in ways widely approved throughout the antebellum South, attempting to instill in Huck the same biblical

principles that were used to perpetuate and uphold slavery as a moral good and natural hierarchy. Her Christian standards continue to influence Huck later in the novel as he debates what to do after Jim is sold by the imposter king. Huck attempts to pray for forgiveness for the sin of helping Jim run, but:

the words wouldn't come. Why wouldn't they? It warn't no use to try and hide it from Him. Nor from me, neither. I knowed very well why they wouldn't come. It was because my heart warn't right; it was because I warn't square; it was because I was playing double. I was letting on to give up sin, but away inside of me I was holding on to the biggest one of all. I was trying to make my mouth say I would do the right thing and the clean thing, and go and write to that nigger's owner and tell where he was; but deep down in me I knowed it was a lie, and He knowed it. (261)

Up to this moment, Huck has internalized Christian morality and privileged the white perspective instead of considering Jim's oppression in debates with his so-called conscience. Huck then realizes he is trying to use double-voice discourse on God, "playing double" in a prayer in order to save his own soul (261). To avoid the problem, he decides to write a letter telling Miss Watson where Jim can be found. While the written confession allows him to feel absolved from sin, he cannot help but think of the human connection he had with Jim. In a bout of true moral inspiration, Huck chooses "forever, betwixt two things" (262). He favors his affiliation with Jim over the promise of hell, a choice that symbolizes his embrace of the black perspective over the white view of slavery. Huck's experiences with blackness—with Jim—ultimately win out over his original racial allegiance.

*Huckleberry Finn* depicts a white boy's partial awakening, as he realizes that a black person is not as stereotypical and nonhuman as his society suggests. Jim behaves—and emotes—in ways that cause Huck to question his social conditioning and even what he believes to be his own conscience. Jim and Huck's shared experiences unveil an entirely new perspective to the white boy, opening his mind so he becomes conflicted enough in his whiteness—and his words—to rely on double-voice discourse. Ultimately, Huck makes the choice

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to believe the voice of experience over the feelings of guilt caused by white Southern Christianity. However, he is still not completely changed: his mind is not so free that he treats Jim as an equal. Huck may seem to have experienced a moral revelation in which his friendship with Jim wins over the social training that taught him slavery was legally and morally acceptable, but the presence of internal conflict and double-voice discourse do not absolve him of his complicity in the white-supremacist system, nor do they give him the full knowledge necessary to relinquish his need to verbally possess black bodies and to use his language to dehumanize.

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## Ecological Borderlands and Animalistic Identity in Cormac McCarthy's *Blood Meridian*

Timothy Bardin

*Timothy Bardin graduated from Texas A&M University in 2013 with a BA in English, and in 2015 with an MEd in Curriculum and Instruction. As an undergraduate, he served as a staff writer and assistant editor for The Battalion. He taught middle-school and high-school English for four years before offering classes in literature and writing to the local homeschool community. Timothy is currently working on an MA in English from Sam Houston State University, where he has served as the non-fiction editor of The Gordian Review for the past two years.*

Cormac McCarthy's *Blood Meridian* is a borderlands novel: personal, psychological, racial, political, economic, and national boundaries are crossed, re-crossed, transgressed, and constantly redefined. *Blood Meridian* is also a novel about ecological frontiers: spaces where human/non-human identity is in flux, where men and women are neither fully animal nor fully human, and where the struggle for dominance is every bit as violent as the conflicts between ethnic groups and nations. Most of the novel's action takes place in the Southwestern desert and harsh environments of the American and Mexican frontiers, which allows McCarthy to investigate ecological space and its impact on identity formation. There are frequent references to animals, and McCarthy often describes his characters—and the people they encounter—as having animalistic qualities. *Blood Meridian* lends itself to an ecocritical reading that analyzes liminal spaces, McCarthy's concept of "optical democracy," and the characters' constant proximity to animals and the harsh natural environment. In this essay, I argue that McCarthy's representations of animals and marginalized characters in *Blood Meridian* explore the boundaries between human and non-human identity in ecological spaces to suggest identity is fluid.

The Oxford English Dictionary (OED) defines "liminal" and

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“liminality” as a “boundary or threshold between two transitional or intermediate states,” and a “transitional or intermediate state between culturally defined stages of a person’s life,” respectively. The OED also defines “animalism” as “the doctrine that human beings are merely animals,” an “animal-like response and behavior,” and a “quality, attribute, or propensity associated with or resulting from mankind’s animal nature.” McCarthy foregrounds the more savage aspects of human nature in a startling and unsettling manner with his use of animalism, such as when a young Mexican girl is tied to a post with a rawhide collar (284). Liminal spaces, because they are ambiguous and fluid, can be paired with McCarthy’s animalism motif to interrogate what it means to be human and animal. The savage and brutal setting allows McCarthy to explore questions of animal-human identity and what it means to participate in “place” and ecological ecosystems. Several critics have considered the impact of liminality and ecological spaces on the construction of identity.

Neil Evernden’s theory of interrelatedness (or interconnectedness) has important implications for liminality in ecological spaces. Evernden contends that the Western mind perceives interrelatedness as “a causal connectedness. Things are interrelated if a change in one affects the other. . . . but what is actually involved is a genuine intermingling of parts of the ecosystem. There are no discrete entities” (93). Thus, for Evernden, identity becomes fluid in liminal ecological spaces because interrelatedness breaks down the boundary separating the human from the non-human, the animate from the inanimate. “There is no such thing as an individual,” Evernden claims, “only an individual in context, individual as a component of place, defined by place” (103). In other words, humanity and nature are not interdependent, they are interrelated; identity is not essential, it is defined by place. As a result, McCarthy’s use of animalism can be read not merely as a narrative device, but as a complex theoretical move to complicate identity formation.

Alex Engebretson follows Evernden, reading *Blood Meridian* as a spatial novel and arguing that “McCarthy finds ways to relate inside to outside, thus negating the idea of space as autonomous or as separated from nature” (160). For Engebretson, McCarthy’s

harsh wilderness settings create “blurry, disorienting, middle spaces” that undermine animal-human distinctions (157). Applying Evernden’s theory of interrelatedness and Engebretson’s conception of liminality allows me to problematize the construction of identity in ecological spaces, and thus to argue that human/non-human identity becomes fluid in *Blood Meridian*.

For Evernden, “self” cannot be established without attachment to place (101). McCarthy’s characters embed themselves in their environment—none more so than “the hermit” and “the idiot”—and their identities become tied to the ecosystem in which they locate themselves. If the land is harsh, brutal, and unforgiving, then it follows that men who cross the boundary into these spaces will absorb the characteristics of their environment. Their Imago is predicated on their surroundings. In other words, if each new place has distinct characteristics, then the self will acclimate to its new environment. Therefore, the nomadic lifestyles of the kid, Judge Holden, and Glanton’s gang cause their identities to fluctuate as they pass through multiple liminal and ecological spaces.

The idiot is one of the marginalized characters in the novel who exists in a liminal space and whose selfhood is established by place. He is neither fully human nor fully animal, and McCarthy spends a great deal of time describing the idiot—along with his appearance and behavior—in animalistic terms. The first time we encounter him he is in a cage open to the elements, caught somewhere between civilization and nature. The novel’s language animalizes the idiot by equating him with a swine: “[his] face was smeared with feces and he sat peering at them with dull hostility silently chewing a turd” while he sat on the floor of a cage “littered with filth and trodden food and flies,” for all the world like a pig in a pigsty (243). McCarthy sustains this animalist motif through the rest of the novel. Every time “the naked imbecile” appears he is walking about on all fours, leashed like a dog (233). Judge Holden himself refers to the idiot in animalistic terms, asking the brother and owner, “where’s your ape at?” (248). Clearly the characters view him as less than human and we, the readers, are invited to do the same. It is telling that the idiot manifests no individual identity, nor does he develop as a distinct character. The liminal space he

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inhabits not only prevents the formation of a distinct identity, it also becomes a necessary feature of his reality, without which he cannot exist.

McCarthy exposes the idiot's attachment to, and dependence on, his liminal existence in the scene where Sarah Borginnis attempts to "civilize" and rescue him. After she takes him down to the river, Borginnis attempts to give him an identity when she names him: "James Robert come out of there" (268). The idiot is then cleaned up and dressed like a proper gentleman. This scene shows how separateness is a cultural construct and how identity becomes fluid in liminal and ecological spaces. By dressing the idiot in clothes and making him "presentable," Borginnis attempts to separate him from the animals he has resembled for much of his life. This act is problematic because Borginnis herself refers to him as a "child penned up like a wild animal," acknowledging that he has more kinship with animals than with human society (269).

One night, the idiot passes through the camp, "naked once again, shambling past the fires like a balden groundsloth," until he is standing on the shore of the river (269). Curiously, the idiot—standing on the bank—"hooted softly and his voice passed from him like a gift that was also needed so that no sound of it echoed back" (270). Here, the text seems to suggest the idiot's identity blends with his surroundings as his voice and body move into the ecological space of the river. His voice coalesces with the night, mirroring his body's merging with the river when "he entered the water" and waded in until he was waist deep, before the idiot "lost his footing and sank from sight" (270). The idiot's response to freedom and an absence of supervision is to strip himself of civilization's trappings and wade into the river, as if he was trying to reinsert himself more fully into the liminal space from which he had been removed. This scene suggests nature has more power over identity in liminal spaces than in "civilized" spaces—the novel rejects the idea that identity will stabilize when an individual is exposed to civilization.

*Blood Meridian* addresses ecological spaces directly: "in the optical democracy of such landscapes all preference is made whimsical and a man and a rock become endowed with unguessed kinships" (259). McCarthy's theory of "optical democracy"

welcomes—even demands—ecocritical readings of *Blood Meridian*. His description of “the neuter austerity” of the landscape suggests that “all phenomena [are] bequeathed a strange equality and no one thing nor spider nor stone nor blade of grass could put forth precedence” (258). In other words, the human and non-human are on equal footing in *Blood Meridian*’s ecological spaces: “optical democracy” suggests all human/non-human life is equal in value and has a shared identity.

Another example of identity’s fluidity in ecological spaces occurs when “the kid” encounters a hermit on the prairie. McCarthy’s representation of animal-human dynamics in the context of dwellings (and the hermit’s hut in particular) suggests that identity is fluid, because in *Blood Meridian* humans and animals “blend together in liminal space” (Engebretson 160). McCarthy describes the kid’s meeting with “an old anchorite nested away in the sod like a ground sloth” (17). The images and language here—nest, “ground sloth,” the gloom, the dirt, the “pile of hides in one corner,” the “inside darkness” and the “smell of earth”—point to the hermit’s hut as an animal’s den (17). As Engebretson argues: “the association with the ‘ground sloth’ and ‘nest,’ the primitive furnishings and absence of windows or any direct exposure to the sun, figures the hermit’s den as an animal lair” (160). In choosing to dig a hole in which to dwell, the hermit carves out a space for himself in the local ecosystem and becomes a member of McCarthy’s “optical democracy.” The hermit literally dwells inside the earth, and his identity appropriates the habits of non-human entities to cope with his surroundings. The kid himself is not immune to the influence of place upon his identity, as the novel animalizes him too: “in his sleep [the kid] struggled and muttered like a dreaming dog.” (21). Thus, in the liminal space of the hermit’s hut, identity becomes fluid and human/non-human kinship is made more explicit through McCarthy’s use of animalism. For Megan Riley McGilchrist, McCarthy’s “optical democracy” is a rejection of the anthropocentric view, but it is not a minimization of humanity; instead, it “valorizes the natural world” (46). McCarthy’s “optical democracy” considers human and non-human entities comparable in ecological spaces. I diverge, however, from McGilchrist’s claim

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that McCarthy does not minimize humanity. I think McCarthy not only minimizes humanity, but subverts the construction of human identity. For instance, Glanton's gang encounters four men—"foul and ragged and half crazed"—barricaded in a presidio (121). Already the men's humanity is slipping away, but it recedes even further when we learn they "had been feeding off a dead mule that lay gutted and stinking in the far corner of the yard" (121). McCarthy strips away the foursome's humanity by associating them with carrion birds that feed off rotting flesh.

McCarthy implies that—in liminal, ecological spaces—human and animal share kinship. Bridget Nicole Fielder addresses this kinship, arguing that the sympathy evoked by the substitution of animals for slaves in some abolitionist texts makes transference possible across distinct species. Fielder posits that animal-human identity and kinship are interchangeable in literary spaces. However, Fielder believes this transference is possible only when humans and animals are proximate in domestic spaces. In other words, Fielder does not assert that familiarity equals similarity in terms of animal-human identity, nor that transference is possible outside of domestic spaces. By focusing on kinship in domestic spaces, Fielder overlooks wilderness spaces. In contrast, I argue the transference of animal-human identity and kinship is possible in literature that explores ecological spaces where animals and humans dwell in proximity to wilderness spaces.

A macabre example of wilderness proximity occurs when the scalphunters stumble across a village massacred by Indians. They encounter a scene where the blood of animals and humans are mixed together like ingredients in a giant's mixing bowl: "There were goats and sheep slain in their pens and pigs dead in the mud" and "people lay murdered in all attitudes of death" (61). There is a grotesque intermingling of blood and identity in this slaughter; as the blood of animals and humans leaks into the ground, it all mixes together. This grisly portrait paints a picture of animal-human kinship, shared identity, and the instability of identity in a situation where comingled blood prevents distinct identities: the liquid blood reflects the fluid identities present in ecological spaces.

I have suggested thus far that human and non-human

entities share kinship in ecological spaces. This view has some troubling consequences, though, when considered in the light of consumption. If humans and animals share kinship in McCarthy's ecological spaces, then does it necessarily follow that the consumption of animal flesh is a type of cannibalism? Or is it an outcome of the destructive—even self-destructive—tendencies of frontier expansion? Can it be both? What then becomes of identity? How is human identity constructed in a sphere where there is no special preference for the human over the non-human? It is clear, at very least, that *Blood Meridian* questions, challenges, and redefines identity as we commonly understand it.

Madison Jones interrogates the relationship between eating and identity, arguing that the fear of cannibalistic consumption is a result of cultural inscription via tattooing. Jones's claims, though, can be expanded to include the consumption of animals. Jones views a land's inhabitants as inseparable from the land. In this respect, Jones engages with Evernden by building on the notion that identity is rooted in place (or the land) and that separateness is a construct. Pairing McCarthy's "optical democracy" with Jones's liminal spaces suggests that, if human and non-human entities are equivalent, then by consuming animals they consume themselves. The act of eating each other connects the human and non-human more fully. As Jones notes: "eating connects people and place" (88). In other words, by consuming animals in an ecological space, humans become connected to the non-human.

As I conclude, I return to the old hermit and the kid to consider how eating connects people and place and how it subsumes identity. As I noted above, the hermit's and the kid's identities becomes fluid by dwelling in what amounts to an animal den. The stew they eat reveals another aspect of how their identity becomes fluid: "an old dark brass kettle" in the corner of the den contains "the remains of one of the lank prairie hares interred in cold grease and furred with a light blue mold" (19). McCarthy's "optical democracy" casts the wild rabbit and the two men as equivalent beings. Since the men and the animal share kinship, eating the rabbit becomes a cannibalistic act. The old hermit and the kid further subsume their identity by eating a wild rabbit, because they,

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like the wolves that prowl the landscape around the hut, prey on a creature with whom they share kinship.

The act of eating can subsume identity in liminal and ecological spaces when humans feed on non-human organisms, but the same is true of the reverse: humanity is deconstructed when animals feed on humans. Captain White's scalphunters encounter a church filled with slaughter where "the murdered lay in a great pool of their communal blood" (63). McCarthy's use of the phrase "communal blood" suggests that blood is a conduit of identity. The men, women, and children lying dead in the nave all have a shared identity, because their blood mingles in one large pool as cultural and gender distinctions disappear. This pool is "a sort of pudding crossed everywhere with the tracks of wolves or dogs;" by crossing it the non-human residents of this space add their identity to the pool (63). The victims' identity is further eroded when the text reveals the scalped and naked bodies piled on the stone floor are also partly eaten. Whether the remains were eaten by the wolves and scavengers or by the Indians is unclear. Who ate them, though, matters less than the simple fact they were eaten. In this scene, identity is fluid because the consumption (of human bodies) subsumes human identity.

Cormac McCarthy's *Blood Meridian* is a novel about ecological borderlands. In it, identity and kinship are transgressed and redefined in multiple ways. The liminal spaces created by the harsh environment destabilize the distinctions between human/non-human identity, and the concept of human identity is further undermined by McCarthy's "optical democracy," which suggests human and non-human entities are equivalent in ecological spaces. The novel's accounts of animal-human kinship and consumption of flesh (either animal or human) also subvert the cultural construction of identity. Ultimately, *Blood Meridian*'s description of animals and marginalized characters demonstrate how identity becomes fluid in ecological spaces.

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## An Attic of His Own: Spaces of Modernist Transition in Willa Cather's *The Professor's House*

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As an author whose life and writing career straddled the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, Willa Cather and her work defy classification. Some argue that her innovative literary techniques and responses to early twentieth-century America echo those of the modernists, while others point to traditional values and nostalgia in her work. Classifying her works as modernist or anti-modernist affects whether she is read as adapting or avoiding the changing human experience in the twentieth century. In her own writing she never explicitly identifies with or rejects modernism: she scorns tenets of literary modernism, but in the same breath adopts modernist techniques and concerns. In *The Professor's House*, her treatment of physical spaces echoes modernist concerns and philosophies articulated in her essays "148 Charles Street" and "The Novel D meubl ." While these two essays initially appear to express contradictory attitudes towards modernism, they are reconciled through a theoretical reading of physical space, similar to the one outlined by Virginia Woolf in *A Room of One's Own*. As an analytical framework, *A Room of One's Own* establishes the presence of these spatial theories in Cather's work, placing her into a modernist schema. Viewing the attic space in *The Professor's House* through the lens of Woolf's philosophy—as explored by Cather in her essays—reveals it as a physical manifestation of Cather's response to modernism, embodying her role as a transitional author between the nineteenth and twentieth centuries.

*The Professor's House*, as the title suggests, rests heavily on the

significance of physical space, both for an individual and for the narrative. An interest in space is not unique to Cather, with other writers, such as Woolf, exploring its modernist significance. In *A Room of One's Own*, Woolf connects the reading and creation of physical space to metaphorical, social, or psychological implications. The essay argues that women are unable to write great fiction because they are poor and do not have their own rooms in which to work. The security and freedom of a five-hundred-pound salary and a private room allows women to experience a life that leads to the creation of great art by giving them a space in which to focus on creating it. However, Woolf's "room of one's own" is not restricted to a literal, physical room: creating a space for oneself and one's ideas can be translated into the creation of a social and psychological space. Woolf creates a parallel between the material and immaterial when she discusses the difficulties female writers faced in past centuries: "Such material difficulties were formidable; but much worse were the immaterial. . . . The world said with a guffaw, Write? What's the good of your writing?" (52). A physical space for a woman's writing is intrinsically connected to the social space for her work to be received.

Specific aspects of the female author's room take on symbolic significance as well. The attributes of this room reflect the specific conditions needed—such as privacy and autonomy—and the validation the room itself provides. Woolf creates the metaphor, saying, "[allowing] a generous margin for symbolism . . . five hundred a year stands for the power to contemplate . . . a lock on the door means power to think for oneself" (106). The physical space of the writer's room creates—in addition to a social space—a psychological space in the writer's own mind that her artistic processes are valid and should be pursued. Woolf's writing on this subject is significant for an exploration of Cather's literary spaces because it connects the theorization of physical space to modernist techniques. The similarity of the two writers' theories of space—established by Cather in her essays—allows a reading of physical spaces in Cather's work: the psychological and social implications of *A Room of One's Own* articulate what Cather leaves unsaid.

While Woolf uses theoretical spaces to advance marginalized,

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progressive ideas, Cather shows the same spaces, in “148 Charles Street,” preserving traditional nineteenth-century artistic ideals. In the essay, Cather writes of a safe space in the metropolis of Boston where traditional literary and intellectual conventions survived despite the twentieth century’s atmosphere of innovation. The house belonging to Mrs. Fields at 148 Charles Street served as a gathering place for intellectuals of the nineteenth century: Sarah Orne Jewett, Charles Dickens, Matthew Arnold, and many others. The house’s physical spaces were imbued with the history and tradition that Mrs. Fields had lived: “the unique charm of Mrs. Fields’ house was . . . that it was a place where the past lived on—where it was protected and cherished, had sanctuary from the noisy push of the present” (842). 148 Charles Street also serves as a metaphorical space for the preservation of ideas; a fortress housing literary and artistic traditions Cather thinks are declining. In this space, “the ugliness of the world . . . seemed securely shut out. It was indeed the peace of the past, where the tawdry and cheap have been eliminated and the enduring things have taken their proper, happy places” (843). By describing the house in this way, Cather situates it in opposition to the dominant culture of the twentieth century. The physical space of the house preserves a non-dominant way of thinking about the world and creates a place for that world to be discussed.

It would be easy to read “148 Charles Street” as employing the modernist philosophy of space articulated by Woolf in order to reject modernist tenets, playing twentieth-century literary conventions against themselves. However, Cather establishes a connection between physical space and literary techniques in “The Novel D $\acute{e}$ meubl $\acute{e}$ ” that tempers her criticism of modernism while also drawing a parallel between physical spaces and novels themselves. She claims “the novelist must learn to write, and then he must unlearn it; just as the modern painter learns to draw, and then learns . . . utterly to disregard his accomplishment . . . to subordinate it to a higher and truer effect” (836). The essay reveals a significantly more nuanced idea of modern art than one would expect from someone who previously called modernists “iconoclasts” (“Escapism” 971). Her thoughts towards modernism are complicated: she rejects the newness that breaks with tradition, yet admires the deliberate

subversion of tradition for the sake of a higher artistic purpose. In “148 Charles Street” she shows that literary tradition must be preserved, but “The Novel D meubl ” argues this tradition does not exist for its own sake. Her openness to newness manifests itself in “The Novel D meubl ” with respect to literary spaces as well, which discusses literary style through the metaphor of a physical room: “how wonderful it would be if we could throw all the furniture out the window . . . and leave the room as bare as the stage of a Greek theatre” (837). Through this comparison, Cather parallels novels with physical spaces. As Kathy Mezei and Chiara Briganti contend:

Novels and houses furnish a dwelling place—a spatial construct—that invites the exploration and expression of private and intimate relations and thoughts. For writers like Virginia Woolf . . . the use of private domestic space as frame and metonym of inner, psychological space reflects this recent validation of privacy and intimacy. (839)

Not only do physical spaces allow for the exploration of non-dominant narratives, but novels can function similarly. Cather’s treatment of literary spaces is significant, then, because it reflects her thoughts on literature and on her novels’ purpose.

Cather’s physical spaces take on another layer of importance as they shape their inhabitants. Judith Fryer connects Gaston Bachelard’s philosophy to formative spaces in Cather’s works: “[Bachelard] means by ‘felicitous space’ the space we love, the space that concentrates being within limits that protect. Felicitous space is a house of secret rooms, ‘abodes for an unforgettable past’” (185-186). These felicitous spaces become creative and nurturing environments that incubate. Characters are not only formed by their spaces, but revealed by them. Furthermore, characters’ interactions with their significant spaces have larger metaphorical significance. *The Professor’s House* demonstrates this theoretical use of space, revealing in the process a way of exploring Cather’s response to modernism. In the novel, the attic study is where Professor St. Peter actualizes his creative self. The ability to be alone with his thoughts is fundamentally important to St. Peter; in this solitude he is able to cultivate himself as an individual. The attic space serves as a sanctuary for the professor, a place of rest and self-reflection where

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he can physically assume his psychological space outside society. The space takes on significance because of the qualities of its inhabitant: a countercultural figure both in his community and, more broadly, in early-twentieth-century America.

In the novel, the conflict between St. Peter and the demands and materialist priorities of his society takes up residence close to home. This tension manifests when St. Peter's family moves into a modern, luxurious house, while he stubbornly foots the rent for the old house so he can continue working in his attic study. The study for him remains a sanctuary from which he can shut out an increasingly materialistic world. At his university, Professor St. Peter has to fight against the deterioration of intellectual integrity. The values of his academic environment have shifted, now prioritizing research that draws a profit, not only leaving history professors like St. Peter behind, but actively working against him. A faculty motivated by gain ensures that "the liberal appropriations, the promotions and increases in salary, all went to professors who worked with the regents to abolish the purely cultural studies" (182). Appreciation for academic or artistic endeavors—represented in the novel by St. Peter's multivolume work on Spanish explorers of the Americas—waned rapidly in this environment. An increasingly materialistic attitude infiltrates his own family when his daughter Rosamond marries Louie Marsellus, a man who becomes rich by taking the invention of St. Peter's former protégé and Rosamond's former fiancé, Tom Outland, and successfully marketing it. The academic significance of Tom's discovery is lost under the ever more outrageous maneuvers Louie uses to capitalize on Tom's name, even turning his own summer home into "a sort of memorial to him" by naming it after Tom and moving all his research apparatus there (121). Louie is a foil to everything St. Peter holds dear; his commercial gains on the back of Tom's academic contributions and appropriation of everything Tom possessed—including his fiancée—represent the loss of St. Peter's values to an increasingly materialistic society.

St. Peter's attic study's physical attributes reflect his identity, as well as his antiquated ideas of art and intellectualism. These ideas are cultivated and preserved outside the dominant narrative in the

spaces he has created. Cather notes in her essay about the novel that she tried to stuff the new house with “new things”: “American proprieties, clothes, furs, petty ambitions, quivering jealousies—until one got rather stifled” (“Escapism” 974). She uses the house’s physical attributes to create a sense of the overcrowdedness of materialistic American life. However, she does not discuss her use of the same technique in St. Peter’s old study, which the novel presents in minute detail:

The low ceiling sloped down on three sides, the slant being interrupted on the east by a single square window, swinging outward on hinges and held ajar by a hook in the sill. This was the sole opening for light and air. Walls and ceiling alike were covered with a yellow paper which had once been very ugly but had faded into inoffensive neutrality. The matting on the floor was worn and scratchy. Against the wall stood an old walnut table, with one leaf up, holding piles of orderly papers. Before it was a cane-backed office chair that turned on a screw. (106)

Additionally, St. Peter shares the study with the family seamstress, Augusta, whose sewing forms represent his daughters in their youth. The window of the study overlooks Lake Michigan, reminding him of childhood experiences on the water. These and the room’s other outdated attributes suggest St. Peter’s preoccupation with the past. Though his study is for him an escape from the demands of a society to which he cannot conform, this escape is not entirely positive. At the end of the novel, the outdated stove fills the room with gas, nearly resulting in St. Peter’s death, which “he . . . felt no will to resist” (271). After Augusta forcibly removes him from his study and saves his life, St. Peter notes “[h]e had let something go . . . something very precious, that he could not consciously have relinquished” (271). After these events, he is apathetic, without joy or grief. The traditional belief in beauty, art, and intellectualism he had fought to preserve in his study have gone, and his sanctuary space is compromised.

According to philosophies of space outlined by Woolf, Fryer, and Cather herself, St. Peter’s study is a formative physical space that represents a psychological and social narrative carved out of

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the dominant culture. The attic room represents the nineteenth-century artistic ideals and traditions Cather treasures. The room is cluttered and overcrowded with details, a style she associates with the nineteenth century in “The Novel D meubl .” St. Peter’s preoccupation with the past links his space to the house at 148 Charles Street, where everything is conventionally nineteenth century, and where intellectual and artistic traditions continue, despite their abandonment by the modern world. Through the lens of “148 Charles Street” alone, St. Peter’s attic space seems to represent the creation of sanctuary spaces to fight the modernist tide. In that case, Cather would be using modernist technique ironically to preserve nineteenth-century realist ideas. However, this analysis ignores St. Peter’s near-death experience, which results from his unyielding dedication to tradition for its own sake. The complication presented by this event undermines the notion of sanctuary and completely changes the tone of St. Peter’s study: a sanctuary space that almost kills its inhabitant has failed. St. Peter’s study represents dangerous isolationism, a refusal to engage with the outside world. The study is not Cather’s method of preserving the traditional narrative; rather it showcases the incompatibility of the traditional with the twentieth century. St. Peter’s way of living—as shown by his space—and its parallel literary techniques are insufficient to deal with the social and cultural climate of 1920s America.

The openness to newness and innovation Cather discusses in “The Novel D meubl ” suggests that, after her recognition of this incompatibility, she adapts her understanding of writing to suit the century in which she lives and works. The novel *d meubl *, or “unfurnished” novel, sweeps away the nineteenth-century clutter of 148 Charles Street and St. Peter’s study, as well as the twentieth-century materialism decorating St. Peter’s new house, so the reader might confront the true nature of things. Cather’s response to modernism can be summarized by St. Peter’s narrow escape from death and his subsequent life. In order to engage with the twentieth century, he must sacrifice the artistic and intellectual traditions that defined his world. His resulting apathy reflects Cather’s disdain for the disposal of literary tradition. However, unlike St. Peter, Cather’s objection to the unthinking disposal of all tradition does not prevent

her from making use of literary innovations to evoke the true experience of life in the twentieth century.

Ultimately, I argue that Cather explores her contemporaneous literary landscape in service of her art. She is not modern, anti-modern, or proto-modern. Her relationship with modernism is one of thoughtful inquiry, experimentation, and often criticism; like modernism itself, it is a complicated dialogue. Strictly classifying Cather's work as modernist overlooks the value of reading her work as transitional, a lens that offers unique insight into the rapid cultural changes of the twentieth century. Cather's complex relationship to modernism produced works that illuminates how a writer staunchly committed to literary tradition could come to appreciate the twentieth century's radical literary movements.

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## Making the Political Personal: Domestic Models of Social Reform in Charles Chesnutt's *The Marrow of Tradition*

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While the concept of making the personal political emerged from mid-twentieth century feminist theories, the female characters in Charles Chesnutt's *The Marrow of Tradition* also represent how politics can be made personal. Although the novel's climax centers on a race riot in a post-Reconstruction Southern city, its beginning and its end focus on family conflicts that intertwine the mixed-race, middle-class Miller family with the white-supremacist Carterets. Most scholars focus their analysis of social reform methods on two black men's differing actions: Mr. Miller's professionalism and Josh Green's violent rebellion. The women's domestic involvement and the family conflicts framing the novel have been studied less frequently, despite their relation to the era's broader racial issues. Through its depiction of Janet Miller, *The Marrow of Tradition* reveals mixed-race women's ability to improve race relations by generating empathy in domestic settings, even between mixed-race and white-supremacist families. The novel thus suggests a method for combating racism: making the political personal.

As a realist novel, *The Marrow of Tradition* illustrates multiple reactions to racial violence in the South, but focuses on personal and familial relations in a town struck by political differences. Based on an 1898 race riot in Wilmington, North Carolina, the novel's central conflict demonstrates that the root of racial violence was "intended to disempower the rising black middle classes" (Najmi

4). Therefore, the political motives for racial violence are intensely personal to the mixed-race, middle-class Miller family. This threat to the black middle class affects both Mr. Miller's professional medical career and his wife Janet Miller, since she is the illegitimate daughter of Olivia Carteret's white father and his servant. Chesnutt frames the novel's escalation toward the race riot with family conflict, demonstrating how political strife is intertwined with personal lives. The novel begins and ends with the Carteret baby: Dodie's medical emergency serves as metaphor for society's racial crisis, illustrating this connection between personal and social conflict. The final scene—in which Mr. Miller gives power over to Janet, so she might decide whether they try to save Dodie—reveals Janet as a model of “domestic feminism” who attempts to resolve political conflict in a private setting (Danielson 75). Chesnutt contrasts Janet's solution with several ineffective responses: Miller's professionalism, Josh Green's rebellion, Major Carteret's white guilt, and Olivia's silence on the issue of racial justice. These various failed tactics emphasize how powerful the hope Janet creates—by choosing to try to save Dodie and begin repairing race relations—is.

Much of the novel focuses on Mr. Miller's professionalism, which ultimately fails to protect the black community and his family. In some ways, Miller's professionalism mirrors Chesnutt, whose own personal background may indicate “a solid racial identity can be achieved through hard work, education, and unrelenting effort to fight for equal rights” (Glass 82). In the novel, however, the Miller's middle-class status does not prevent their son's death during the race riot. The novel thus suggests individual hard work by mixed-race persons cannot be the only means for advancing black people's status in society. In fact, the novel notes that white working class's fear of “nigger domination”—that is, white responses to black middle-class advancement—actually fosters the environment in which the race riot occurs (Chesnutt 24). Major Carteret's insistence that Miller's medical skill and character are only good “for a negro” also shows the limitations of Miller's adherence to “professional ethics” for racial advancement (Danielson 76). African Americans have already been systematically denied a voice in public systems, so Miller's work for racial advancement cannot be situated solely in the

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public, professional realm. Consequently, black advancement in the public sphere cannot be done without humanization at the personal level first.

In addition, while Major Carteret eventually does empathize with Miller—due to their similar family roles—his white guilt prevents him from correcting the damage his racist propaganda has caused. Carteret only understands his own racial prejudice when he views Miller's son's death—during a race riot he provoked. As Carteret empathizes with the threat to his own son's life, he finally sees “things as they were, in their correct proportions and relations,—saw clearly and convincingly that he had no standing here . . . in the home of this stricken family” (207). Carteret's realization of their common humanity relies on family responsibilities to which he can relate: he “he could not ask . . . this father to leave his own household at such a moment” (207). Although his guilt seems appropriate here, he abandons any chance of mending his relations with the Millers or the black community. His empathetic reaction stands in striking contrast to his earlier response to black people's deaths during the riot: “I am not responsible for these subsequent horrors,—I wash my hands of them” (199). Even though he was “aware that a negro was being killed,” he didn't know who the person was specifically, so he could continue dehumanizing the entire race through their anonymity (198). While Carteret would not before humanize any black man, once his son's medical emergency leads him to the Miller household, the empathy he learns in a domestic sphere allows him understand Miller through their shared paternal roles. Nevertheless, neither Miller's professionalism nor Carteret's empathy generate any effort to correct past injustice or prevent future violence.

Women like Janet Miller, though, are positioned in this personal, domestic space, where they become the agents of change, using the empathy from common family experiences to repair race relations. After Carteret and Miller's confrontation, Olivia Carteret rushes to the Miller household to beg for help. Miller, however, gives his wife the power to make this decision. The novel's final scene depicts Janet and Olivia as they “stood confronting each other across the body of the dead child,” a clear indication of how the main

racial conflict is reduced to their personal relations (210). While Janet rejects Olivia's sisterly recognition—after Olivia offers her a share of their father's inheritance—she does let Miller try to save Dodie's life. Here, she embodies “domestic feminism”—surpassing her private role into the public sphere—as well as “civic virtue,” by supporting the common good instead of her individual interests (Danielson 77). *The Marrow of Tradition* does not necessarily reject women's involvement in the political, public sphere; rather it shows how women can address political issues through their personal relations—a more effective tool for combating racism.

Janet continually resists the negative stereotypes surrounding black and mixed-race women, affirming their value and, thus, promoting racial progress. While these actions might resemble “true [white] womanhood,” as a black mother, Janet reflects instead black feminists' social role in “agitating for a radically revised role for black women within and outside of the home” (Bentley 254). Chesnutt presents Janet as the ideal hero not just because of “her superior character” or “strong humanity,” but because she can reconcile her personal interests in racial advancement with future relations between black and white families (Wallinger 70). Her composure in the face of her sister's hysteria represents the broader community of women of color who use their domestic role for social good. In contrast to Miller and Carteret's public exchange, Janet's actions reveal the domestic setting as the more appropriate space to correct race relations, because it allows for personal accountability.

While Chesnutt shows that common family roles help develop empathy, this healing does not need literal blood ties between mixed-race and white families. When Olivia attempts to use their family relation to convince Janet to have sympathy for her and her son, Janet rejects this plea, claiming that “when this tardy recognition comes, for which I have waited so long, it is tainted with fraud and crime and blood, and I must pay for it with my child's life!” (212). Miller also remarks on the absurdity of Olivia's tardy recognition, because even though they were family, Olivia was “a sister who had scorned and slighted and ignored the existence of his wife for all her life” (210). Chesnutt weds this “family melodrama” between Janet and Olivia to the novel's overarching political

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conflict (Chakkalakai 674). Their family drama over inheritance and legitimacy connects to the broader issue of interracial marriage: Janet's parents were legally married, but not socially acknowledged as legitimate. As a result of this family history, the personal and political conflict come together in Janet's domestic space in the text's final scene. Because Janet clearly rejects Olivia's "sisterly recognition" in the end, her real act of empathy comes from their shared role as mothers, and from her desire to change how her world perceives women of color (212). Janet again acts as an ideal model: a woman who "may be foully wronged, and yet may have a heart to feel, even for one who has injured her" (212). An empathy that does not emerge from their literal family relations demonstrates that similar relationships might be formed between white and black families who lack these pre-existing connections.

In contrast to Janet's personal decision to promote social good, Olivia's hysteria and her silence regarding racial justice reveal white women's complicity in institutional racism. Olivia, however, has also been a victim of the "true womanhood" ideal, which precludes any political involvement. Confined to her domestic role, Olivia inevitably obsesses about her son's health and blames Janet when Dodie almost falls out a window. Although Janet shows compassion in this moment by crying out, she does threaten Olivia's lifestyle of "true womanhood" with her public presence and the persistent reminder of her potential illegitimacy. Social competition between black and white women also fuels Olivia's resentment toward Janet, prompting her to burn all documentation of Janet's inheritance. Nevertheless, after being complicit in Major Carteret's racist propaganda and failing to take responsibility for the harm she inflicts on Janet, "Olivia is no longer a blameless victim" in the end (Danielson 86). She shows no compassion for their son's death or regret for the Carterets' complicity in the race riot. She only wants the Millers to save her son, so she never "acknowledge[s] a need for racial justice" (Danielson 85). Olivia shows no personal growth, nor understanding of Janet when she insists that Janet simply "do[es] not mean all of the cruel things [she] has said" after rejecting their sisterhood (213). Claudia Tate explains how "this social equation between personal and political or private and public works in two

directions”: politics shape individual lives—like Janet’s presumed illegitimacy—while personal actions reinforce social institutions, as in Olivia’s alienation of Janet (8). Olivia’s white womanhood distances her from the public, political sphere, allowing her to ignore the personal side of institutional racism. Conversely, Janet’s race and gender require her to address racism in her domestic space, revealing the need for accountability for prejudice even in one’s personal relations.

Janet also indicates how empathy might be formed without minorities forgiving their oppressors, because the Millers show no tolerance for racial violence. While Hanna Wallinger claims the novel ultimately shows Janet’s “potential for forgiveness,” Janet entirely disregards Olivia’s attempts to make reparations for her lack of recognition (70). Janet’s attempt to save the Cartarets’ child does not require her to forgive the Carterets for inciting the violence that killed her son. Rather, it rather shows her ability to move past vengeance. In addition, Olivia never actually apologizes; she accepts no accountability for the damage to Janet’s public identity. She clearly does not understand Janet’s thinking saying, “I will see you again, and make you take [your words] back” (213). Major Carteret, on the other hand, shows some accountability, claiming “he could not blame the doctor for his stand,” perhaps because he was more directly responsible for the race riot than was his wife (207). Even though Carteret, earlier in the novel, attempts to wash his hands of responsibility, he seems to grow more than Olivia by novel’s end. Olivia’s hysterical reaction to Dodie’s medical emergency suggests that in “such a crisis a mother’s heart usurps the place of intellect” (208). Janet, however, acts out anger, compassion, and intellect, despite her son’s death. She remains rational enough to know she can promote racial progress by allowing Mr. Miller to save Dodie, but she also validates her own anger by not forgiving the Carterets or accepting Olivia’s family recognition. Janet’s model of compassion without forgiveness holds white supremacists accountable, rejecting violence and vengeance as means for redressing racial inequality.

Finally, while the novel stops short of fully condemning violent resistance, it portrays Josh Green’s rebellion as less effective in the long term than mixed-race women’s actions on the personal

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level. In contrast to Miller's middle-class professionalism, Josh serves as an important leader for the black working class. In some ways, Chesnutt presents Green as a heroic figure particularly during the riot where he fights back against white supremacists, appearing immune to their bullets until he reaches McBane. The text, though, does not uncomplicatedly romanticize Green, instead recognizing his "reckless courage" and his pursuit of vengeance (199-200). Despite its humanization of Green's heroic, yet vengeful acts, the parallel between his and McBane's death suggests he is not a model to emulate. Many scholars claim "two types of heroism are exposed" in *The Marrow of Tradition*: Miller and Green (Wallinger 66). Janet, though, provides an entirely separate heroism: compassion that works toward social good and toward racial advancement. Green's violence against McBane may be justified, but Janet offers hope for the future white generations represented by Dodie: a chance to be better than their parents.

*The Marrow of Tradition* ends ambiguously, with race relations far from fully repaired. The final scene, however, shows the communal work that must be done at a personal level to develop stronger connections between races. This healing must begin in the domestic space, with black woman's empathy and white people's accountability. Although Janet allows Miller to help save Dodie, it remains unclear if he will survive, an uncertainty that symbolizes the peril of the broader society's race relations. The novel's final statement about Dodie's medical emergency—"there's time enough, but none to spare"—resonates as a call to action (213). Although Chesnutt represents a range of perspectives in the novel, Samina Najmi claims he tailors his message to white female audiences with the novel's "illumination of the politics dividing white women from African Americans" (15). Janet, therefore functions as a first step toward inspiring white female readers to act: her compassionate work and her pursuit of the social good are values white women should emulate at the turn of the century. *The Marrow of Tradition* also, though, suggests they must take responsibility for their personal actions and their actions' political effects on race relations. The novel's ambiguous ending invites readers to choose what they want the future to look like.

Even before second-wave feminism's focus on making the personal political, *The Marrow of Tradition* demonstrates that women must use their domestic space to engage in politics, because their personal relations have political impact. The Carterets are just beginning to learn this lesson, but if extreme white-supremacist families can learn to empathize with middle-class, mixed-race families, then clearly the novel maintains some hope for the future. Through her intersectional identity as a mixed-race woman, Janet confronts racial issues in her private domestic space. Ultimately, by contrasting Janet's character with failed models of political action—professionalism and violence—Chesnutt privileges the personal as the best approach for addressing social issues.

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## Claudia Rankine's Criticism of Social Antipathy in *Citizen: An American Lyric*

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In “On Lyric Poetry and Society,” Theodor Adorno contends that lyric poetry offers a vision of the social macrocosm. The poet’s perspective combined with the social context in which they create their work offer readers an understanding of an antipathy to which they were previously ignorant. As Adorno claims “the lyric work is always the subjective expression of social antagonism” (45). The lyric’s obligation to subjective expression almost makes it responsible for creating dialogue about social shortcomings and for expressing criticism of cultural trends. The readers, then, with their newfound perspective—produced by the lyric’s exploration of its world—can view society through the lens of the author, creating new avenues for discussion and enabling change.

One writer invested in that change is contemporary poet, Claudia Rankine, who appears astutely conscious of lyric poetry’s power and of its connection to society. In her recent book, *Citizen: An American Lyric*, Rankine offers a remarkable criticism of the racial environment in America. Rankine uses her position as a prominent African-American educator and skilled lyricist to create a platform from which she can apply her personal experience to write a poem containing a sharp criticism of the treatment of black people without voicing an explicit negation. She instead invites readers to view the work—and subsequently the world—from a different perspective, one that defamiliarizes the offenses *Citizen* depicts. Rankine uses an unconventional lyric form that reads almost as prose (it is not written in stanza form and has no set meter

or rhyme), yet it maintains poetry's phonetic qualities. By employing this atypical form, *Citizen* is able to convey a narrative depicting racial microaggressions as they occur in Rankine's life and the lives of her fellow black Americans. Rankine's formal choice and her distinct subjectivity intersect with Adorno's argument that lyric poetry and society are intertwined, each affecting the other, as the lyric is molded and defined by its social context. *Citizen*, as Adorno suggests lyric poetry might do, reveals to readers that they can change the society that inspired—and demanded—the poem.

One of *Citizen*'s first notable characteristics is the perspective from which the narration takes place: a second-person point of view. The poem's first line reads "when you are alone and too tired to turn on any of your devices, you let yourself linger in the past stacked among your pillows" (5). This opening line establishes the poem's frame and acclimates the reader to the second-person point, marking the reader as the poem's protagonist. From here the poem acts as a sort of personal documentary, a frame of reminiscence comprising memories of racial tension experienced first-hand. These memories are recalled from the lonely confines of a sleepless night, and are occasionally interrupted by more lucid regressions in which issues are addressed directly.

Placing the reader in the position of protagonist has several notable effects that Rankine uses to illustrate how American society propagates a mentality of black inferiority. Most directly, the second-person perspective invites empathy from the reader. Beyond the sympathy of recognizing the suffering of another individual, *Citizen* calls for a profound empathy: if the reader is directly involved, there is little choice but to empathize—and the results can be somewhat unsettling. The explicit "you" immerses the reader in the trials of racial injustice, while maintaining ambiguity. Yet, while the lyric's narrator addresses the readers as if to describe events in which they were involved—to capture their feelings in these moments—there remains a distinct narrative subject: a speaker who tells the stories of others' lives. Adorno addresses this sort of ambiguous narration in his comments on lyric poetry:

It is commonly said that a perfect lyric poem must possess totality or universality, must provide the whole within the bounds of the poem and the infinite within the poem's

finitude. If that is to be more than a platitude of an aesthetics that is always ready to use the concept of the symbolic as a panacea, it indicates that in every lyric poem the historical relationship of the subject to objectivity, of the individual to society, must have found its precipitation the medium of a subjective spirit thrown back upon itself. The less the work thematizes the relationship of “I” and society, the more spontaneously it crystallizes of its own accord in the poem, the more complete this process of precipitation will be. (42)

By using a second-person point of view, Rankine removes the “I” in Adorno’s “‘I’ and society” and replaces it with a “you,” forcing a total immersion into the text and making the mistreatment of black Americans resonate more strongly. Universality cannot extend to race: so long as there remains a distinction between races, a white person cannot truly come to know the plight of a black person. By projecting her own experiences of racial discrimination onto an ambiguous “you,” however, Rankine can represent her and her peers’ experiences—and the accompanying emotions—in a universal manner to which readers are nearly forced to relate. The second-person narration’s forced dis-identification can have a disconcerting effect, but this is part of the power of Rankine’s take on race in America: the unsettling nature of being engaged in a narrative other than one’s own is coupled with a subject matter actively avoided by many Americans. Rankine uses this pairing to heighten the poem’s pathos.

Rankine’s use of the second-person also serves to mirror the feelings of powerlessness she and her contemporaries experience in their inability—or refusal—to retaliate when they face the kind of microaggressions depicted in *Citizen*. For instance: “You are reminded of a conversation you had recently, comparing the merits of sentences constructed implicitly with ‘yes, and’ rather than ‘yes, but.’ You and your friend decided that ‘yes, and’ attested to a life with no turn-off, no alternative routes” (8). Here there is a feeling that, by acquiescing to the standard alienation involved in minor racial insults, the individual is made incapable of producing change. One is expected not to react and so approaches the situation with a

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“yes, and” mentality. The lack of defiance and the inability or refusal to stand up to mistreatment results in more of the same (and so on), with no alternative until the “yes, but” is applied. The poem’s form conveys these stories of unjust action and conduct as if they happen to its readers. Then the readers are told how they responded. The narration of action and inaction carries power, because readers see the injustice and empathize with it, yet the mistreatment elicits feelings of disenfranchisement that invite them to desire action taken on their behalf. By depicting that loss of agency, Rankine presents a sense of society’s repressive nature, maintaining a certain status quo. The text’s complex interrelationship of speaker and reader evokes a desire for action coupled to the inability to accomplish it, a dissonance expressed later in the poem: “Then the voice in your head silently tells you to take your foot off your throat because just getting along shouldn’t be an ambition” (55).

Though the poem’s “you” is identified through most of the text as a black woman, this fixed identity waivers at moments. One of these moments—which seems quite different than most of the poem; almost regressive—describes not an experience of explicit bias, but instead a friendly conversation between “you” and a companion, in which the two discuss how misspoken words create separation between friends:

A friend argues that Americans battle between the “historical self” and the “self self.” By this she means you mostly interact as friends with mutual interest and, for the most part, compatible personalities; however, sometimes your historical selves, her white self and your black self, or your white self and her black self, arrive with the full force of your American positioning. Then you are standing face-to-face in seconds that wipe the affable smiles right from your mouths. What did you say? Instantaneously your attachment seems fragile, tenuous, subject to any transgression of your historical self. And through your joined personal histories are supposed to save you from misunderstandings, they usually cause you to understand all too well what is meant.

(14)

Until this point the reader’s identity has mirrored Rankine’s own

identity almost exclusively, with the “you” aligned closely with her experiences. But here identity becomes fluid: “sometimes your historical selves, her white self and your black self, or your white self and her black self” (14). This complication of the self, which has until this point been relatively stable, places further emphasis on how the poem plays with subjectivity, individuality, and universality, elucidating in the lyric a moment of complexity minimized elsewhere. By explicitly disregarding attributed race—instead focusing on interracial relationships and discourse—the poem offers a stronger sense of the universality Adorno considers paramount to lyric poetry: “Its universality is no *volante de tous*, not the universality of simply communicating what others are unable to communicate. Rather, immersion in what has taken individual form elevates the lyric poem to the status of something universal by making manifest something not distorted, not grasped, not yet subsumed” (38).

The passage from *Citizen* also represents the heart of the racial issues in the stories of mistreatment that precede and follow it: a racism so profound it interferes with personal, day-to-day conversations amongst friends further illuminates many of the text’s other moments. The text gestures toward the beginnings of a process of change. The representation of a candid discussion points to the possibilities of open communication, of expressing the situation more plainly. Yes, the poem includes scenes of personal conflict, like when a slip-up leads to offense: “What did you say?” (55). As with many of the text’s other stories, the conflict might have been avoided with a more conscientious approach, more cautious word-choice or phrasing, but the real issue lies deeper.

Rankine’s *Citizen* points out that, in the history—and the present—of American racism, it is not a more subservient filter that is necessary, but an extermination of the inherent prejudice that still lingers. The stanza concludes “and though your joined personal histories are supposed to save you from misunderstandings, they usually cause you to understand all too well what is meant” (55). It is as if Rankine here suggests interracial personal relationships are tainted by the remnants of racial bias, overpowering any individual connections. At times, there occur slips, when racism’s loathsome history resurfaces to reveal a conflict between the historical self and

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the more immediate self. Rankine seems to imply that although, to a certain level, individuals should be held accountable for the things they do or say, it is society itself that has failed the black community by failing to extinguish the racism that led to slavery, segregation, and years of injustice—and that still lingers. This lingering racism is still extremely prevalent in the minds of people who would never dream of advocating an overtly racist ideology, but for some reason still seem to hold onto a false sense of superiority that manifests itself now in racial microaggressions instead of explicitly racist actions.

Unacknowledged biases, however, manifest more radical consequences than the occasional microaggression. In many situations of great importance—such as instances of police violence—underlying racism produces tragic results. Rankine uses the stories of minor offenses emerging from a nearly subconscious racist ideology—in contrast to, say, police brutality—to suggest both are symptoms of the fundamentally flawed ideology that still lingers in the minds of Americans, and to help readers understand that the issue needs to be addressed at even the most basic levels. Ultimately, *Citizen* advocates for still needed change. It suggests these issues are not going to simply go away, and that dialogue is essential. Rankine contends that just as racism did not end with the abolition of slavery, so too has it endured after the hard-fought victories of the Civil Rights Movement. Now acts of racism rest squarely on the shoulders of moderates: the individuals who do not consider themselves racist—and may even pride themselves on their refusal to discriminate—but still harbor traces of the bias that occasionally materialize in actions or statements; things they would be comfortable saying, perhaps, in front of Rankine herself, because to they do not recognize the malice in their words. Just as Martin Luther King voiced discontent with the white moderate in his “Letter from Birmingham Jail,” Rankine proclaims the same frustration: while acts of blatant racism have become less prevalent, the ideology that leads to them remains.

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## The Royal Pardon: Magnanimity and the English Monarchy in the Second *Henriad*

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From the tragic fall of Richard II to the remarkable rise of Henry V, Shakespeare's second *Henriad* delves into English history to explore the nature of the monarchy. The first play in the tetralogy, *Richard II*, grapples with regicide, exploring the justification for and consequences of overthrowing an inept leader. *Henry IV* parts one and two continue the saga, following the usurper Henry Bolingbroke's uneasy reign over England, during which he suffers the consequences of his coup. The tetralogy ends with the triumphant portrait of Henry V, who transforms himself from an apparent reprobate into a dynamic, capable monarch, though his successors do not retain his conquests. As the foundation of the monarchy shifts drastically beneath the three rulers, the manner in which the kings dispense their duties—among them the royal pardon—reflects the fluctuating health of the monarchy. Never properly used by Richard II, the formulaic ceremony of pardon offers important insight into the relationship between the monarch and his subjects, as well as between himself and his god. The use of the royal pardon in the second *Henriad* manifests the weakness of Richard II, the uncertainty of Henry IV, and the confidence of Henry V.

The royal pardon, or prerogative, originates from the traditional understanding of kingly morality, which recognizes justice as the king's duty and essential virtue. Sherman Hawkins explains that justice has been one of the foremost royal virtues

since the writings of Cicero, who claimed that all kings must seek justice (316). Likewise, Aristotle clearly confirms the importance of kingly virtue, arguing that “a man is not a king unless he is sufficient to himself and excels his subjects in all good things.” In Shakespeare’s day, dominant political thought still affirmed that the king, by means of his virtues, inspired moral rectitude in the people (Hawkins 316). By judging the people with fairness and equity, kings could promote contentment and foster a sense of uprightness and regularity in the kingdom.

However, unmitigated justice risks becoming draconian and may give rise to vigilantism, which undermines the kingdom’s justice system. Thus, as Andrew Novak notes, medieval English kings wisely chose to mitigate the law’s demands with mercy (18). The royal pardon thus took on a function nearly as important as royal justice, for a king who was unwilling to pardon would be a tyrant. When used appropriately, such royal mercy simultaneously promoted the king’s authority and preserved the integrity of the law (Novak 18). According to Novak, the normal procedure permitted either the guilty party or an advocate to intervene and sue for mercy (19). Pardoning eventually acquired a customary, ceremonial status: kings used their royal prerogative as a platform for demonstrating their graciousness and benevolence (Novak 20). The use of the royal pardon, therefore, directly relates to the health of the monarchy, since the king’s use of magnanimity depends directly on the security of his royal position.

Since the royal pardon reflects the security of the monarchy, pardons offer an opportunity to explore the strength of the second *Henriad*’s monarchs. The first king in the cycle, Richard II, is the only one who never uses the formulaic royal pardon in the plays, though he makes some feeble attempts. Unfortunately, they fail because he is a weak monarch in his own eyes and in the eyes of his people. Shakespeare fashions Richard as a conflicted, uncertain ruler, even omitting royal pardons that historian Raphael Holinshed records. As Joseph Satin indicates, Holinshed records an episode in which Richard II exercised the royal prerogative by pardoning the Earl of Arundel for conspiring to kill him, along with Mowbray and Bolingbroke (77). In the scene Holinshed describes, Richard appears

a reasonably capable, authoritative ruler. However, the play omits this royal act, beginning after Richard grants the pardon and never alluding to it. The omission accentuates Richard's weakness.

The only scene in *Richard II* that approaches a royal pardon is the sentencing of Mowbray and Bolingbroke, but the scenario merely parodies a true royal pardon. Richard's sentences are inherently unequal and unjust: he banishes Mowbray for life, while sentencing Bolingbroke to a mere ten years, though neither man has been tried for a crime, since Richard stopped the trial by combat. Both the sentences and the ensuing conversation seem capricious. When Mowbray protests the severity of his sentence, saying, "a heavy sentence, my most sovereign liege / And all unlooked for from your highness' mouth," Richard dismisses his plea: "It boots thee not to be compassionate. / After our sentence plaining comes too late" (R2 1.3.154-55, 174-75). Mere moments after this exchange—with Mowbray still standing by—Richard shortens Bolingbroke's sentence after glancing at John of Gaunt, without hearing any plea for mercy: "Thy sad aspect / hath from the number of his banished years / plucked four away" (R2 1.3.209-11). The sheer inequity of the sentence undermines Richard's position as the king who metes out justice to his subjects.

Beyond the injustice and untimeliness of the sentence itself, the pseudo-pardon demonstrates that Richard lacks the confidence and majesty to offer a true royal pardon, and is merely trying to manipulate the situation to save face. He never uses the official, formulaic language of the royal pardon, and even switches quite frequently back and forth from the royal "we" to a more unauthoritative, informal "I" (R2 1.3.148-51). He appears unsure whether to set himself apart from the men he is sentencing or to speak with them as equals. After passing the sentences, he does not wait for anyone to sue for pardon, which, according to Novak, was an expected step in the process (20). Rather, Richard immediately realizes he might not have the strength to keep Bolingbroke out of England for ten years if he alienates John of Gaunt by banishing his relative. He tries—and fails—to cover his sense of weakness with a cloak of benevolence. This pseudo-pardon, however, by omitting the term "pardon," makes Richard's actions appear less like the

strong choice of a benevolent king, and more like the self-preserving concession of an insecure monarch.

For their part, the prisoners seem aware of Richard's vulnerability, responding accordingly. Though Mowbray accepts his sentence with grief and submission, Bolingbroke accepts his sentence with an unaffected air, saying "that sun that warms you here shall shine on me, / And those his golden beams to you here lent / Shall point on me and guild my banishment" (R2 1.3.145-47). The sun imagery—traditionally tied to the monarchy—suggests this comment is far more than a platitude; it may be a veiled threat, as Hugh Grady argues: "the context here supports premonitions about Bolingbroke as a politically ruthless, destructive character" (71). But whether or not Bolingbroke is already planning to overthrow Richard, his statement communicates none of the humiliation and submission Mowbray offers. He remains unaffected. Even John of Gaunt, who refuses to challenge Richard's right to the throne, remains unsatisfied with Richard's show of supposed benevolence. Having shortened the term by four years, Richard grows petulant when Gaunt remains ungrateful: "Thy son is banished upon good advice / Whereto thy tongue a party verdict gave. / Why at our justice seem'st thou then to lour?" (R2 1.3.233-35). Gaunt, for his part, finds Richard's attempt at royal mercy unsatisfactory. Richard's abortive attempt at magnanimity ends with characteristic insecurity and inconsistency. Though he uses the majestic plural, he seems to yearn for Gaunt's approval of his decision, demonstrating that the weakness of his character prevents him from offering a true royal pardon.

Although Richard's usurper Henry Bolingbroke does not possess hereditary right to the throne, he almost immediately, with confidence, offers an official royal pardon that demonstrates a union of justice and mercy absent from Richard's judgment. Unlike the pseudo-sentence Richard delivers, Henry IV's sentencing of Aumerle deals with a specific, punishable offense: treason. This scene follows the normal pattern of the royal pardon: the guilty party approaches the king to beg his pardon. Though Henry is a usurper, the English nobles recognize his status as king, so any threat to his person is perceived as treason. Unlike Mowbray and

Bolingbroke—who are banished on Richard’s insecure impulse rather than legal grounds—Aumerle clearly understands his guilt and begs for pardon. Both the crime and the punishment are clear. Unlike Richard, who punishes Mowbray and Bolingbroke without stating the crime, Henry IV has every right to condemn Aumerle for conspiring to kill him, since he possesses physical evidence of the plot. If he chooses not to pardon Aumerle, the sentence would be just, and Henry’s virtue would go unharmed.

However, Henry’s precarious position as usurper encourages him to err on the side of mercy rather than justice. His primary worry, as Lily Campbell notes, is suffering the same kind of rebellion he himself waged against Richard (214). Rather than fomenting discontent, he intends to gain Aumerle’s loyalty by pardoning his crime. Like Richard, Henry uses the royal pardon as a means of manipulation, but he executes the pardon with more poise, ceremony, and confidence, successfully using the royal pardon to build his kingly image. Surprised by Aumerle’s entrance and dramatic plea, Henry immediately sees an opportunity to solidify his own insecure throne, offering a pardon even before he has heard Aumerle’s crime: “To win thy afterlove I pardon thee” (R2 5.3.35). Though this initial exchange violates the prescribed order, Henry repeats his decision after hearing the charges against Aumerle, specifically and repeatedly confirming “I pardon him” (R2 5.3.131). His initial eagerness to pardon and his stated reason both confirm that Henry’s motive for offering a royal pardon is no more admirable than Richard’s: it is inherently self-interested, since “[a] King is most surely king-like in dispensing justice with mercy” (MacIsaac 144). Henry, however, faces the self-interest of his motives more honestly, acknowledging them outright rather than feigning benevolence as Richard does. Adding to the tone of uncertainty in the interview, Henry uses the majestic plural intermittently, demonstrating some of the same insecurities that plagued his predecessor (R2 5.3.79-82). Yet, despite his tenuous position and small displays of insecurity, Henry remains the authority with the power to grant a pardon or to enforce the penalty of the law, though he speaks very seldom during the interview. Ironically, though he orders his aunt to stand up three times to no avail, the family still

looks to him to mitigate Aumerle's sentence, which "gives Henry the shining opportunity to perform as a better King than Richard" (MacIsaac 144). Though his authority is stronger than Richard's, Henry still does not embody the powerful figure of a pardoning, benevolent king, but rather an uncertain, pragmatic usurper.

Aumerle and his parents exalt Henry for offering the pardon, unlike Bolingbroke and John of Gaunt, who esteemed Richard poorly. The Duchess pleads with Henry on her son's behalf, grounding her plea in the royal pardon's traditional root: benevolence, which she calls "love" (R2 5.3.88). Henry ought to pardon her son, she argues, to display his magnanimity. She clings to formulaic ceremony, refusing to rise to her feet until the king says the word "pardon," because "the word is short, but not so short as sweet; / No word like 'pardon' for kings' mouths so meet" (R2 5.3.117-18). Her words have double meaning in the context of the royal prerogative. First, as king, Henry has the authority to pardon her son's treason. Second, by using the word "pardon," Henry takes upon himself the office of the king, strengthening his own position, so that when he extends the pardon to Aumerle, his mother exclaims, "a god on earth thou art" (R2 5.3.136). Her effusive gratitude elevates him beyond the English throne to "a divine virtue" in (MacIsaac 144). Despite such enthusiastic praise, however, "legitimacy eludes [Henry IV], since he seized power by irregular means" (Bevington 52). Henry has effectively manufactured his own royal presence by using the royal pardon, but his position remains unconventional, and thus tenuous.

Act II of *Henry V* presents a final pardoning scene, though here the ruling has unfortunate consequences for the supplicants. By far the most ceremonious of the three scenes, these events strengthen Hal's position as King of England. The situation parallels Aumerle's plot in some ways: three nobles—Scroop, Cambridge, and Grey—have conspired to kill the king. However, Hal carefully manipulates the situation to test whether they merit his magnanimity. Before revealing he is aware of the plot, he remarks that he has pardoned a commoner for cursing him (*H5* 2.2.43). When they insist that the peasant should be punished, he springs the trap. The men's conspiracy does not have such honorable

intentions as Aumerle's; their plot comes not from an explicitly stated desire to reinstate a deposed king, but from a desire for power and French gold. Like Aumerle, once they are found out, they eagerly beg pardon, but Hal refuses their plea, condemning them to death for treason.

Hal appears as the most regal of the three kings during this episode, employing the royal pardon in the interests of the kingdom, rather than for personal gain. After demonstrating his power to grant royal pardon earlier in the scene, he denies his benevolence to the traitors, because they have betrayed England, or more accurately, his "royal person," as Ronald Berman labels it (6). Unlike his father and Richard, Hal directly renounces any self-interest when condemning the traitors:

Touching our person, seek we no revenge,  
 But we our kingdom's safety must so tender,  
 Whose ruin you have sought, that to her laws  
 We do deliver you. (*H5* 2.2.174-77)

Henry's attitude demonstrates confidence and self-assurance that do not appear in any of the other trial scenes. He pursues "image-making," manipulating the conspirators to make the revelation of the plot as impactful as possible (Bevington 61). Rather than Richard's petulant whining or his father's terse acquiescence, Hal offers a lengthy, flowery monologue upbraiding the traitors for their offense and rendering them to judgment, concluding, "for this revolt of thine, methinks, is like / Another fall of man. Their faults are open" (*H5* 2.2.141-42). Hal dominates the scene, confidently and passionately rendering his judgment, and explaining at length his motivation for rejecting their plea for mercy. He uses the majestic plural almost exclusively, lapsing into the first person only when he seems to refer specifically to his personal connections with the prisoners, one of whom was formerly a close friend (*H5* 2.2.8). Henry, by freely and ostentatiously exercising—even denying—the royal pardon, follows Novak's pattern of benevolence. His ceremonious actions both strengthen his own position as king and uphold the integrity of English law.

Scroop, Cambridge, and Grey all acknowledge Hal's sovereign authority to offer pardon, just as Aumerle's family did, but

they also invoke God, signaling that the authority of the monarchy has shifted yet again, so now the royal pardon relates more closely to a divine standard of justice. For instance, Cambridge says he is “[b]eseeching God, and you, to pardon me” (*H5* 2.2.160). The difference between Aumerle’s pardon and this scene is striking: Aumerle and his mother pleaded for Henry IV to have mercy, but never once did they call for divine pardon; the suit was solely political. By contrast, the traitors standing before Hal seem obsessed with the moral evil of their treachery. Though their fear of execution surely deepens their self-abasement, the confessions seem sincere. As Scroop laments, “our purposes God hath justly discovered, / And I repent my fault more than my death” (*H5* 2.2.151-52). By repeatedly coupling God and the king as the two wronged parties, the traitors elevate Hal’s kingly status beyond that of his father.

Because a king must have certain authority and confidence to successfully exercise his royal prerogative, the use of the pardon reveals the health of the monarchy in England throughout the second *Henriad*. The fickleness of royal pardons under Richard II clearly demonstrates the ineptitude, poor leadership, and lack of respect that lead Bolingbroke to seize the throne. Its gradual reinstatement under Henry IV and Henry V suggests that, although deposing Richard caused difficulty for England, some good came from the change, since “Richard, because of the nature of his true inner self, is unfit for his royal vocation” (Grady 93). Conversely, the use of the pardon also serves to fortify this new line. Through the royal prerogative, Henry IV strengthens his claim to kingship by deliberately taking on royal roles. Hal consummates the three-fold illustration of the pardon, exercising his kingly prerogative with an ostentation that builds his own fame and strengthens England herself.

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## Sex and the Soul: Beguine Spirituality and Eroticism in “Christabel”

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Though Samuel Taylor Coleridge wrote “Christabel” on the verge of the nineteenth century, it deliberately situates itself in a medieval tradition. It is composed in the archaic English, using words like “betrothèd,” “yesternight,” “moaneth,” “palfrey,” “unsandl’d,” and “wis.” Coleridge also uses archaic clauses, including “prayeth she,” “‘twas,” “who art thou,” and “camest thou.” The poem was written in the common measure, another nod to the medieval period. The common measure thrived during the Middle Ages because of poor literacy: its rhythm and rhyme scheme allow for content to be easily memorized and recited. Partly due to its form, the poem contains the lyrical buoyancy of a medieval fairytale. The poem’s folkloric imagery further situates the poem in the medieval tradition. For instance, the poem contrasts light and darkness within a quaint, pastoral forest setting. It also contains archetypes often found in fairytales, like the distressed maidens, knights, and thieves. The incorporation of medieval formal elements in “Christabel” invites consideration of other medieval ideas.

In this essay, I suggest “Christabel” draws on medieval Beguine spirituality. The poem’s folkloric tone, coupled with the very physical—almost vulgar—details of the plot, produce a tension reminiscent of Beguine mystical texts. I argue “Christabel,” like Beguine texts, recounts a spiritual experience that is simultaneously

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religious and erotic, a seemingly incongruous pairing that transgresses boundaries of religious propriety. This essay seeks to explore that tension, likening it to Beguine mystical texts. Focusing on Part I of the poem, I first draw out the poem's Biblical allusions, suggesting these allusions locate it in a Christian tradition, which allows the poem to be read in relation to other Christian texts. I argue that the allusions are dualistic in nature, confronting the spiritual with the carnal. I then argue that the poem is strongly erotic: its setting, Christabel's prayer, Geraldine's abduction, and the climactic bedroom scene. Finally, by showing how the poem's treatment of the spiritual and the sexual parallels Beguine mystical texts—by Hadewijch of Brabant, Beatrice of Nazareth, Mechthild of Magdenburg, and Margaret Porete—I argue that the poem's erotic threads do not make it less spiritual. Ultimately, I hope to demonstrate that "Christabel" portrays spirituality and eroticism as complementary, thus aligning itself with the Beguines' medieval spirituality.

"Christabel" evokes Christian religious tradition with a multitude of Biblical allusions. These allusions simultaneously invoke a spiritual and a carnal reality. The first important dual allusion is Christabel's name. Her name invites a parallel between her and Christ. Both are righteous, embodied souls who bear the cross and suffer at the hands of others. Christabel seems penitent at the end of Part I, as her "limbs relax, her countenance grows sad and soft," but this was after she herself fell from grace. Thus, her name seems to inappropriately recall Christ's sinlessness. Another dualistic Biblical allusion embedded in the poem is the Virgin Mary. Coleridge alludes to Mary more often than any other Biblical figure, with lines like, "Jesu, Maria, shield her well," "Mary mother, save me now," and "Praise we the Virgin all divine." Coleridge's fixation with Mary is especially significant to my argument, because Mary is a woman defined largely by her sexuality. She possesses the virtue of a mother's fruitfulness, but is also remarkably sinless in her conception. The Virgin Mary is defined by her purity, a complete absence of carnal reality. Ironically, she serves as a reminder of a pressing sexual reality because of her simultaneous participation in and exemption from it. This dualistic quality is also reflected in the

poem's allusion to the sacraments. Coleridge alludes to communion through Christabel's mother and her "wine of virtuous power," then to the sacrament of marriage in her promise to be present on Christabel's "wedding-day." At their core, sacraments are essentially earthly, physical rituals that invoke a spiritual grace. They link the perceived separation of earthly matters and spiritual matters, implying that a physical act can also be spiritual. The mention of the sacrament of marriage is also an important consideration, with wedding days implying consummation. Coleridge again uses a Christian allusion with an especially sexual implication.

Despite its Christian framework, "Christabel" is filled with dark, sensual images. Coleridge establishes this mood immediately, beginning on a "chilly" night with "thin gray cloud . . . spread on high." This scene occurs on the property of Sir Leoline, "the baron rich," whose absence the reader cannot help but mark. Instead, his "toothless mastiff bitch" barks at the night air, suggesting a presence unseen. The setting's dark mood and the poem's questions of presence produce an immediate tension: the sensual world—where darkness and clouds obscure vision, cold obscures touch, and the question of presence cannot be rationalized—is rendered inadequate. Coleridge builds his dark mood on the unknown, paradoxically heightening the importance of details the reader can actually perceive. The chilly night becomes more chilling, and the dog's barks become even louder than were they perceived in a normal sensory environment, one that does not admit uncertainty. In short, by beginning the poem in a dark sensory deficit, so to speak, Coleridge increases the sensuality of physical matter. Eroticism is a sensual, physical matter, so it is unique to the embodied. Christabel—as an embodied soul—is subject to all the earthly desires and sins associated with physicality. Nonetheless, Coleridge goes to great lengths to portray her as an innocent, pious young lady, one who inhabits the spiritual realm (she prays during her first appearance in the poem). The hour of and setting for her prayer—the midnight wood—however, seems to be in tension with the act. The poem's opening creates a tension between the material, embodied world and the ghostly, spiritual world.

Coleridge's characterization of Christabel is deeply erotic

despite her resonance with the spiritual. The poem represents her prayer, for instance, using highly physical language. Coleridge describes the sounds she makes in her prayers very erotically, contrasting the “silence” in which she “prayeth,” with “sighs” that she “heaved . . . soft and low.” He also describes the “ringlet curl” draping “from the lovely lady’s cheek,” a feminine charm that historically signifies intimacy and erotic love. The poem also sexualizes the surrounding landscape, describing a “huge, broad-breasted” oak tree and a “bare” forest. The wind “moaneth bleak,” and Coleridge reports breathlessness: “there is not wind enough in the air.” In addition to Christabel’s erotic physical appearance, the poem sexualizes the act of prayer itself. She prays—on her knees—for her fantasy “betrothèd knight,” the lover who is “far away” but filled her dreams “yesternight.” Christabel simultaneously possess the innocence of a faithful maiden and the sensuality of one who exudes eroticism.

The poem uses similarly physical language to describe Geraldine, paying special attention to her provocative faculties. When she first appears to Christabel, Geraldine is represented as a “damsel bright, / drest in a silken robe of white” with a “stately neck” and arms “bare,” “feet unsandl’d,” and “wild,” “entangled . . . hair.” Geraldine’s abduction is also sexually charged, suggesting a type of rape fantasy that relies on a mythic quality. The story is told retrospectively—a story within a story—giving it a dreamy tone despite its violent content. The language recounting the abduction is also erotic. Geraldine is cast as the “maid forlorn,” who “lain entranced” as she was taken by warriors, “choked” and “tied.” All the while, the palfrey “rode furiously behind.” The sexual innuendos make the scene erotic in a forbidden way, as violence and pleasure seem at odds. Nonetheless, it is the transgression’s forbiddenness (of physical violence into the realm of sexual pleasure) that increases the scene’s eroticism. In the same way, the poem intimates the forbiddenness of Geraldine and Christabel—two same-sex strangers—lying in bed naked together. This climactic scene’s vagueness heightens its suggestive, dark undercurrent of physicality.

All evidence points to a sexual encounter: Christabel’s deflowering by Geraldine. I contend this act is framed as a mystical

union. The language surrounding the climactic scene is intensely suggestive, even depicted with erotic language: the “little door” has a “key that fitted well” and “opened straight.” The gate is made of iron “within and without,” and during this passing “over the threshold,” Geraldine “sank, belike through pain.” This atmosphere of eroticism before the ambiguous bed scene implies a sexual act occurs between the two women. Yet, they engage in Christian pathways to grace—sacraments of sorts—before their union. Christabel lights a lamp “with twofold silver chain . . . fastened to an angel’s feet.” Only two stanzas earlier, she sees Geraldine through “a tongue of light, a fit of flame.” The act of lighting a lamp and the flame allude to the book of Acts: “they saw tongues like flames of a fire that separated and came to rest on each of them. And they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other tongues as the Spirit enabled” (2.3-4). As I mentioned above, the poem also alludes to other means of grace—including the sacraments of communion and marriage—all to build to this sexual encounter. Thus, the religious and the erotic coexist, building together as the poem progresses. This pairing essentially assigns the sexual act a spiritual significance.

This link between sexuality and spirituality is reminiscent of medieval Beguine spirituality. Beguine mystical texts were notably passionate, a passion often manifested in vivid descriptions of sensuality. Hadewijch of Brabant writes that her soul and the Holy Spirit “possess each other in mutual delight, mouth in mouth, heart in heart, body in body, soul in soul, while a single divine nature flows through them both and they both become one” (108). Using highly physical language, she describes complete union, likening her soul’s union with God to the ecstasy of a sexual encounter. Beatrice of Nazareth’s experience of living in proximity to God is also highly sensual and suggestive. She describes God’s nearness as “a marvelous bliss . . . an ecstatic sweetness, a great overpowering by the strength of love, and an overflowing abundance of immense delight” (89). She goes on to say she “feels [it in] her senses” (89).

Coleridge’s restraint, not disclosing the details of such an important scene, aligns his poem with mysticism. Like all mystical experience, the sexual act is vague and surreal. The indescribable quality of mysticism presents mystics with the difficulty of

communicating the inconceivable. The Beguines commonly likened this inconceivable intimacy with love and sex, their mystical writings often taking the shape of lyrical courtly love poems. The bulk of Hadewijch of Brabant's work is poetic and focuses on love's mysticism. Her poetry sometimes uses stanzas, sometimes couplets. The poetic expression of her spirituality is significant because poetry allows more expressiveness and overt emotion than prose. The Beguines believed this emotion was essential for achieving intimacy with the divine. Mechthild of Magdeburg also expresses her love of God in poetry charged with the principles of "*minnesang*, the German chivalric tradition of courtly love" (Bowie 49). For instance, when discussing "how God woos the soul and makes it wise in his love," Mechthild uses soft images like "precious dove," to refer to the soul God is courting (66). She then includes a list of well-mannered, yet flirtatious observations that God makes about his prospective bride:

Your feet are red,  
 Your feathers smooth,  
 Your mouth well-formed,  
 Your eyes beautiful,  
 Your head noble,  
 Your movements delightful. (66)

The Beguines used physicality to describe the indescribable, likening mystical union to love and sex. This airing manifested not only in their texts' content and structure, but also in their bodies: the Beguines often screamed in ecstasy during their visions. They were reported to lose all inhibitions and all control of their bodies, often quivering and flailing their limbs. Their experience of God was highly physical, even sexual or erotic.

The poem further aligns itself with Beguine spirituality through the transformative quality of Christabel's sexual act. Mysticism invariably transforms its experiencer, so the Beguines maintained that mysticism resulted in a type of annihilation of the soul. For Beguine mystic Margaret Porete, the goal of spirituality is the soul's total eclipse in a union, grounded in mutual love, with the divine. In this union, the soul and the divine being are no longer two distinct entities, but one single absolute whole, whose

nature is love itself. Porete had entered into this annihilation—this entwinement with the divine—when she composed *The Mirror of Simple Souls*. For, instead of assuming authorship of the book, she highlights her own soul’s ambiguity, referring to herself as the “Soul who had this book written” (qtd. in McGinn 247). Here, she essentially claims that “both God and the Soul are authors of *ce livre*” (McGinn 247). The making indistinct of identity—or the identity’s annihilation—seems present in the conclusion to Part I of “Christabel.” Christabel prays the morning after her deflowering, and the poem notes how she has changed: “Can this be she, / The lady, who knelt at the old oak tree?” Coleridge then describes Christabel with holy terms, suggesting her experience did not ruin her, but fundamentally changed her. The language surrounding this aftermath casts Christabel as a type of Beguine mystic. She has visions and constantly prays in a trance: “she doth smile, and she doth weep, / like a youthful hermitess, / beauteous in a wilderness,” who “praying always” experiences “a vision sweet” that gives “tingles in her feet.” The smiling, the weeping, and the tingles all parallel the physical ecstasy Beguines experienced during their prayer and mystical visions. The reference to Christabel as a “hermitess” in the “wilderness” evokes Beguine spirituality, as they strove toward asceticism like Christ’s in the wilderness.

Coleridge’s portrayal of eroticism and spirituality as complementary also aligns with Beguine spirituality. Contrary to Augustinian theology, with its stigma surrounding sex’s sinfulness, Coleridge and Beguine texts frame sexuality as consistent with spirituality, using eroticism as a way of communicating God’s grace. The poem’s eroticism intensifies, rather than detracts from, the sacredness of the spiritual. As Rita Perintfalvi argues, “it is exactly through the transgression in mysticism and eroticism that one can enter the sphere of the sacred” (230). The perceived tension between sex and spirituality is made null by what they have in common: they are both experiences of authentic love and intimacy. Coleridge hints at this connection when Geraldine foretells Christabel’s sexual and mystical union, telling her she “didst bring her home with thee in love and in charity.” Love and charity lead to grace. Both “Christabel” and Beguine mystical texts point to this truth of love

and charity through eroticism. There remains tension between the sexual and the spiritual, but the reconciliation of this transgression yields authentic intimacy with God. In this way, the interaction of eroticism and spirituality produces a whole greater than the sum of its parts.

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## The Most Enlightened of All Possible Worlds: Reconciling Reason and Emotion in *Candide*

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The Enlightenment is often regarded as a time focused on pure logic, a time when science began to thrive and philosophers scorned emotion as irrational and detrimental to reason. Enlightenment thinkers did emphasize logic over emotion, but they did not always go to the extreme of suggesting the complete disqualification of emotion. Rather, they attempted to find ways to minimize emotion's negative impacts on reason (Schmitter). Additionally, as the Enlightenment period began to decline, many French philosophers turned to aestheticism, which emphasized that emotion could be valuable in relationship to reason (Morizot). The literature of the time—particularly philosophic writing—exemplifies the tension between reason and emotion during the French Enlightenment and the turn toward aestheticism. French writer and philosopher François-Marie d'Arouet, better known as Voltaire, addresses this tension in his well-known work *Candide*. In this novel, Voltaire explores a logic-based utopia—in the form of the country of El Dorado—"offer[ing] a classic example of abstract utopian idealism" (Ansart 37). At first glance, El Dorado seems an entirely logical utopia, conveniently supporting the Enlightenment's emphasis on reason over emotion. However, Voltaire's use of El Dorado is much more complex, as he uses the logical El Dorado in conjunction with the emotional Candide to resolve the central tension between reason and emotion in Enlightenment thought. Voltaire draws not only from Enlightenment thought, but also from French aesthetics, sometimes even challenging stereotypical Enlightenment stances on emotion. Though scholars have explored

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the use of utopia and the role of emotion in *Candide*, they have not fully addressed Voltaire's reconciliation of reason and emotion, especially within its historical and philosophical contexts. In *Candide*, Voltaire juxtaposes the rational utopia of El Dorado with Candide's travels in the natural world to explore the tensions between reason and emotion. This juxtaposition allows Voltaire to address the Enlightenment interest in the relationship between reason and emotion, concluding that both reason and emotion are important for human thought and experience, though emotion should be subordinate to and tempered by reason.

In the early-eighteenth century, many philosophers sought to reconcile emotion and logic, provoking much discussion about the relationship between the soul and the body. This discussion contributed to the Enlightenment view of the relationship between emotion and reason by asking how the soul related one's emotions to one's rational faculties. Late-seventeenth- and early-eighteenth-century thinkers had such difficulty reconciling emotions with reason that they began to speculate people might even be controlled by two separate souls, as Walter Charleton suggests in his 1674 *Natural History of the Passions*: "I have declared my assent to their opinion, who hold that in every individual Man, there are *two* distinct *Souls*, coexistent, conjoined, and cooperating; one, only *Rational*, by which he is made a Reasonable creature; the other, *Sensitive*, by virtue whereof he participateth also of Life and Sense." The theorization of another soul—as a way to resolve tensions between reason and emotion—reveals just how complex this issue was during the Enlightenment.

In *Candide*, Voltaire exemplifies the complexity of this relationship through the contradictions present in the characterization of Candide. Voltaire describes Candide as an attentive student to Pangloss's particular brand of reason. Even so, Voltaire makes clear that Candide is still motivated primarily by his emotions. Describing Candide's lessons with Pangloss, the text explains, "Candide listened attentively and believed implicitly; for he found Miss Cunégonde exceedingly pretty, though he never had the courage to tell her so" (356). Here, Voltaire reveals that even when Candide is attentive to reason, he is only attentive because

of his emotional motivations. This characterization reveals just how closely interlocked emotion and logic are, and just how easily one can influence the other. Voltaire foregrounds the complex relationship between emotion and reason, making it exceedingly clear just how difficult it is to separate the two. Voltaire's emphasis on the difficulty of separating emotion and reason—as evidenced in the characterization of Candide—exemplifies the difficult task of resolving the tensions between emotion and reason during the Enlightenment.

As Enlightenment thinkers began to establish that emotion and reason are difficult—if not impossible—to separate, they also began to propose ways to use reason to temper emotion. At the beginning of the eighteenth century, the vocabulary used to describe emotions changed. One particularly significant change was the newly drawn distinction between “sentiment” and “passion.” The term “sentiment” now “specified calm emotions, perhaps tempered by reflection or refined in some other way; whereas, ‘passion’ indicated a raw, uncorrected emotion, which may be ‘violent’ in the sense of . . . being unresponsive to reason” (Schmitter). This distinction became especially important because it defined the exact issue Enlightenment thinkers had with emotion: they did not support emotion that refused to subject itself to reason. The distinction between sentiment and passion is evident in *Candide*, though Voltaire does not so obviously state it. However, he draws a definite distinction between emotion tempered by reason and emotion untempered by reason, representing these two types of emotion thorough the El Doradans and Candide, respectively. The El Doradans do display emotion—and even admit so—yet they temper their emotion with reason. The old man Candide talks to in El Dorado says that “they [the wisest princes] decreed . . . that henceforth no inhabitant of our little kingdom should ever leave it; and this rule is what has preserved our innocence and happiness” (382). The El Doradans have emotion—happiness—but they temper this emotion with reason, as they realize that isolation rationally provides the best way to preserve their country and their happiness. Voltaire contrasts the El Doradans’ tempered emotion, or sentiment, with Candide’s untempered passion. After a month

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in El Dorado, Candide tells Cacambo, “it’s true my friend, I’ll say it again, the castle where I was born does not compare with the land where we now are; but Miss Cunégonde is not here” (384). Candide is ruled by his passion for Cunégonde—an emotion untempered by reason. He realizes El Dorado is rationally the best possible place, but then decides not to stay, instead continuing his pursuit of Cunégonde. Voltaire uses the distinction between sentiment and passion to suggest emotion is not, perhaps, inherently corruptive, but that it must be subject to reason to avoid negative effects.

Voltaire’s work also explores another Enlightenment fascination: the distinction between emotion as a cause and emotion as an effect. Voltaire even ironically appeals to pathos in order to criticize emotion as a causal influence. During the French Enlightenment, views on emotion shifted and became “recast as increasingly complex, ever-changing experiences” and “reconfigured as constitutive elements of the self, rather than as strange and damaging forces, and as such, they became the object of a wide-ranging literary and philosophical discourse” (Pacini 103). In light of this evolving view of emotions, Voltaire plays with the idea of emotion as positive, though taking care to qualify when it can be positive. He seems to suggest emotion as a cause is negative, because it influences logic, resulting in skewed or perverted reasoning. Voltaire, however, also suggests emotion as an effect is not bad, even seeming to say positive emotions should logically follow good reasoning.

Jean-Pierre de Crousaz, a Swiss theologian who attacked Gottfried Wilhelm Leibniz’s philosophy, was one of Voltaire’s influences. Crousaz concluded that “men are happy in so far as they are reasonable,” and it seems Voltaire’s opinion follows suit (Morizot). Voltaire represents this view in *Candide* almost humorously, using Pangloss to reinforce this way of thinking, then employing pathos to critique emotion as a causal influence. The original description of Pangloss’s philosophy notes “he proved admirably that there cannot possibly be an effect without a cause” (356). Here, Voltaire contends that cause and effect must exist, because even Pangloss—who Voltaire portrays as a great fool—realizes so. However, while Pangloss simply recognizes this distinction, the

text expounds upon it to show that emotion's place is as an effect, not as a cause. Voltaire then expands this philosophical exploration through his description of two burials (the two men employing Cunégonde as a mistress), saying "the Holy Brotherhood came to investigate the house; they buried the inquisitor in a fine church, and threw Issachar on the dunghill" (368). Ironically, Voltaire here appeals to pathos to evoke a sense of injustice, using an emotional response to critique emotion as a cause. Voltaire shows how emotion—religious intolerance and hatred—can result in negative consequences (such as treating two men very differently, despite them committing the exact same sin). Voltaire contrasts this thread with the El Doradans, who possess positive emotions as an effect of their logic-oriented society. In this way, Voltaire shows that while emotion as an effect can be harmless, or even positive, emotion as a cause results in serious negative consequences.

Voltaire builds from this conclusion to suggest that, just as emotion as an effect can be a good thing, so can emotion as a means for evaluating reason. During the movement toward aestheticism in France—which Voltaire both contributed to and was influenced by—philosophers highlighted a connection between truth and beauty similar to Keats: "Beauty is truth, truth beauty, - that is all / Ye know on earth, and all ye need to know." According to many eighteenth-century French aestheticists, such as Father André, "there is no distinction between *beauty* and *truth*" (Morizot). David Hume unpacks the synonymy of beauty and truth, connecting it to the Enlightenment tension between reason and emotion: "It would seem, that the very essence of beauty consists in its power of producing pleasure. . . . and if beauty is so universally the subject of vanity, it is only from its being the cause of pleasure." For Hume and others, beauty produces pleasant emotions because beauty is truth and truth should produce pleasant emotions. Since Enlightenment thinkers sought truth through reason, the interrelation of truth and beauty ties emotion to reason as an evaluation of reason, since emotion is an evaluation of beauty and beauty is truth. For the Enlightenment thought from which eighteenth-century French aestheticism emerged, "the classical dictum that beauty is truth holds good; beauty is truth perceived through the feeling of

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pleasure” (Bristow). This line of thought suggests that if positive emotions result from beauty, and if beauty is truth, and if truth is reason’s goal, then the presence of positive emotions can be used to evaluate the logic used to arrive at truth.

Using emotion to evaluate reason is the converse of the idea that positive emotions are an effect of reason. Therefore, the positive emotions displayed by the El Doradans also demonstrate that emotions can be used to evaluate reason. The old man in El Dorado says, “the wisest princes of their house were those who had never left their native valley; they decreed, with the consent of the nation, that henceforth no inhabitant of our little kingdom should ever leave it; and this rule is what has preserved our innocence and our happiness” (382). In the context of the French Enlightenment and aestheticism, the happiness produced by the El Doradans’ decision to seclude themselves acts as emotive proof their decision was indeed rational. By showing that emotion can be used to evaluate reason, Voltaire once again imbues emotion with value, challenging the common view that he might have been strictly opposed to emotion.

By so deeply exploring emotion’s role, Voltaire suggests emotion is not inherently detrimental to reasoning and that pure reason is not as desirable as some Enlightenment philosophers claimed. The critique of reason seems especially significant in the context of Voltaire’s position as an Enlightenment writer. Enlightenment thinkers not only believed in “freedom and equality for all, founded, ostensibly, upon principles of human reason,” but also in “the characteristic expectation of the age that philosophy (in [a] broad sense) would dramatically improve human life” (Bristow). Voltaire directly counters this expectation by not only attacking Leibniz’s optimism as “a philosophical chimera produced when dialectical reason remains detached from brute empirical facts,” but also by discrediting the other extreme: an entirely empirical philosophy (Shank).

Voltaire critiques this overly empirical outlook through the character of Pocourante, the Venetian nobleman who is rumored to have never experienced any hardships. However, Voltaire quickly makes it clear that, though Pocourante possesses everything

he could possibly want, he is indifferent and does not actually enjoy any of his possessions. Pococurante's dismal philosophy of dissatisfaction attracts Candide: "Candide, who had been trained never to judge for himself, was much astonished by what he heard; and Martin found Pococurante's way of thinking quite rational" (401). This description of Candide's ignorance inverts Immanuel Kant's definition of Enlightenment as "man's emergence from his self-imposed nonage. Nonage is the inability to use one's own understanding without another's guidance." By casting Candide as the definitional opposite of Enlightenment, Voltaire makes it clear Candide's fascination with Pococurante's nonchalance is not supposed to recommend this philosophy: "Don't you see, said Martin, that he is disgusted with everything he possesses? Plato said, a long time ago, that the best stomachs are not those which refuse all food" (401). Pococurante, by the standards of reason, possesses everything he could desire; he even provides logical reasons for why none of these things delight him. In this way, Voltaire not only portrays Candide's gullible nature and inability to think for himself as a hindrance to Enlightenment, but he also critiques excessive empiricism. Voltaire's depiction of Pococurante reveals a belief that while reason may be more important than emotion, sacrificing all emotion for pure empirical reason is similarly undesirable.

Taking into account all the ways Voltaire represents reason and emotion, it seems he doesn't villainize emotion and advise an entirely logical approach to life. Rather he attempts to resolve the tension between emotion and reason that was such a pressing issue during the eighteenth century. Voltaire does not oversimplify this tension, but addresses it in all its complexity. He explores the various roles of emotion and the subsequent relationships between reason and emotion, considering the various ways these roles and relationships produce positive or negative consequences. Voltaire seems to conclude that emotion is not inherently bad and that reason is not singularly good. Ultimately, Voltaire suggests emotion should be subordinate to reason, and that it should be an effect rather than a cause, concluding that emotion can be used to evaluate reason. He also, though, discusses the differences between positive and negative emotion—and how difficult it is to separate

the two—alongside reason’s ability to temper emotion. Even in his conclusions, Voltaire continues to recognize the complexity of the relationship between reason and emotion, never trying to offer a final definition of the ideal balance between the two. Rather, Voltaire arrives at a similar point to the one reached by Kant: “Thus we observe here as elsewhere in human affairs, in which almost everything is paradoxical, a surprising and unexpected course of events.” While *Candide* explores the known natural world and the unknown utopia of El Dorado, Voltaire explores the tension between reason and emotion.

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## Mouse and Wife: Trauma, Repetition, and Marriage in Art Spiegelman's *Maus*

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*Maus I and II* follow Art Spiegelman's father, Vladek, through the Holocaust and his old age. By including both Vladek's Holocaust story and his life as an old man who has survived, the text exposes not only the horrors of being a Jew in Nazi Germany, but also the haunting ways in which the trauma of Auschwitz can never be forgotten or abandoned by those who experienced them. Using Sigmund Freud's theories of trauma from *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* reveals that even though Vladek escaped with his life, he may not have survived in the fullest sense. Over the course of the two volumes, readers can track Vladek's compulsions to repeat certain acts and behaviors in order to make sense of them. These repeated behaviors include hoarding seemingly unnecessary, random objects that might be of use later, and saving money to the point of being miserly just in case of an unforeseen emergency. By replicating the actions that got him through the Holocaust, Vladek takes on an active role through which he engages with the situation rather than being the passive victim he was in Auschwitz. These acts of repetition with the goal of mastery are not limited to inanimate objects, however. Several years after the Holocaust, Vladek again is traumatized by the suicide of his beloved wife, Anja. In an effort to escape the trauma of the Holocaust and his failed marriage, Vladek attempts to achieve a sense of mastery over both the Holocaust and Anja's death by repeating the union of marriage with Mala.

Freud likens trauma to a physical wound: anything that is forcible enough to break through the outer layers that protect the subject, whether it be skin or psyche. Traumas are “any excitations from outside which are powerful enough to break through the protective shield” (Freud 33). These events can cause traumatic neuroses, which are built primarily from surprise and fright—for Freud, “fright” has a specific meaning, separate from fear and anxiety (11). Fright is the experience of meeting danger without being properly warned or prepared; fear is a focused form of fright that depends upon a certain object to be feared; anxiety is the expectation of and preparation for danger, even if the danger is unknown (Freud 11). Throughout *Maus I* and *II*, Vladek experiences various frights and anxieties. I will focus on the frights and anxieties related to his marriages.

In addition to trauma, frights, and anxieties, *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* also explores the idea of mastery, which is the conversion of the passive role of experiencing trauma into an active role of controlling it. Freud uses the example of his grandson’s “fort/da” game as an example of this mastery: the child is upset that his mother leaves and that he cannot control her, so he turns to throwing his toys and pulling them back with a string as a situation he *can* control, and thus he finds pleasure (14-15). Vladek is much like this grandchild: he is separated from Anja in a way he cannot control (the Holocaust, then her suicide), so he turns to a situation he can actively control: his relationship with his second wife, Mala.

In order to fully grasp the stress of their separation, it is important to understand Vladek and Anja’s relationship. Vladek reveals the story of how he met Anja in the first volume, explaining to Artie “if you talked a little to her, you started loving her more and more” (18). After meeting, marrying, and having their first son, Richieu, Anja and Vladek never separate until the Holocaust: “When we came [to Auschwitz], they pushed in one way the men, and somewhere else the women. I waved very fast goodbye to Anja. But you understand, **never** Anja and I were separated! The war put us apart. But always, before and after, we were together” (*Maus II* 24-25). Vladek never had to live without Anja before being separated at Auschwitz, so this separation troubles them both deeply. After

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the separation, all of his actions are dedicated to surviving for her and then finding her so they may be reunited. Anja and Vladek are liberated from their camps separately, but readers are exposed only to Vladek's liberation story, which takes several twists and turns until he is fully free and able to begin looking for her. Upon being freed from Auschwitz, Vladek sets out to find Anja. When he begins asking around for her in Poland, he learns she is alive and alone in Sosnowiec: "So when I heard Anja is alive I stopped everything to go only back to Sosnowiec. I traded my things to have gifts. We went, sometimes by foot, sometimes by train . . . but I went only straight to Poland. It took three or four weeks" (*Maus II* 133-5). Upon their reunion in Sosnowiec, the Holocaust narrative of *Maus* has finished, never filling in the portion of Anja and Vladek's post-war life up until her death in 1968.

Readers learn the details of Anja's death from "Prisoner on the Hell Planet: A Case History," a comic inserted into *Maus's* narrative present. In 1968, Anja commits suicide by cutting her wrists, ingesting pills, and letting herself die in the bathtub of their home (*Maus I* 100). Vladek finds her body, a deeply traumatizing event for him. Vladek laments "Oy, Artie! Why? **Why!** Such a tragedy! And not even a note!!!" (*Maus I* 101). This discovery is a fright in the Freudian sense: even though Vladek faces no physical danger at this point, he has been exposed to a psychological and emotional danger for which he was not prepared. Following the discovery, Vladek is incapable of normal function: "That night was bad. . . . My father insisted we sleep on the floor—an old Jewish custom, I guess. He held me and moaned to himself all night. I was uncomfortable. . . . We were scared!" (*Maus I* 102). At this point, Vladek's fright has likely turned into fear. He now has a specific thing to fear: being alone. The initial trauma of discovering a deceased loved one is to be expected. However, it is the way Vladek seeks to master this trauma that may be unexpected. Rather than becoming completely engrossed in the past to the point he can no longer function in the present, Vladek attempts to master his lost marriage by remarrying.

The Holocaust has taken away numerous members of both Vladek and Anja's families—including their first-born son Richieu—

so preserving the family unit is itself a form of mastery over the Holocaust and, by extension, Anja's suicide. Readers do not know exactly what drove Anja to kill herself, but it is likely the trauma of the Holocaust played a role. By marrying Mala, Vladek repeats the experience of marriage in order to master the disintegration of his original family caused by the Holocaust. His son Artie has taken the place of Richieu and his new wife Mala has replaced Anja. The restructuring of his family unit allows Vladek to reassert himself as an active patriarch rather than a passive victim who loses the people who surround him. This reformation of the family unit also gives Vladek something to do: Anja pushed him to survive the Holocaust; Mala pushes him through the far less perilous trials of old age.

Though Vladek does master the loss of family by remarrying, this mastery is somewhat superficial, because his relationship with Mala is extremely dysfunctional. Spiegelman depicts Vladek and Mala fighting numerous times, typically over trifles such as using wire coat hangers instead of wooden ones (*Maus I* 11). In an aside addressing readers directly, Spiegelman bluntly states "They didn't get along" (*Maus I* 11). Vladek's personality is quite different from Mala's. Reminiscing about his childhood, Artie somewhat playfully tells Mala how Vladek used to force him to eat everything on his plate; Vladek forcefully asserts "yes! So it has to be. Always you must eat all what is on your plate" (*Maus I* 43). To this Mala replies with mild disdain: "Acch, Vladek" (*Maus I* 43). Their exchange exposes Vladek's continued belief in the behaviors he employed to survive the Holocaust, while Mala has been able to abandon these actions and live fully in the present. Though readers might expect Mala to be a positive influence on Vladek and help him move past the Holocaust, he constantly reprimands her for not supporting his compulsions: Mala confesses to Artie that "he drives me crazy! He won't even let me throw out the plastic pitcher he took from his hospital room last year! He's more attached to things than to people!" (*Maus I* 93). Clearly distraught, she urges Artie to rearrange the books he moved while looking for his mother's diary: "WAIT! Put everything back exactly like it was, or I'll never hear the end of it!" (*Maus I* 93). Mala has come to expect Vladek to act out his Freudian anxieties. These anxieties, grown out of the Holocaust,

compel Vladek to hoard objects that may be helpful (to him) someday, even though this danger will never come. Still, endlessly, he repeats his arguments with Mala in an attempt to overcome the origins of his psychological traumas.

Finally, Mala can no longer accept Vladek's compulsions and anxieties, so she leaves him. Even though neither Mala nor Vladek seem happy in their marriage, Mala's absence causes Vladek significant distress. He calls Artie, explains the situation, and asks him—through tears—to stay with him in the Catskills (*Maus II* 19). He moans in his sleep, just like he did following Anja's death (*Maus II* 74). Though it is obvious to Artie and to readers that Mala had many reasons for leaving such an antagonistic relationship, Vladek claims she left solely for financial reasons:

She wants that all my money, what I worked so hard all my life, it will only be for her . . . [we went] to the bank to renew some bonds. One I wanted in trust of Mala, one for my brother in Israel, and one I wanted for you . . . but she didn't like I'll put for you and Pinek **anything**—she screamed like a crazy person! She drove away and left me by the bank, and when I walked home she was gone already. (*Maus II* 19)

This assertion that Mala's motives were strictly fiscal is the ultimate form of mastery: because Anja's death was a suicide, she left Vladek on her own terms before he could prepare for it, so Vladek married Mala in an attempt to master her death. Therefore, he cannot allow his relationship with Mala to disintegrate in the same way his marriage with Anja did—he has to agree to the terms on which they separate, if not dictate them. By agreeing to the monetary portion of her motive, he is able to ignore their general incompatibility and thus achieve mastery. Without Mala, however, Vladek's family unit has again fallen apart, throwing him into a state of fright because he is unprepared to deal with the danger of being elderly on his own. As Artie notes, "I think their battle keeps him going. He's been a bizarre combination of helplessness and maniacal energy ever since she left" (*Maus II* 120).

When Vladek's health declines, Mala begrudgingly returns to him. In this sense, Vladek has achieved mastery in two ways. First, he has successfully turned the passive loss of Anja into an active

regaining of Mala, thus preserving his family unit and exorcising his fright and anxiety. Second, he has mastered Mala in the sense that he has power over her. When Artie asks her why they got back together, she answers, “I don’t know. I got a call from the hospital and felt sorry for him. I went over. I **swore** I’d never see him again, but I’m just a sucker. He talked until I was blue in the face . . . and here I am. . . . But now he’s more confused and dependent. . . . What can I do? He **trapped** me” (*Maus II* 122). In addition to using Mala as a means to achieve mastery, he has also become quite literally Mala’s master. However, Vladek’s rapidly declining health makes the situation more sympathetic than tyrannical. Even though she has returned, she cannot fix his fear of death.

Though *Maus* contains several instances of repetition in an attempt to achieve mastery over a previously experienced trauma, Vladek’s relationship with Mala is particularly interesting because it shows an attempt to master the Holocaust and Anja’s suicide simultaneously. By reentering the union of marriage, Vladek has overcome the disintegration of his family unit caused by the Holocaust and, later, Anja’s death. Though his relationship with Mala restores Vladek’s family unit, it is turbulent because he repeats actions that recall the Holocaust, while Mala refuses to participate in them. Eventually, this antagonism leads Mala to leave, but because Vladek has become her master—in addition to using her to achieve mastery—she cannot stay away, so she returns to him following his decline in health. This return once again completes Vladek’s family unit. Finally, through Mala’s return, Vladek has mastered Anja’s suicide: instead of passively losing his wife, this time she has returned, and Vladek actively accepts her return. He dies shortly after their reunion: perhaps this mastery was all Vladek needed to relinquish the fear of death the Holocaust and Anja’s suicide caused.

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## “Better than Ben Hur”: The South as Seen by Shreve McCannon in *Absalom, Absalom!*

Addie Booth

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In the opening pages of *Absalom, Absalom!*, Quentin Compson is described as “an empty hall echoing with sonorous defeated names; he was not a being, an entity, he was a commonwealth” (6). One defining characteristic of Southern culture—especially in Faulkner’s Yoknapatawpha County—is the web of connections between individuals and families and the stories everyone seems to know about everyone else. As Thomas Sutpen’s story floats through the wisteria-laced porches of Jefferson and is retold and reinterpreted by each narrator in *Absalom*, these interpersonal and interfamilial connections are presented as products of the South. In this way, storytelling becomes the medium through which the South is represented in the novel. As a result, the critical conversation surrounding *Absalom* is dominated by a focus on the novel’s narrative structure. Approaches to this topic range from analysis of Sutpen’s indirect narration and the development of his voice, to Quentin and Shreve’s combined unreliable narration, to Rosa Coldfield’s biased, vengeful point of view. Through each character’s narrative, however, the pieces of Southern culture come together.

Richard Poirier locates Quentin as the novel’s central narrator, noting he is “nearly allowed to appropriate the position of the author” (13). I agree that Quentin is the novel’s most essential narrator. Nevertheless, I argue that centrality is based on his role:

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he tells Sutpen's tale to an outsider, a non-Southerner, Shreve McCannon. A large majority of Sutpen's story in *Absalom* is told to or by Shreve after he asks Quentin: "Tell me about the South. What's it like there. What do they do there. Why do they live there. Why do they live at all" (181). When Quentin leaves the South for Harvard, he cannot cut the strings that attach him to his home; he is tied to it, controlled by it, and ultimately embodies it. As he passes on Sutpen's story, he answers Shreve's questions, showing him what the South is like. Looking at the characters involved in Sutpen's story, the familial and social values represented within it, which accounts are deemed important, and which are not, we can see how Southern culture is presented specifically through the act of storytelling in *Absalom*.

Considering first how Quentin represents his home, it is important to note that Quentin's Southern identity—the "commonwealth" he has become—is intrinsically tied to his personal identity. At the beginning of the novel, he is described as being "two separate Quentins": one who is real and living and preparing to go to Harvard, and one who is a "ghost" stuck listening about "old ghost-times," since he was born and bred in the same Deep South as those to whom he listens and those about whom he hears (3). As Quentin first sits listening to Rosa Coldfield—in the novel's first account of Sutpen's story—he also listens to the "two separate Quentins" in his mind, attempting to make sense of Sutpen's story. One Quentin leaves the story distanced and impersonal, while the other interjects with Miss Rosa's details and personal bias. This internal conversation reveals that one Quentin—the real and Harvard-bound—tries to separate himself from the other, the ghost of those before and around him, but finds it impossible. Quentin Compson's role as both listener and narrator elucidates the inextricable connections of past and present, people and events, in Southern culture.

The image of the South Shreve receives from Quentin is not a picturesque one. Quentin does not present a genteel, easy life, but a harsh reality where many Southern stereotypes are referenced and often confirmed. After Quentin receives a letter from his father announcing Miss Rosa's death, the novel introduces Shreve as he

asks his first question about Miss Rosa: “She was no kin to you, no kin to you at all, that there was actually one Southern Bayard or Guinevere who was no kin to you? then what did she die for?” (181). Shreve tries to understand why someone outside of Quentin’s family would be so important; why a story she told would be worth repeating if it never concerned Quentin in the first place. Shreve also implies here that his outsider expectations of the South point toward incest, a common stereotype of poor whites in the Deep South. The possibility of incest surfaces throughout the story of Sutpen’s children. In several accounts, Henry’s possible incestuous love for his sister is described as he is merged with Charles Bon in the role of Judith’s seducer: “In fact, perhaps this is the pure and perfect incest: the brother realizing that the sister’s virginity must be destroyed to have existed at all, taking that virginity in the person of the brother-in-law, the man whom he would be if he could become, metamorphose into the lover” (76). While incest is never confirmed in the story, its suggestion in multiple accounts and the fact it is never rejected or denied, reinforce the stereotype and affect Shreve’s impression of the South.

On a larger and perhaps more obvious scale, the Southern social structure—including tensions regarding race and class—is also presented to Shreve throughout this story. Thadious Davis claims “Shreve comes to [Sutpen’s] legend with an image of the South’s depravity and he concludes with a confirmation of it” (qtd. in Puxan 539). The conflict that sparks the development of Sutpen’s “design” emerges from an awareness of social and racial divisions. As Sutpen narrates his past to Mr. Compson, he describes the moment when he realizes his place in Southern society and decides to attempt to break free from it. Coming from the West Virginia mountains, Sutpen was ignorant of the South’s defining social distinctions when he moved to the Tidewater region of Virginia. He believed that “some people were spawned in one place and some in another, some spawned rich . . . and some not” not realizing the importance placed on making a name for yourself and forcefully moving from one class to another (222). Quentin tells Shreve that Sutpen “had hardly heard of such a world until he fell into it” (222). After Sutpen is told by a black servant to use the backdoor

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of a neighbor's house, he has a revelation about the society he has entered. He contemplates the situation and eventually decides that "to combat them you have got to have what they have that made them do what the man did. You got to have land and niggers and a fine house to combat them with" (238). Donald Kartiganer explains that "Sutpen's face is the community's own, confounded to larger-than-life-size proportions," describing how Sutpen forces Jefferson (and by extension, Shreve) to reflect on its values as he performs the community's social expectations in a forward, abrasive manner (291). When Shreve hears the story of Sutpen's upbringing and the origin of the "design" that dictates the rest of the tale, he receives a sense of Southern ideals, learning how the social structure is formed and maintained.

Shreve learns about the existence of racial tensions and prejudices, an especially important facet of this Southern social structure. As Quentin recounts more details of Sutpen's story (and as he and Shreve create their own), these prejudices infiltrate the narrative and precipitate many of the tale's crucial events. As Marta Puxan claims "blackness becomes the touchstone that precipitates the downfall of Sutpen's dynasty" (539). When Sutpen moves to the West Indies to oversee his own plantation and begin his legacy, his plan is interrupted once he realizes that the woman he takes as his wife, Eulalia Bon, has "negro blood" (380). Since this miscegenation was considered inappropriate and would taint his legacy, Sutpen repudiates her and their son, Charles Bon, deciding to relocate his "design" to Yoknapatawpha County. As Quentin and Shreve expand on the story of Sutpen's children later in the novel, the fact that Charles is from black descent becomes a critical detail. Charles attends college in Mississippi and meets Henry Sutpen, but Thomas Sutpen refuses to acknowledge Charles as his son until it becomes apparent Charles intends to marry Judith, which would result not only in incest, but also in a further "tainting" of Sutpen's legacy. What transpires after Thomas Sutpen shares this information with Henry (in order to prevent the marriage) is imagined by Quentin and Shreve based only on their own assumptions. This section is riddled with the words "maybe" and "probably" as the two try to piece together the story in a way that seems logical to them

within Southern culture. In this way, as Shreve participates in the storytelling just as much as Quentin, he learns the social “rights” and “wrongs” of Southern culture.

When we consider whose narratives of the Sutpen story are represented and whose are excluded, these stereotypically Southern views on race appear even clearer. Clytemnestra Sutpen, Sutpen’s daughter by a black slave at Sutpen’s Hundred, is the only person who could provide a first-hand account of the entire Sutpen tale in Jefferson. However, her narrative is not included in *Absalom*. Shreve hears the perspectives of Miss Rosa, Mr. Compson (and indirectly, Thomas Sutpen), and Quentin, but the most thorough, and perhaps most reliable voice, is silenced. Doreen Fowler, referencing Toni Morrison’s *Playing in the Dark*, argues the narratives within *Absalom* work to “avert the critical gaze from the racial object to the racial subject; from the described and imagined to the describers and imaginers” (132). I argue, though, that *Absalom* does not fully realize Morrison’s goal, because it silences the African American voice. As Shreve receives the Sutpen story from white narrators, he is shown the South’s racial divide. The absence of Clytie’s voice, while unfortunate, is telling in antebellum Southern culture.

Interconnectedness is perhaps the characteristic Shreve learns and ultimately understands the best about the South. As the novel progresses, Shreve is pulled further into the story and his role as storyteller becomes greater. As Shreve retells and recreates Sutpen’s legend, Quentin reflects that “he sounds just like Father” (188). Shreve later says to Quentin, “don’t say it’s just me that sounds like your old man” (271). These two musings show the interconnectedness of Quentin’s Southern culture—how people become intertwined with the lives and stories of those around them, and how the past is inescapable. Shreve says of the South, it is a place where people “outlive [them]selves by years and years and years” (377). Quentin reiterates this idea as he reflects on the cycle of storytelling:

Maybe we are both Father. Maybe nothing ever happens once and is finished. Maybe happen is never once but like ripples maybe on water after the pebble sinks, the ripples moving on, spreading, the pool attached by a narrow

umbilical water-cord to the next pool which the first pool feeds, has fed, did feed, let this second pool contain a different temperature of water, a different molecularity of having seen, felt, remembered, reflect in a different tone the infinite unchanging sky, it doesn't matter: that pebble's watery echo whose fall it did not even see moves across its surface too at the original ripple-space to the old ineradicable rhythm. Yes, we are both Father. Or maybe Father and I are both Shreve, maybe it took Father and me both to make Shreve or Shreve and me both to make Father or maybe Thomas Sutpen to make all of us. (273)

With every retelling, the story changes and is interpreted in different ways. Each speaker and each listener brings to the story their opinions, biases, and perspectives. Each becomes a separate "pool" of water with a different temperature and molecularity. This contemplation explains the "commonwealth" used to describe Quentin at the beginning of the novel and how Shreve, through his storytelling, has become a part of it. Commenting on this distinctly Southern form of interconnectedness, Judith Sutpen describes how people are all intertwined with one another, "like trying to, having to, move your arms and legs with strings only the same strings are hitched to all the other arms and legs . . . like five or six people all trying to make a rug on the same loom" (127). As Quentin and Shreve weave together the past with the present, the familiar with the unknown, they simultaneously weave Shreve's image of the South.

Shreve's role as an outsider to the South not only affects the way he interprets the Sutpen story, but also changes how Quentin sees it. As the novel concludes, Quentin begins to fully accept his Southern identity—it becomes "quite distinct" as he sees himself as "older at twenty than a lot of people who have died" (377). Despite the flaws, tensions, prejudices, and stereotypes of the South, Quentin realizes that his Southern background and the stories of those before him have become a crucial part of who he is, a part that, with Shreve's help, he finally realizes he doesn't hate. Shreve's queries about the South force Quentin to see it through a different lens; he is forced to explain the culture he has always known, to see

it from an outside perspective. In this way, Shreve's distanced point of view drives the narrative of *Absalom, Absalom!*: because of its intricate web of connections and relationships, fully understanding the South requires an (initially) external force. Quentin is unable to see all the qualities of a Southern culture because he is too close to it, too intertwined within it. He would not be able to present an image of the South without Shreve.

Storytelling within *Absalom, Absalom!* relies on the collective memory of people and events, which echoes the nature and history of the South. Quentin's and Shreve's complicated and combined narration makes sense of the "notpeople" and "notlanguage" of Sutpen's story by going beyond the tale itself and reaching the individuals and the culture it represents (3). Shreve perhaps gets more than he bargains for when he asks Quentin to tell him about the South. The image he receives is one that shows the rough, working complexities of Southern culture, but one that becomes real and living and transports Shreve from his New England dorm to Jefferson, Mississippi. Initially confused by where Quentin comes from, Shreve's interest in the South grows as the story continues; he becomes impatient with Quentin's narration saying "go on" and urging for more of the story (205). As he and Quentin rely on imagination and "play a while" with the Sutpen tale, Shreve deepens his understanding of the South and shows storytelling as a tool through which culture is translated and explained in *Absalom* (221).

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## Passing Through a World of Birds: The Performance and Signification of Blindness in Stephen Kuusisto's *Planet of the Blind*

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In a 2008 interview, Stephen Kuusisto asserts that all lyric poets—visually impaired (as he is) or not—appreciate “uncertainty” and take note of “the unfamiliar,” and that this way of living surprises “us out of all our habits of thinking and feeling” (Savarese 202). To that end, he suggests he can “denounce the culturally prevalent cliché that blindness is ‘absence’ by filling that misapprehension with the curios of poetry,” the fragments of language that, in the attentive mind, form out of the rich uncertainty and confusion of experiencing the world while blind (Savarese 202). He thus inverts the notion that sight is knowledge and suggests this clichéd, ableist way of thinking is an absence itself—a void he finds unpleasant, yet productive, just as being lost is both distressing and poetically fruitful: “although I don’t . . . like the panic of feeling lost or . . . vulnerable, I do take a good deal from [these] situations,” from being “richly . . . confused while traveling” (Savarese 202).

He fills the blank space with “stones from Ravenna, a pair of opera glasses . . . a burned clock . . . which [he] used to play like a musical instrument up in the attic;” with, in short, the curious

and rare pieces of his poeticized life (Savarese 202). The sound he creates with the clock is a curio itself, one that is collected and preserved by lyrical language. Kuusisto presents the enjoyable sound of “pigeons cooing and fluttering,” an aural curio that recalls his endeavor to experience birds in his 1998 memoir *Planet of the Blind* (Savarese 197). In this highly allusive and lyrical memoir, Kuusisto associates birds with circumstances in which he passes as blind or sighted, using them as a leitmotif that guides readers through the complexities of managing social absences and presences of blindness. The birds are visual, haptic, and aural curios through which he understands his relation to the sighted world. Ultimately, his first guide dog, Corky, symbolically kills the birds and reconciles the personal performance of blindness with its social signifier.

Kuusisto alludes to Geoffrey Chaucer’s poem *The Parliament of Foules*, connecting two instances of passing in which his personal performance of blindness appears inexplicable to the sighted world. To signify his visual impairment, he must make it socially present by means of language, but socially legible blindness is not always met with accommodation. Equipped with “blindness” that “still allows [him] to see colors and shapes that seem windblown,” Kuusisto grapples with the complexities of passing while he studies literature and creative writing at university (2). As a child, he learns to read with his face pressed against the page, painstakingly discerning the printed words (20). As an undergraduate and graduate student he carries a “To Whom It May Concern” letter, an avowal “that too much reading is dangerous for [him]” (64). He carries the letter to signify his blindness both socially and officially, because his practical and personal performances of blindness are misunderstood by the sighted world. Aware of the play on words, he brings his face physically close to the text in order to do a close reading, but on the planet of the sighted this act seems a pantomime of sight undeserving of further accommodation (64). As a student at the Iowa Writers’ Workshop, Kuusisto brings the “To Whom It May Concern” letter to a meeting with Professor Gambrel, who refuses to give him more time to conduct research. Before the meeting, Kuusisto admits that in “retrospect it’s so foolish masquerading as a seeing man” (103). Tired of the assumption that he can work as

quickly as his sighted peers, he tries passing as blind. He, ironically decides to “pas[s] for who [he] actually [is]” (Samuels 136). But he learns that passing as blind is troublesome as well. He has the forethought to bring the letter and bluntly declares that he “can’t see,” but the language of passing as blind is as insufficient for securing accommodation as his personal performance of blindness (104). He fails because Gambrel understands blindness in terms of the “ableist metaphor” that substitutes visual impairment with the “inability to understand the world” (Savarese 202). Gambrel decides Kuusisto does not “belong” in his class, because he misapprehends Kuusisto’s appeal for accommodation as a declaration of total inability. On Gambrel’s planet of the sighted, this performance of blindness rebounds adversely on Kuusisto.

Kuusisto confronts Gambrel with the irony of this discrimination against a blind literature student, calling attention to Gambrel’s ignorance of the visual impairment of great literary figures. Told that he “shouldn’t be here” if he needs more time to do research, Kuusisto asks if “Milton, Homer, and James Joyce . . . couldn’t have taken a course in this department either?” (104). He suggests these writers—who helped produce the literary world from which Gambrel attempts to bar Kuusisto—have been passing as sighted in Gambrel’s mind. Once again, the person who misapprehends blindness reveals their own lack. For example, Gambrel would not be able to read Emily Dickinson’s poetry in the context of her visual impairment, and therefore would not understand that her poetry is “concerned . . . with the evanescence of seeing,” as Kuusisto argues (Savarese 206). Gambrel refuses to reconcile these writers’ literary ability with their visual impairment, so he dismisses Kuusisto, content to remove blindness from the literary canon. This is the absence of blindness where it should be present.

Gambrel thinks about Kuusisto’s blindness as an inability to study literature, twisting Kuusisto’s request for more time into an admission of total unfitness for graduate school. He imposes the cliché of blindness-as-absence onto Kuusisto, who promptly asserts his literary aptitude. He imagines Gambrel as a grackle, a crow-like bird perched on the vines outside the professor’s office. He recalls

that “grackles live solely on shit,” cheering himself with the “picture” of “Gambrel . . . seated . . . at a conference snacking on turds” (104). By alluding to Chaucer’s *Parliament*, Kuusisto demonstrates that he is well-read and aligns Gambrel’s ableist assumptions with this image of the grackle, a poetic, if vulgar, curio. He refuses to comply with this governing body of birds, who consume “shit” and produce nothing of value.

Ironically, Kuusisto passes as sighted when he creates this curio of poetry, demonstrating the difficulty of abandoning the habitual privilege of visual language and photographic imagery. He does not describe how he knows the “grackles [are] in the vines,” but he does “picture” Gambrel at the conference of birds (104). He performs sight through this visual curio, a recourse to the “ophtho-centrism” he rejects a decade later: “we’re not trying to create a photographic image in poetry” (Savarese 196). Still caught up in his youthful aversion to the signs of blindness and subject to the ophthocentric language that dominates discussions of perception, he has not yet fully developed his non-ophthocentric aesthetic and the language appropriate to it. David Bolt argues that Kuusisto’s 2006 memoir *Eavesdropping* “illustrates . . . the difficulty of departing from the dominance of ocularnormative discourse” (1113). We remain inside the ocularnormative discourse when we turn all kinds of perception into new ways of seeing. Thus, Kuusisto writes to disrupt the ocularnormative discourse and surprise himself—and others—out of the comfortable, but careless habit of describing touch, thought, and hearing with visual terms.

Earlier in the memoir, Kuusisto realizes Bolt’s claim that in some texts “haptic perception becomes supreme rather than supplementary,” resisting the impulse to frame touch as a way of seeing (1112). Kuusisto’s remark about Gambrel being “seated . . . at a conference” of grackles connects the confrontation to the scene in which Kuusisto visits an “ornithology collection” to see “the taxidermied and long-fallen members of the parliament” (72-73). He frames this experience as a visual one, a long-awaited moment after a lifetime of never having “seen a bird,” but he eventually focuses on the tactile discovery of the birds (72). At first, he presses his face to the glass cabinet where the stuffed birds dwell, but they are “strange”

“cocoon shapes” that may as well be unseen (73). In the “deserted” hallway, he opens the case and his “hands are free to explore the vagaries of the bird-tomb. . . . [to] hold [a hawk] to [his] face, just barely making out its predatory look” (73). Like his reading, Kuusisto’s way of experiencing birds demonstrates that, as Samuels contends, “disability identity [is] a kind of performance” (135). In solitude, he allows himself to hold the birds and look closely at them, accommodating his minimal sight through a personal and practical performance of blindness: once again, Kuusisto is “passing for who [he] actually [is]” (Samuels 136). Nevertheless, he revels primarily in the tactile experience of the birds. He feels their “stiff” feathers, “lacquered” and textured “like the tiny ribs of a corset [he] once held,” and the “supple delicacy” of their joints (73). He fills blindness-as-absence with these haptic curios, a cascade of feeling and non-ophthocentric language. He also uses his hearing to experience the birds: he listens to his elementary school teacher “like the ornithologist who unwraps bird bones from tissue paper” (18). Sensory methods aside, he can only reach an understanding through “bird bones” and the “bird-tomb” whose occupants are “stiff . . . spent,” totally unlike “a live bird’s plumage” (73). Although haptic perception appears superior for a moment—and is lyrically productive—he encounters its practical limitations.

As I noted above, the decision to pass as blind is contingent on Kuusisto’s practical needs. Unlike a white cane, the personal performance of blindness in the ornithology corridor does not signify blindness in a socially understandable way. He knows the exhilarating experience of “fondling birds” could be interpreted as the actions of a “pervert;” his actions require preemptive explanation (73). He introduces a hypothetical “security guard” who revives the same “self-conscious[ness]” that kept him from “put[ting his] nose against an open page” in the library (38). He imagines saying, “I’m blind, sir, and this is my first experience with birds!” (73). He then thinks up several more absurd, falsely jubilant responses, affecting a tone suggesting he understands that how he experiences the world is inexplicable to others. Samuels argues that “most disabilities become perceptible only according to . . . circumstance” (135). When he gets caught “fondling birds”

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or needs accommodation, he finds himself in situations where he must make his blindness “perceptible” by preparing—if not using—“speech acts . . . and forms of medical certification,” such as his responses to the imagined security guard and the “To Whom It May Concern” letter he brings to Gambrel’s office (Samuels 135). Ironically, he worries over the perceptibility of his blindness only when he is “blind for others,” when he is blind for someone else’s eyes (190). He prepares to pass as blind in order to justify his actions to a society that may misunderstand his personal performance of blindness.

Kuusisto follows his tactile experience of birds with a passage in which he goes bird watching. He hears, but cannot see the birds, so this expedition recalls his childhood exclusion from the sighted world. He performs sight so his friend cannot impose his perception of the birds onto Kuusisto. He pretends to see the birds and keeps his “blindness locked away for the time,” because he does not want the moment to “become an exercise in description” (75). He would rather play at being Jorge Luis Borges, a blind poet Kuusisto frequently invokes. According to Kuusisto, Borges would walk with a friend and “narrate what he was seeing: a carnival filled with birds” (29). He fills blindness-as-absence with invented sights and stories. On his own bird-watching outing, Kuusisto exclaims he can see a bird jump, and “at the moment [he says] it, [he] mean[s] it” (75). He creates birds in his mind, narrating the “goldfinch jumping like a penny on a railroad track” into existence (75). Nonetheless, his speech acts cannot change reality to the extent that he sees the way his friend sees, because, according to Kuusisto, “no blind person will ever be ‘just like a sighted person’” (Purpura 677). Regardless of how or what he narrates, the world of the living birds remains encased by trees. He sees “a coral blue/green bubble” through the binoculars that could be a mix of sky and leaves or his “blue dish of self,” the color he claims comes from his own eyes and can “never [be] found in the outer world” (74, 27). Though he can hear them, he is separated from the birds by this “blue/green bubble.” Similarly, as a child he is “emphatically told not to mix” with sighted children, but he “can hear [the] children through the trees, the shrieks and exaggerations” (12-13). The other children are the heard, but unseen

inhabitants of the trees, birds in a world that society prevents him from joining.

Kuusisto associates birds with the fear of losing his ability to pass and being permanently marked as blind. However, blindness's definitive signifiers—his white cane and guide dog, Corky—symbolically kill that fear. After he gets “glasses fitted with telescopes” as a child, his “anxieties live like pilot birds atop [his] shoulders” (22). When his glasses are stolen, Kuusisto's “panic brings [him] alive like a tree filled with birds” (21). The glasses signify his blindness in social contexts, but they are easily purloined and make him feel as if he “belongs . . . to other people” (21). His glasses turn visual impairment into a social vulnerability others can abuse. These early negative experiences with signifiers of blindness leave him with an aversion to public signification and a stubborn desire to pass as sighted in order to “minimize stigma and avoid . . . unwelcome encounters” (Samuels 135). Nevertheless, as he trains with the white cane in preparation for getting a guide dog, his “torso dips forward as if [he were] wearing a bag of bird shot around [his] neck” (Kuusisto 154). The “bird shot” may weigh him down, but it also has the potential to kill the anxieties the birds represent, allowing him to accept that he needs the white cane to navigate the world and pass as a blind person. In the final chapter, his first guide dog Corky holds a “shoe in her mouth, as if it were a living bird. She's ready for life beyond the door” (175). Thus, Corky controls and may yet kill Kuusisto's “pilot bird” anxieties. Corky also signifies the possibility of a “life beyond the door” that does not require the same negotiations of passing that trouble Kuusisto throughout *Planet*.

According to Samuels, the syntax of passing is “slipper[y]” because we pass for an identity and “acquire” our “identities through acts of passing,” such that all identity is a performance (135). I want to suggest further slippage or nuance: when he passes for blind or sighted, Kuusisto passes through the blind and sighted worlds. That is, he traverses the planet of the blind, a world nested within the sighted one. The birds never definitively side with the blind or the sighted, and they lose their significance after Corky takes hold of them. Kuusisto continues to write about them, but they are

simply curios of poetry—fragments of sound and touch captured by language—that no longer symbolize passing, blindness, sight, or anxiety. Likewise, Kuusisto claims that Corky has “no analogy” and does not “have to represent anything” (Kuusisto 165, 169; Savarese 198). I disagree with Savarese’s reading of this literalism. He argues that Kuusisto forgoes analogy because this is the “the point at which [he] secure[s] a kind of surrogate sight” (197). He suggests that the literal world is now accessible to Kuusisto, who would no longer need to speak his world into being or experience it aurally or haptically if Corky were his “surrogate sight.” But Corky—as the solution to Kuusisto’s bird-like anxieties about being rendered helplessly blind in social contexts—is not a “kind of surrogate sight,” but rather a socially understood sign and a practical performance of blindness. She liberates the birds from their duties as symbols and guides and reconciles the public and private performances of blindness. Before Corky, Kuusisto never had a public and private means of identifying as blind (for himself and for others). For this reason alone, she is without analogy. With Corky, he traverses the blind and sighted planets simultaneously.

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## The Language of Diaspora: Multiraciality and Resistance in Junot Díaz's *The Brief Wondrous Life of Oscar Wao*

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In 1983, Rita Dove published her poem “Parsley,” which recounts the slaughter of 20,000 Haitians at the command of Dominican Dictator Rafael Trujillo: “El General has found his word: *perejil*. / Who says it, lives. He laughs, teeth shining / out of the swamp.” These lines juxtapose the genocide of black bodies in Trujillo’s Dominican Republic with the role of language, the Spanish for “parsley” becoming the massacre’s shibboleth. Trujillo’s army confronted black canefield workers, and “if they had difficulty with the rolling ‘r’ in ‘perejil,’ they were lined up and shot on the spot as they were gagged with sprigs of parsley” (Ayuso 51). Trujillo was infamously obsessed with race, wanting defined borders between the Dominican Republic and Haiti—using the shallow river that flowed between the two states as the firm boundary—not to be crossed by either side. He lightened his skin with powders when he was due for public appearances, and stressed the divide between white and black in his rhetoric. In *The Brief Wondrous Life of Oscar Wao*, Junot Díaz plays with the ideas of language, creating a narrative that both operates within traditional bilingual territory and ventures into the abyss of the unknowable when it comes to power, trauma,

and the memory of Trujillo. Díaz blends white and black, his main character being a “moreno” child of the Dominican Republic who acts as the antithesis of all things Dominican and masculine. Language has the unique ability to act as an agent of oppression as well as a mode of resistance, so Díaz denies any attempts to own language by employing neologisms, academic metaphors, and geek culture, by blending multiple languages, and by blurring American literary conventions with the orality of Latin American narrative. Through these narrative methods, Díaz recreates the middle space in which Oscar and exiled Dominican nationals exist, effectively mimicking the Dominican diaspora.

Two epigraphs open the novel. The first is a quote from an issue of Marvel Comics’ *Fantastic Four*, which suggests an immediate power imbalance, with Galactus made analogous to Trujillo as the novel unfolds. The second epigraph is key for locating *Oscar Wao* as literature of the diaspora. Díaz quotes Derek Walcott’s poem “The Schooner Flight,” selecting passages that represent identity crises and the failure of language to define the experiences of oppressed peoples:

they nickname Shabine, the patois for  
any red nigger, and I, Shabine, saw  
when these slums of empire was paradise. . . .  
I have Dutch, nigger, and English in me  
and either I’m nobody, or I’m a nation. (238)

“Patois” here represents both the language of the West Indies and the original definition of “jargon.” As a person of color, the narrator is labeled “Shabine,” a highly racialized term for anyone of mixed ancestry. Further, the use of the poem to open *Oscar Wao* effectively labels the diasporic subject as both a “nobody” and a “nation,” cements the otherness of Díaz’s main characters, and dedicates their movements entirely to the Trujillo regime. Walcott says of “The Schooner Flight”:

I think if the development of West Indian literature  
continues, my generation of writers will be known as people  
who had to go through a very anguished kind of identity  
crisis. And if we’ve set down West Indian roots, we’ve used  
the language we heard around us and described the things

we saw and the experiences we went through as a people.  
(qtd. in McCallum 23)

Here Walcott locates language as a mode of expression necessary for the diasporic experience. This reading of Walcott's poem offers a lens for understanding *Oscar Wao*: the novel's unique, often bizarre use of language is necessary to represent the experience of Afro-Caribbean peoples. Díaz, like Walcott, must bend and shift language to create a mode of expression applicable to the needs of the dispossessed and the displaced.

*Oscar Wao*'s narration relies heavily on code switching, blurring between lively, Caribbean-inflected vernacular and academic prose. Code switching provides the narrator the comfort necessary to tell the diasporic story on his terms. The text's shifts between Spanish and English are central to the Dominican experience, so the echoing that occurs during these shifts (the Spanish appearing in italics followed quickly by the English definition) exists solely for the reader. Díaz, like Walcott, notes language's failure to encapsulate the immigrant experience:

So I was thinking about how in the world to describe the extreme experience of being an immigrant in the United States, the extreme experience of coming from the Third World and suddenly appearing in New Jersey. . . . Every language that I was deploying, every language system, fell apart. . . . But science fiction, fantasy, and comic books are meant to do this kind of stupid stuff, they're meant to talk about these extreme ludicrous transformations. (qtd. in Celayo and Shook 15)

In this interview Díaz defines his use of science fiction references as a bridge meant to gap the lapse in language. Not only does he note that science fiction is an important genre—immigrating like his characters—but he also explains the injection of geek culture as a strategy through which to discuss the “extreme” immigrant experience. Yunior's code switching in a text littered with various geek references communicates an experience where language has failed.

Whereas science fiction acts a bridge, the novel's use of vernacular slang represents the molding of language to fit an

experience that can be told in no other way. Yuniór, *Oscar Wao's* narrator, uses a brand of Spanglish entirely unique to this novel. His informal colloquialisms often serve as commentary on the story, revealing his failings as a narrator and a friend. Nowhere is this blending of academic and vernacular more prevalent than in the footnotes that litter the text, acting as a space where Yuniór's narrative is unrestrained by literary conventions. In them the secondary plot begins to develop, establishing Oscar's story as intertwined with the history of the Dominican Republic. The role of these footnotes is complex. For one, they implicate US involvement in the Trujillo Regime, and they do so with unrelenting sarcasm: "Outstanding accomplishments include: The 1937 genocide against the Haitian and Haitian-Dominican Community; one of the longest, most damaging US-backed dictatorships in the Western Hemisphere (and if we Latin types are skillful at anything it's tolerating US-backed dictators)" (3). They also provide context for the characters about whom Yuniór is speaking: "You really want to know what being an X-Men feels like? Just be a smart bookish boy of color in a contemporary US ghetto. Mamma mia! Like having bat wings or a pair of tentacles growing out of your chest" (22). In these sections, not only does Yuniór identify himself as knowledgeable—as part of the Dominican experience—he also switches from academic rhetoric to sarcastic indictments of superstructures to language from science fiction, all to illustrate Oscar's life. In these spaces, Díaz creates an outlet for Yuniór's expression unhindered by traditional narrative strategies.

Alongside its blending of language and narrative strategies, the novel explores races in a way that necessarily complicates the narrative of Oscar de León. In the context of the Dominican Republic's problematic racial history, a novel that prizes black—or Moreno—identity resists the very conventions Trujillo desperately attempted to enforce. In the traditional binary, black represents misfortune and poverty, while white connotes wealth. The narrator even mentions that, because this binary runs so deep in Dominican culture, the respective births of Belicia and Oscar were viewed as ill omens. Yuniór describes these events with disbelief—giving voice to the racial acrobatics, or "legerdemain," that Dominicans might

go through to be non-black—noting that Belicia was born “not just any kind of black. But *black* black—kongoblack, shangoblack, kaliblack, zapotoblack, rekhablack” (248). The novel uses Dominican terminology to describe the blackness of Afro-Haitian skin. He follows up this statement with one of disbelief: “That’s the kind of culture I belong to: people took their child’s black complexion as an ill omen” (248). Later describing her as a “literal child of the apocalypse,” Yuniór labels Belí as a figure in “one of Oscar’s fantasy books” (251-53). Because of her blackness, Belí is sold as a “criada,” or “restavek,” two culturally opposing terms (the former Spanish, the latter Haitian) that mean the same thing: domestic servant or indentured slave. Her blackness not only others her from Dominican society; it also places her into the same caste as the Haitians, a group Trujillo set out to eliminate.

Díaz places conversations about race and blackness at the center of the text. Nowhere is the violence against black bodies more prevalent in Dominican culture than in the canefield. It represents an invasive species—an extension of the colonial hand—and thus it is always a racialized space. The canefield first appears with Belí’s brutal beating at the command of Trujillo’s sister, La Fea, who is angry that her husband had an affair with a “*negra prieta*.” Yuniór’s narration skips the actual violence when describing the beating, focusing instead on the damage done, recounting it as a list of things broken and bruised. In this recollection, Yuniór places her beating “at the end of language, the end of hope,” noting the inability to properly capture anything so intensely violent with language (147). In the assault of Belí, the canefields are wholly representative of “Trujillato” (Spanish for the Trujillo years). This context establishes canefields as violent spaces where Trujillo’s “gangsters” brutalize others, recalling the Parsley Massacre in 1937. Oscar’s death is positioned at the intersection of race and language. His murder in the canefield flags it as distinctly racial, with the narration noting the cane was so thick “you could hear the *kriyól* voices lost in the night” (320). As with his mother’s assault, Oscar’s narration recounts language’s failure, effectively separating him from the words: “the words coming out like they belonged to someone else, his Spanish good for once” (321). His death is predicated on

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language, with his blurting of the word “fire” serving as the death knell.

The text’s play with race complicates the narrative of Dominican history. By placing specific attention on the blackness of De León family members, it suggests they do not fit the binary kept by the rest of the Dominican Republic. The narrative concludes that the De León family have a decidedly pro-black image of themselves: Lola and Oscar do not apologize for their black skin, and when she is younger, Belí insists her beauty is due to her blackness, not despite of it. The beatings of Belí and Oscar in the canefields are haunted by the dehumanization of black bodies throughout Dominican history. Their appearance is marked by the genocide of Africans/Haitians as well as the revolts and resistance to these systems, symbolized in the canfield scenes by the appearance of the black mongoose. The notion of blackness as resistance in *Oscar Wao* situates the De Leóns in opposition to Trujillo and the racial norms of the Dominican Republic, such insurrection being literalized in the novel’s use of the mongoose as warden of the family. Like the De León family, the mongoose is an immigrant and should have a strictly utilitarian purpose. However, as the mongoose was transplanted westward to the Dominican Republic, it mimicked diasporic movements and “accompanied humanity out of Africa,” its presence becoming synonymous with the black experience in Hispaniola (151). Moreover, the mongoose is described in one footnote as “an enemy of kingly chariots, chains, and hierarchies” and believed to be “an ally of Man,” suggesting a dual purpose: guiding the De León family out of deathly situations and undermining Trujillo authority (151).

In the text, Oscar represents an in-between existence, ethnically, nationally, and racially. He recounts his experiences—alongside the memories and traumas of his mother, Belicia, and grandfather, Abelard, under authoritarian control—through language. The novel represents Trujillo in a variety of ways, but he is almost always present in the lives of Dominicans, even after his death in 1961. Recollections of Trujillo ground the text and foreground the De León family’s misfortunes, with Díaz’s “*fukú americanus*” coming to represent the mysticism found in the wake of

the Trujillo regime. The novel's careful use of language and unique narrative strategy blend American literary conventions with the orality of Latin American narrative. Through these methods, Díaz recreates the middle space in which Oscar and exiled Dominican nationals existed, mirroring the Dominican diaspora. By establishing *fukú* as the family's curse, Yunior's act of storytelling becomes the *zafa*, or counterspell, to Trujillo's *fukú* in the Dominican realm. In a 2008 interview, Díaz recounts his efforts to represent the immigrant experience: "You just create this entire language, and in some ways it holds you together . . . longer than even your physical presence" (qtd. in Celayo and Shook 14). Here, Díaz speaks of the need for narratives like *Oscar Wao*, ones that challenge history and place themselves at the forefront of pop culture. The inclusion of geek culture and code switching creates a language that encapsulates Yunior, Oscar, even Díaz's immigrant experience, allowing it to transcend the physical through the orality and vocalicity of Dominican nationals everywhere.

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## Zadie Smith's "Docile Bodies": Institutional Gazes in *White Teeth*

Ian Jayne

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In her 2000 debut novel, *White Teeth*, Zadie Smith offers a postmodern narrative that challenges the limits of realist writing. In the novel, Samad Iqbal compares the gap "between books and experience" to "a lonely ocean" (199). Ironically, it is in precisely this gap where critic James Wood locates a flaw in *White Teeth*: what he terms Smith's "hysterical realism," and, in general, the overwroughtness of late-twentieth and early-twenty-first-century novels. For Wood, hysterically realist texts exaggerate themselves into implausibility, threatening to collapse the novel form. In light of the scholarly conversations surrounding *White Teeth* that address the relations of science, narrativity, and identity, it becomes possible to read Smith not as a hysterical realist, but rather as a writer whose work bridges the divide between fiction and experience. The text negotiates this process by grounding characters' experiences and traumas in various institutional frameworks. Characters' experiences—often described through language related to religion, science, or combat—find dual voice in Smith, who remains at once invested in and detached from the events of her plot. Smith's precise language realizes the obligations of realism through its exploration of institutions. The narrative, then, reveals the Foucauldian docility of its characters as they are "subjected, used, transformed, and improved" by the outer layers of plot and fiction (Foucault, "Docile Bodies" 182). Thus, *White Teeth* constructs its characters as "docile bodies" subject to a tripartite institutional gaze—variously coded as medical, religious, and martial—complicating any understanding of Smith's "hysterical realism."

In the seventeen years since *White Teeth*'s publication, scholars have offered competing claims about Smith's narrative strategies and the genre into which her work falls. Wood asserts that authors from the period—such as Salman Rushdie, Thomas Pynchon, and Don DeLillo—“clothe people who could never actually endure the stories that happen to them” (180). According to Wood, “information has become the new character.” (185). He thus argues that “Smith's principal characters move in and out of human depth” (182). Philip Tew similarly contends that Smith's characters “suffer, seeing a world verging on the tragic,” without the benefit of the “authorial and readerly” comedic overtones (*New British* 48). By situating both author and reader in a position of omniscient “knowingness,” Tew indicates the depth of pain in Smith's novel even as he acknowledges her narrative distance (*New British* 48). In a similar vein, Ulrich Tancke claims that Smith's authorial stance of omniscience “brings to the surface the poignant experiences, emotional dilemmas and violent potentials” to construct a “meta-critical impetus, by which the novel exposes individual ways of reading” (36-37). Cumulatively, these critics conclude that *White Teeth*'s narrator simultaneously draws near to and away from the characters and their traumatic experiences; such a process both engages with and blurs the boundaries of conventional realism.

Other scholars analyze the predominance of scientific and genetic discourse in *White Teeth* to position Smith as a kind of narrative scientist fixated on the body. Josie Gill, for instance, asserts that Smith “draws[s] on a Forsterian comic mode in her representation of genetics,” a narrative procedure that ultimately “reveals common ground between science and writing” (18). Gill thus argues the novel's plot “consists of the consequences of action as they unfold in time,” in a manner similar to the scientific process (25). This reading suggests that Smith and her narrator function as arbiters of institutional discourse. As Joanna O'Leary claims: “*White Teeth* continually confronts the reader with questions of whether an ideal body form exists, and the moral issues of manipulating other (non-ideal) bodies” (39). O'Leary asserts that such an experimental context “significantly complicates the practice of appropriating an external . . . body to act as container for one's aspirations,” a process that parallels the relationship between author and character (51).

Scholars also examine the limits of bodily agency in *White Teeth*. Brad Buchanan, for example, suggests that the novel's "genetically engineered mouse whose fate is encoded in its body is arguably a witty metaphor for human nature" (20). By situating Smith's metaphorically symbolic narrative strategies within the context of genetic experimentation, Buchanan reveals Smith's fusion of science and fiction. Similarly, Michele Braun points to the dual presence of science and personal history—both apparent in the novel's prevailing dental imagery—as indicative of "the upheaval of immigration" (222). Braun situates the novel's "root canals" as a kind of textual "shorthand" that "connects the cleaning out of a diseased root in a tooth to the immigrant experience" (223). These scholars assert that Smith's text engages with scientific discourse to examine bodies and experiences.

Smith and her narrator share a paradoxical proximity to and distance from her characters' pain, with the narrator effectively performing the duties of a figure that parallels this relationship: the physician. Michel Foucault provides a helpful foundation for examining Smith's narrator as a "doctor." Foucault positions the "clinician's gaze" as a tool "that burns things to their furthest truth," through which "the essential purity of phenomena can emerge" (*Birth of the Clinic* 120). He suggests "a certain silence" accompanies the clinical gaze, which allows the physician "to listen" (*Birth of the Clinic* 107). *White Teeth's* narrator exhibits the traits of a Foucauldian physician: gazing and listening, then ascribing meaning and significance. Smith does not limit the narrative voice to the powers of the physician; rather, she employs a medical gaze that validates the traumatic experiences Wood finds unbelievable. While many have noted that *White Teeth's* title and chapter formats ("The Root Canals of Mangal Pande," for example) evoke scientific examinations, I further argue that the text constitutes a kind of medical record, a family medical history of "root canals" signaled by the text's epigraph: "What is past is prologue." From the text's opening moments, Smith's narrator assumes an institutional posture overseeing the characters as they exorcise their trauma.

Moments where narration and medical discourse overlap fill *White Teeth*. Most notably, Irie Jones, who—as she develops physically

develops toward womanhood—literally interrupts the text with her preoccupation. Smith employs a visual aid—doodles—in order to signify Irie’s body not only as an object of subjective self-scrutiny, but as one further filtered through a larger, “objective” lens. The doodles-as-text signify a new source of authority that corresponds to the text’s narrator. Such attention to the body continues when Irie undertakes a quest to chemically alter and cut her hair. Smith’s narrator uses language that transforms the cosmetic procedure into a medical event. With its attendant pain, the hair-altering procedure relocates Irie’s concerns with her own body into the context of pseudo-medical expertise. The narrator notes “these were not customers” in the salon, “but desperate wretched *patients*” (229). The novel’s hyper-attentiveness to Irie’s distress does not constitute narrative “hysteria,” but rather grounds its characters—as several scholars have noted—in a field of complicity and empathy. Just as Foucault’s medical doctor, Smith’s narrative gaze burns to the “furthest truth” of the body dysmorphia Irie experiences as a black woman in late-twentieth-century England. When Irie later works with Marcus Chalfen to construct her family tree, Smith’s narrative once again interrupts the text with a family chart, common in medical records. *White Teeth*’s reliance on a sort of medical exploration heightens the text’s realism—increasing the sense of self-awareness—in ways the narrator alone cannot.

*White Teeth* also links its characters’ experiences to the Jehovah’s Witness movement. While Islamic practice permeates the text, Jehovah’s Witnesses—and their religion—figure more clearly as an institutional framework. The novel consistently imbues its metaphors with religious and medical significance, as the narrator compares religion, “the opiate of the people,” to “a tight band, a throbbing vein, and a needle” (161). Playing on the unwillingness of Jehovah’s Witnesses to engage in medical procedures, the narrator ironizes religious experience within the medical context. The Bowdens’ family ties remain deeply rooted in the Jehovah’s Witness movement: the devout Hortense’s daughter Clara leaves the faith, and her daughter Irie makes a symbolic return to the fold when she uses Hortense’s home as a hideaway. In addition, Darcus, Hortense’s husband, succumbs to “a mysterious illness” which “no

doctor could find physical symptoms of,” but which manifests as laziness and television watching (26). While these elements contain a measure of humor, they also position the novel’s characters within institutional frameworks, offering touchstones against which subjective experience is measured. Smith’s narrator expands this personal framework into a larger field of religion when Hortense finds “large, albeit eccentric, company” not in a “solitary psychosis,” but with eight million other Jehovah’s Witnesses who predict the end times in 1975 (27). The narrator wryly notes, “the wounds of 1925”—another failed prophecy—“had healed” (28). While Buchanan positions such prophecies as “plainly ridiculous,” the objective tone with which the text details the calculating, pseudo-scientific predictions signals a willingness to use the Jehovah’s Witnesses movement as a frame for characters’ experiences (19). Even when describing the unlikely and the absurd, Smith consistently renders her characters’ experiences as both physical and mental, fusing institutions and representing individuals who shoulder the duties of multiple discourses.

By setting parts of *White Teeth* during World War II, Smith deploys a larger field of martial knowledge as another discourse that might elucidate her characters in their discrete subjectivity. The medical gaze operates as a form of spectatorship, an “unflinching and honest stare, a meticulous inspection that would go beyond the heart of the matter to its marrow, beyond the marrow to the root” (71). Thus, the novel shows that its characters—previously seen through medical and religious lenses—as Foucauldian docile bodies, “can be made . . . out of a formless clay” (Foucault, “Docile Bodies” 179). How much more so, then, are Smith’s soldiers: products of both a narrative consciousness and of the historical—if fictive—specter of war. The novel’s martial gaze manifests as a textual process of viewing, moving quickly from Archie Jones’s and Samad Iqbal’s military physical examinations, *White Teeth*’s narrator propels the two into a staring match, a “silk-thread bond” forged during wartime (73). Examining soldiers’ close quarters as they inhabit a tank moving across Europe, the novel constructs the “Buggered Battalion” as bodies subject not only to the narrative, but also to the larger forces of chaos. Self-reflexively, the text downplays the

narrator's voice even as it amplifies textual structures to authenticate itself: Archie tells Samad, "'slike a 'Smith.' We're nobody" (84). Playing on the relative anonymity of her own surname, Smith uses military excursion as a way to unearth both medical and religious details about her characters.

Smith's narrative situates martial knowledge as important to corporeal and textual examinations of objectivity. Just as Claire and Irie both suffer personal injury, so too does Samad, who details his "buggery hand," the "five dead, tightly curled fingers" rendered lame during his time in the Indian army (75). As O'Leary points out, "the weathered body is the one that the reader associates with Samad because it is the only one the reader really knows" (40). His body made docile by the war, Samad parallels his great-grandfather, the revolutionary Mangal Pande who the novel calls a "human powder magazine" ready to explode (212). Samad's subsequent quest for the historical truth about Mangal Pande's actions reveals a meta-process within the text to codify and systematize truth. As Samad travels to a university library to uncover the "truth" of Pande's legacy, the narrative refracts into the text he reads: he discovers that Pande "succeeded in laying the foundations of the Independence to be won in 1947" (215). Samad reads about war even as *White Teeth's* reader reads about this process. That Samad weeps upon this discovery does not make him hysterical any more than it does Smith's novel. Rather, the text annexes his experiences and emotions into external fields that validate and codify his trauma. While Wood might take issue with the probability of the novel's events, the text's built-in institutional framework of martial prowess and textual recording suggests otherwise.

*White Teeth* begins with Smith saving Archie Jones's life, and it ends with his death. The novel ultimately dispenses with Archie, shifting temporally between World War II and the FutureMouse exhibition. Archie struggles to take the life of Doctor Perret, a Nazi physician at the mercy of the Bugged Battalion. Archie, who does not want to murder Perret, is "caught between duties," torn between his military responsibility and his subjective moral code (444). Archie flips a coin, does not shoot the doctor, and injures himself, signaling a narrative intervention: although Perret proclaims that

“only those who are sufficiently strong” can endure life, the text preserves his life a few pages longer (447). The gaze becomes medical once more, as Archie feels “a blistering pain in his right thigh. He looked down. Blood” (447). Only when the narrative resumes at the FutureMouse exhibition—where Archie coincidentally saves Perret’s life once more—does he perish. The improbability of encountering the same Nazi doctor decades later at a genetic science fair constitutes narrative hysteria for Wood, yet Smith’s narrative uses the physician as a signifier for Archie’s life. Rather than attempting to construct a “believable” plot, *White Teeth* positions Archie’s story as one fundamentally framed by the medical and the procedural. While the text earlier preserved Archie’s life, its conclusion finally removes him from medical scrutiny. Unprotected by institutional gazes, Archie can no longer endure what happens to him (to borrow Wood’s language). Smith’s novel thus appears as “something ‘to know *with*;” her texts “unwed themselves from models of representational facility, and adopt structures which support the act of thinking-to-come” (Holmes 147). Recalling the text’s epigraph that “what is past is prologue,” the narrative concludes, simultaneously a medical record, fragmented religious testimony, and document of martial horror that avoids the “hysteria” of real life.

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## Jurors

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